THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION BETWEEN CAIRO AND JERUSALEM, 1969-1974:
CONCEPTS, STRATEGIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION
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This work is dedicated to the memory of Mr Simon Hilliard.
**ABBREVIATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMAN</td>
<td>Military Intelligence Directorate (Israel)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASU</td>
<td>Arab Socialist Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF/E</td>
<td>Country Files, Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CF/ME</td>
<td>Country Files, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSU</td>
<td>Central Party of the Soviet Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DMZ</td>
<td>Demilitarised Zone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FPLM</td>
<td>Ford Presidential Library and Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRUS</td>
<td>Foreign Relations of the United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAK</td>
<td>Henry Kissinger Office Files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HAK/ME</td>
<td>Henry Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAF</td>
<td>Israeli Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDF</td>
<td>Israeli Defence Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>Records of Joseph Sisco</td>
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<tr>
<td>KP</td>
<td>Kissinger Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>Library of Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memcon</td>
<td>Memoranda of Conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Manuscript Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NA</td>
<td>National Archives and Record Administration, Washington DC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPLM</td>
<td>Nixon Presidential Library and Museum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPT</td>
<td>Non-Proliferation Treaty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Security Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSDM</td>
<td>National Security Decision Memoranda</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSSM</td>
<td>National Security Study Memoranda</td>
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<tr>
<td>PLFP</td>
<td>Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine</td>
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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Egypt and Syria merged into a single country, the United Arab Republic, or UAR in 1958, but the merger was dissolved in 1961 and the country’s original name, Egypt was restored in 1970. For the sake of convenience and convention, the country is referred to as ‘Egypt’ throughout this thesis except when referred to as the United Arab Republic or UAR in direct quotations from primary or secondary sources.

The third Arab-Israeli war, fought from 6 – 10 June 1967, is sometimes referred to as the Six-day War, but is referred to in this work as the June War or the June 1967 war.

The fourth Arab-Israeli war, fought from 6 - 24 October 1973, is referred to in Israel as the Yom Kippur War and in the Arab world as the Ramadan War, but is referred to throughout this work as the October War.
ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the origins of the Egypt-Israel peace process begun in the immediate aftermath of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War. This American-brokered process led to the restoration of Egyptian land seized by Israeli in 1967 in exchange for a bilateral peace treaty, the first between Israel and an Arab state. Formal US-Egypt diplomatic relations were restored in 1974. By the time of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979, Egyptian defection from Soviet to American was complete, and Egypt had become estranged from the remainder of the Arab world, which refused to recognise, negotiate, or make peace with Israel.

Recontextualising wartime and post-war strategic realignments with reference to developments during the first four and three-quarter years of the Nixon administration, from January 1969 – September 1973, this thesis sets presents a thoroughgoing revisionist account of the origins of this process. Tracing concepts and strategies implemented during and after the war in the antebellum period, the work demonstrates that the concepts implemented during the peace process were developed in negotiations involving Egypt, Israel, the Soviet Union, and the United States from early 1969, and forged into a coherent strategy by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat during the period from October 1970 – September 1973. Reversing the usual interpretation that Sadat conformed to an American grand design in the aftermath over the October War, this thesis demonstrates instead that the United States collaborated and colluded in implementing an Egyptian strategy for a new regional order, premised on peace between Egypt and Israel and partnerships both between Washington and Jerusalem and between Washington and Cairo.
INTRODUCTION

Egypt’s President, Anwar el-Sadat, and US Secretary of State, Dr Henry Kissinger, met for the first time in Cairo on 7 November 1973, twelve days after the conclusion of the October War, to discuss both the volatile immediate situation of post-ceasefire entanglement of Egyptian and Israeli forces and, more broadly, the future of US-Egypt relations. Although Egypt, in conjunction with Hafiz Assad’s Syria, had, against Kissinger’s explicit warning, waged war upon a close friend of the United States and, as Kissinger predicted, had suffered military defeat, Sadat’s political-strategic approach and diplomatic conduct during the war had made a major impression on the Secretary. Sadat had used ‘backchannels’ established months previously to keep in touch with the White House throughout the conflict, explaining Egyptian decisions and motives. Contacting the White House on the second day of fighting to disavow any ill-will towards the US or any intention to destroy Israel, Sadat defined his ‘basic objective’ as ‘the achievement of peace’, and expressed interest in participating in a post-war peace conference.¹

Kissinger, who, with President Richard Nixon in the throes of the Watergate crisis, essentially controlled US foreign policy at the time, later recalled he realised that ‘Sadat was inviting us to participate in, if not take charge of, the peace process’, presenting an opportunity to assume the role of exclusive arbiter of the Egypt-Israel dispute, and expanding US regional influence at the expense of the Soviet Union. Even while attacking Israel, Egypt thus presented the United States with an incentive for bilateral strategic cooperation. Egyptian diplomacy during the October War had a transformative effect on Kissinger’s attitudes towards the Egypt-Israel dispute. Kissinger, by his own account, ‘had not taken Sadat seriously’ beforehand.²

The new Cairo-Washington partnership forged during the October War would define the new regional order which emerged in the mid-late 1970s, as Egypt defected from

Soviet to American orbit to engage in a separate peace process with Israel, with minimal involvement of the Soviets or other Arab powers. Within the academic literature on the topic, as Asaf Siniver’s recent summary notes, ‘[t]his transformation is attributed solely to Kissinger’s grand strategy during the war’. In a tradition established since the mid-1970s, western historiography continues to celebrate the first Kissinger-Sadat meeting as the defining moment when Sadat abandoned reliance on Soviet-supported military solutions to his dispute with Israel, and instead placed himself in the hands of Kissinger, the craftsman of the new Middle East. Kissinger’s earliest, highly sympathetic biographers, reproduce his claim that this encounter heralded a ‘dramatic breakthrough’, which ‘brought about a major turn in the foreign policy of Egypt and therefore in the whole orientation of the area’ as Sadat put his faith in Kissinger to coordinate Egypt-Israel military disengagement, and agreed to restore formal diplomatic relations with Washington.

Later authors, claiming better sourced ‘critical’ credentials have offered identical interpretations. Walter Isaacson, whose work *Kissinger: A Biography* served as the standard reference for a generation of scholars, recounts that with a ‘sweeping gesture’,

Sadat moved Egypt from a reliance on Moscow to a reliance on Washington... It was typical of Sadat: from that morning when he launched a new era of Middle East diplomacy, to the day four years later when he brought that process to a climax by deciding to go to Jerusalem, he was a master at making bold strokes that could serve his national interest.

Similarly, the current standard Kissinger biography by Jussi Hanhimaki follows previous generations of scholars in arguing that

Sadat bit the bullet. Without a fight, he accepted Kissinger’s proposal... On that morning of November 7, 1973, in Cairo, Anwar Sadat effectively made a decision that started the US-dominated peace process that has continued, with its ups and downs, for over three decades... The Egyptian president’s decision was... a courageous reversal of policy...

Even such a fierce critic of Nixon/Kissinger Middle East diplomacy as Salim Yaqub maintains that ‘[i]n a brilliant performance, Kissinger designed and implemented a

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diplomatic strategy that... engineered Egypt’s effective removal from the Arab-Israeli conflict’. 7

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that this standard narrative represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the situation. In a ‘historiography... dominated by a decidedly Israeli-American prism through which the origins of the war, its and consequences are investigated’, 8 with a ‘relative paucity.... of accounts from Arab historians and political scientists explaining Egyptian, Syrian, and even Jordanian actions’, 9 Sadat’s acceptance of American stewardship of the peace process and his suggestion of restoring diplomatic relations with Washington are (mis)represented as radical new departures. This interpretation ignores earlier strategic planning and prior diplomatic understandings however. Sadat had not merely sought rapprochement with Washington from the beginning of his premiership, but also appealed to the US to act as exclusive broker of a separate Egypt-Israel peace. While much has been made of Sadat’s decision ‘in principle’ to restore diplomatic relations with Washington on 7 November 1973, as chapter three of this thesis shows, Sadat had suggested this to Kissinger’s predecessor, William Rogers, two and a half years previously. Kissinger was certainly instrumental in implementing the new strategy of US-Egypt cooperation central to the post-October War peace process, but this was founded on Sadat’s vision. The ‘major turn in foreign policy’ was not in that of Egypt, but in those of Israel and the United States.

Sadat’s strategic goal was straightforward from the beginning of his premiership: to recover Egypt’s Sinai territories seized by Israel during the 1967 June War in their entirety. UN Security Council Resolution 242, adopted on 22 November 1967, enshrined the ‘land for peace’ formula, calling for Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories in exchange for peace with its Arab neighbours, but was notoriously (and perhaps necessarily) vague on implementation specifics, allowing both sides to read their own interpretation into the text. The Arabs insisted that the clause stipulating ‘withdrawal of Israel’s armed forces from territories occupied’ implied withdrawal from all occupied territories, but Israel disputed this, claiming that the clause stipulating that all states in the area had a ‘right to live in peace within secure and recognised boundaries’ implied that Israel would annex some Arab territory as pre-war boundaries had not been secure. UN Special Envoy Ambassador, Gunnar Jarring, was appointed to facilitate implementation of Resolution 242 in November 1967. Jarring met with representatives from Egypt, Israel, and Jordan in December in December 1967 and periodically throughout 1968, attempting to find mutually acceptable formulations for implementing Resolution 242. But the ‘Jarring Mission’ had achieved little progress by 1969, foundering on the basic problems of Arad refusal to negotiate directly with Israel, and Israeli insistence on direct negotiations and annexation of Arab territories.\(^{10}\)

Sadat’s strategy for recovering the Sinai was rooted in reforming Egypt’s relations with fellow Arab powers, with Israel, and with the superpowers. Unlike other Arab leaders, Sadat was willing not just to recognise and negotiate with Israel, but also to pursue a separate peace, without substantive representation from Palestine, Syria, or other Arab powers. For, Sadat, peace between Egypt and Israel was not dependant on resolution of extra-Egyptian issues, such as security arrangements in Gaza, Israeli occupation of Syrian territories, or accommodating Palestinian refugees displaced by the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967. Egypt’s interests were limited to recovering its own captured territories. In order to facilitate his separate peace, Sadat envisaged a two-tier settlement process, with the inner, concrete, Egypt-Israel land for peace

negotiations loosely sited within a nominal framework of general regional settlement, intended to provide political cover from Soviet and radical Arab criticism or propaganda.

Sadat recognised that militarily re-taking the Sinai while Israel enjoyed full American political backing and extensive access to the American arsenal was unfeasible. Further, in his discussions with American representatives, Sadat repeatedly indicated his belief that, despite expressions of support, the Soviet Union did not truly support the Arab ambition to liberate the occupied territories. Sadat therefore planned for Egypt to defect from east to west Cold War camps, replacing Soviet political and military support with American.

These elements, then, formed the core of Sadat’s strategy as presented to American representatives during the first three years of his presidency (October 1970 – September 1973). Egypt offered defection from east to west Cold War camps – a major strategic incentive for the US to support Egypt – to be developed through a separate American-sponsored Egypt-Israel peace process. This would be loosely sited in a nominal framework of overall Arab-Israel settlement in order to mollify the Soviets and other Arabs, but concrete negotiations on restoring Egyptian land in exchange for peace with Israel would be developed trilaterally with Washington mediating between Egypt and Israel, both publicly and through private backchannels. The Nixon White House remained unappreciative of Sadat’s propositions before October 1973, but under the changed circumstances of war, Sadat’s strategic programme came into its own, having a shaping effect on later bilateral and regional developments.

The established historiography unduly minimises continuities in Sadat’s policies towards the United States and Israel from the beginning of his presidency in September 1970, placing an exaggerated emphasis on change after the October War. This oversight is symptomatic of a wider tendency in the literature, so ingrained as to be seldom mentioned, namely a predisposition to treat the years between the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars as a discrete ‘inter-war’ period, carrying the story only as far as the October War. Histories of the October War itself are dominated by military
histories concerned with performance of Israel’s fighting forces and intelligence services, with some attention to oil politics, superpower diplomacy and US-Israel relations, which, according to Beckerman-Boys recent survey, ‘has led to a diluting of the October War historiography that removes the conflict from its roots and relevance to Middle East politics’.  

An unintended effect of such narrowed foci is that the supposed overnight launch of a ‘new era of Middle East diplomacy’ in November 1973 is decontextualised not just from the war which preceded it, but from the entire period of Sadat’s presidency beginning in September 1970. This can be seen in the established periodisation and the titles of even the most recent works, such as the ‘second generation’ monographs on Nixon administration Middle East diplomacy by Boaz Vanetik and Zaki Shalom or Craig Daigle.  

Daigle’s work also follows another well-established practice in assessing Middle East diplomacy primarily through the lens of the Cold War rather than regional politics, leading to his unlikely claim that the October War was a ‘direct consequence of détente’, rather than a local dispute over territory. Similarly, Lebow and Stein’s canonical work is preoccupied with demonstrating how the October War represented a failure of superpower détente, while Nigel Ashton’s edited volume contains a broad range of contributions on diverse aspects of Middle East politics, but stays within the June 1967 – October 1973, Cold War oriented framework.  

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14 Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein, We All Lost the Cold War (Princeton University Press, New York, 1993); Nigel Ashton, ed., The Cold War in the Middle East: Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-
‘revisionist’ scholarship by Yigal Kipnis and Uri Bar-Joseph, while making a powerful case for reconsidering the opportunities for peace lost in early 1973, deals almost exclusively with the lead up to the war and Egypt and Syria’s achievement of strategic surprise at its outbreak. Kipnis himself acknowledges the restricted scope of his work, stating clearly that ‘This book ends with the siren wails that punctuated the Israeli cabinet meeting on the afternoon of Yom Kippur, 1973. This work does not deal with the war, but rather with its roots’.

The historiographical tendency embodied and exemplified in this statement of intent implicitly and uncritically endorses an orthodox ‘before and after’ narrative, leaving post-war negotiations to a kind of hazy promised land over the horizon, where good things are known to have come, but are not outlined in much detail, or with due reference to what came before. Little is said of critical developments after the war, such as the Geneva Peace Middle East Peace Conference in December 1973, or on the actual process of Egypt-Israel military disengagement which began in early 1974, and proved to be a major step on the road to the Egypt-Israel peace treaty signed in 1979.

By recontextualising wartime and post-war strategic realignments with reference to developments during the first four and three-quarter years of the Nixon administration, from January 1969 – September 1973, this thesis sets out to establish a fundamental, thoroughgoing revisionist account of the origins of the American brokered Egypt-Israel peace process which developed throughout the mid-late 1970s. Presenting a sceptical take on the consensus that these realignments were premised on sudden flashes of American inspiration as the October War unfolded, this work reassesses Nixon administration engagement with Middle East diplomacy from its earliest involvement, tracing concepts and strategies implemented during and after the war in the antebellum period.


Focusing primarily on Nixon administration relations with Egypt and Israel, the intention is to contribute to the movement in ‘pericentric’ Cold War history, emphasising the impact of these lesser powers in the international system on superpower behaviour. The work also attempts to rebalance and round out a picture dominated by American and Israeli perspectives by bringing US-Egypt relations more squarely into the frame. Egyptian archival sources remain unavailable, but while Sadat’s goal was the recovery of the Sinai, his strategy was primarily directed at and developed through relations with the Nixon administration, and the wealth of American archival materials now available open a window into critical aspects of Egyptian policy making, as well providing a documentary evidence against which to assess many claims made in memoirs and public statements by key Egyptian figures.

As the emphasis is on Nixon Administration policy, this thesis is developed through an analytical narrative largely based on American primary sources. Archival materials were collected from the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum at Yorba Linda, California, the National Archives and Record Administration at College Park, Maryland, which houses the State Department records, and the Gerald Ford Presidential Library and Museum at Ann Arbor, Michigan. These are supplemented by published sources, both in print and online, including the State Department’s Foreign Relations of the United States series, which offers several excellent volumes dedicated to this area, and the digitised National Security Archive made available by George Washington University.

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Each chapter of this thesis attempts to offer a fresh take on established debates and orthodoxies, which, despite the release of an enormous volume of declassified primary materials on Nixon administration Middle East diplomacy, have to date gone largely unchallenged in ‘second generation’ historiography. The first chapter traces Rogers’ efforts to develop an agreed basis for a Middle East settlement during negotiations with the Soviet Union in 1969, challenging the dominant view that Cairo and Moscow rejected a generous territorial settlement, thus wrecking negotiations. The so-called ‘Rogers Plan’ never advocated full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in advance of direct negotiations between Egypt and Israel, while Israel made clear that it would not withdraw any troops before negotiations were completed, and that in its view a major purpose of negotiations was to determine how much Sinai territory it would annex in addition to the port of Sharm el-Sheikh. In any case, the ‘Rogers Plan’ proved not to be a declaration of Nixon administration policy, but rather a unilateral declaration of State Department policy, as from September 1969 Rogers was not just unsupported but actively undermined by President Nixon himself, who viewed Roger’s heroic failure as useful for his own image in the Arab world.

The second chapter challenges the accepted view that the Jordan Crisis was a watershed for the Nixon administration, as Israeli assistance in deterring a suspected Soviet-inspired Syrian invasion of Jordan supposedly convinced Nixon to adopt a partisan pro-Israel line to the Arab-Israeli dispute thereafter.19 This chapter shows that Washington never believed the Soviets to be more than tangentially involved in the events, and that Nixon’s decision to massively increase military aid to Israel had more to do with Egypt-Soviet actions in the War of Attrition.

Chapter three argues that rather than the accepted picture of bilateral and strategic harmony, US-Israel relations between late 1970 and December 1971 can be read as a struggle to establish an order of policy priorities. The Nixon administration sought to prioritise establishing a framework within which Israel would pursue a peace agreement with Sadat’s Egypt, but Israel showed little interest before securing prior

19 ‘Evenhandedness’ was a term used by the State Department, denoting a balanced policy avoiding favouritism towards either Israel or the Arabs. See William Quandt, Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967 (Brookings Institution Press, Berkley, 2010), p. 73.
guarantees of long term financial and military support, with central emphasis on establishing an ongoing supply of Phantom F4 fighter bombers.

Chapter four offers a reassessment of Egypt-US diplomacy in the period, showing that largely overlooked secret meetings between Kissinger and Egyptian National Security Advisor, Hafiz Ismail, anticipated later strategic cooperation, as all of the major elements underpinning post-October War US-Egypt collaboration were discussed.

Chapter five, on bilateral US-Egypt diplomacy and American policy making as the crisis progressed, demonstrates that ‘backchannel’ input from Egypt influenced American decision making at each critical juncture, shaping the outcomes of the conflict. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat waged and lost the October War, but by presenting unexpected options to the United States, he was ultimately successful in shaping its strategic outcomes.

The final chapter builds on previous chapters to show how bilateral US-Egypt cooperation in the immediate aftermath of the October War manifested and implemented the diplomatic strategy pursued by Sadat in 1971 and 1973, and as such reflect continuity rather than change in Egyptian policy.

A litany of accepted established truths – that the Rogers Plan represented a generous territorial settlement which was rejected by the Arabs and Soviets but later provided the conceptual foundations of the Egypt-Israel peace process; that the US and Israel came to together to defeat a Soviet inspired plot to overthrow the Jordanian monarchy in September 1970 and that this collaboration was the foundational act of a de facto alliance for the next three years; that after the failed ‘interim settlement’ diplomacy of 1971, no further meaningful diplomacy took place until the October War; that Sadat’s overtures to the White House during the war were unprecedented; and that American ideas, whether from Rogers, Kissinger, or elsewhere, provided the conceptual underpinnings and strategic direction for the American sponsored Egypt-Israel peace process in its aftermath – have been recently reinstated by scholars, with little modification.
This thesis offers an alternative, revisionist take on Nixon administration engagement with the Middle East, arguing that when approached without prepossession, declassified Nixon administration materials can reveal a narrative of engagement with the Arab-Israeli conflict which is substantially different from the accepted wisdom on many details, and fundamentally different overall. His reputation as a strategist and his dedication to fighting the Cold War is his own particularistic way notwithstanding, this thesis attempts to reframe Nixon’s Middle East policies with reference to the competing demands and impulses of two key regional actors, Egypt and Israel. Nixon struggled to determine a coherent Middle East strategy from the beginning of his administration’s engagement with the region in 1969, opening a susceptibility to outside influence. Although he occasionally expressed concern about the costs of a default policy of deference to Israel, Nixon never committed to any alternative during his first term, allowing relations with Israel to define his approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. But caught unawares and unprepared by the Egypt-Syria surprise attack in October 1973, the Nixon administration found its way out of the tangle by taking a new direction, guided by Cairo rather than Jerusalem.

The Middle order established in mid 1970s lasted well into the twenty first century, until the upheaval of the Arab Awakening centred on Cairo in 2011. This work attempts to excavate the foundations of this order, challenging the accepted view that it was charted overnight by Henry Kissinger in late 1973. In an effort to move away from the obsession with October War as an agenda-setting and epoch-changing event, the focus here is instead on the origins of the post-war peace process, viewing the war as a important but brief event in a longer historical arc. While concrete Egypt-Israel agreements were only achieved during the last nine months of the Nixon administration (November 1973 – July 1974), this thesis seeks to draw historical threads through from the antebellum period to the postbellem peace process, demonstrating that concepts underpinning these unprecedented achievements and strategies for their implementation were developed in Middle East negotiations from the beginning of the Nixon administration in 1969.
CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

In early 1969, incoming US president Richard Nixon authorised his State Department, under Secretary of State William Rogers, to accept an invitation to the so-called ‘Two-Power talks’, superpower negotiations on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nixon viewed the talks as a ‘test’ of Soviet intentions to negotiate not just on the Middle East, but also on a range of global issues. The American and Soviet settlement proposals were similar in terms of broad principles when the talks commenced in March 1969, but differed on the critical questions of the extent of Israeli withdrawal from territories seized during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, and whether Egypt and Jordan would formally recognise and negotiate directly with Israel, or work through intermediaries in indirect negotiations.

These critical points were never resolved during the Two-Power talks, and as negotiations stalled in the summer of 1969, Nixon administration Middle East diplomacy began to diverge onto two tracks. In July, Washington approved the expedited delivery of powerful, state of the art Phantom F4 fighter-bombers to Israel, which soon tipped the balance in the War of Attrition fought with Egypt across the Suez Canal. Nixon met personally with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in late September, assuring her that little would come of State Department diplomatic initiatives and that US foreign policy was decided in the White House, which he promised would support Israel’s position and would ensure that Israel’s decisive military superiority over its Arab neighbours would be maintained.

The State Department presented a refined version of its terms as a ‘Joint Working Paper’ during the final session of the Two-Power talks in late October as a final, non-negotiable offer. The paper proposed that Israel should withdraw to the former international boundary with Egypt in exchange for full peace. Peace terms would be

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negotiated directly between Egypt and Israel, and would guarantee security safeguards for Israel, including an Israeli military presence at Sharm el-Sheikh. The Soviets did not respond immediately, but throughout November the Joint Working Paper came under fierce public attack from Egyptian, Israeli, and Soviet propaganda.

In an effort to counter what he considered unwarranted and unfair criticism of a balanced proposal, on 9 December Rogers publicly unveiled the Joint Working Paper as a unilateral declaration of policy and intent, in a speech which quickly became known as the ‘Rogers Plan’.

To great controversy, Rogers called for Egypt to ‘agree to a binding and specific commitment to peace’ in exchange for ‘withdrawal of Israeli armed forces... to the international border between Israel and Egypt’. Jerusalem interpreted this statement as prejudicially committing Israel to full withdrawal in advance of negotiations, and rejected it outright. But crucially, Rogers stressed that agreement ‘would also require the parties themselves to negotiate the practical security arrangements to safeguard the peace’. His proposal respected Israel’s insistence on formal recognition and direct negotiations in advance of withdrawal in full knowledge that, for Golda Meir’s Labour Government, ‘practical security arrangements’ and ‘secure and recognised boundaries’ necessitated annexation of Sharm el-Sheikh and a portion of the Sinai peninsula encompassing the entire eastern coast (at a minimum). The Egyptians and Soviets thus interpreted Rogers’ statement as prejudicing their interests, as Egypt was required to accede to a permanent Israeli military presence in the Sinai as the price of entering negotiations. Moscow declared that the ‘Rogers Plan’ did not offer present ‘sufficient grounds’ for settlement in mid-December, a ‘cavalier’ rejection according to the Nixon administration, indicating that the Soviets had failed the test of their intentions and superpower talks on the Middle East should be discontinued.

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The chapter offers a detailed account of the trajectory of the so-called ‘Rogers Plan’ during 1969, challenging the accepted view that Egypt and the Soviets rejected a generous territorial settlement, thus wrecking negotiations. Rogers never contemplated full Israeli withdrawal in advance of direct negotiations. Provisions for direct negotiations, during which Egypt and Israel would determine the extent of withdrawal and final boundaries between them, was foundational to all American proposals. But in any case, the Rogers Plan proved to be not a declaration of *Nixon administration* policy, but rather a unilateral declaration of *State Department* policy unsupported by the White House. Frustrated with slow progress, Nixon allowed State to continue its efforts to negotiate a settlement, but offered no support in late 1969, instead encouraging Israeli and American Jewish leaders to attack Rogers, ensuring that the Rogers Plan was a dead letter. Rather than attempt to settle on generous terms, for Nixon’s White House the Rogers Plan represented little more than a device for abdicating responsibility for working towards a Middle East peace settlement.

**ENTERING THE ARENA: NIXON AND THE MIDDLE EAST, JANUARY 1969**

Nixon arrived in the White House with a determination to take personal control of American foreign policy. Convinced that the American global position was in a decades-long process of decline, Nixon saw superpower negotiations as the key to international stability, envisaging a system of ‘linkage’ between disparate global issues such as arms control and regional conflict management. Wide-ranging negotiations presented possibilities for reciprocating concessions in one area, such as Vietnam, in another, such as the Middle East. His inaugural speech promised that in relations with Moscow, ‘after a period of confrontation, we are entering an era of negotiation’, or détente. Top priorities focused on managing relations with the two communist giants, China and the Soviet Union, and, first and foremost, navigating an exit from the Vietnam War. Although Nixon considered the Middle East a dangerous potential

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4 This line of argument can be found in Daigle, *The Limits of Détente*, p. 96; Kissinger, *White House Years* p. 377; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 163-164.

flashpoint for superpower confrontation, the region was not a primary concern in early 1969.\textsuperscript{6} 

In late 1968, the President-elect’s key foreign policy advisor, Advisor to the President for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger, set about restructuring the foreign policy apparatus, centralising foreign policy making within the White House by elevating the National Security Council, headed by Kissinger himself and reporting directly to the President, to the role of main foreign policy executive. Insofar as possible, the State Department was reduced to a ceremonial role.\textsuperscript{7} Nixon wasted little time in setting up a direct line of communication and negotiation to the Kremlin in Moscow through Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin, bypassing the State Department. Operating in what became known as ‘the Channel’, Kissinger and Dobrynin negotiated on a range of global issues throughout the first Nixon administration.\textsuperscript{8}

The dangers of superpower conflict had been a recurring theme in Nixon’s speeches throughout the 1960s, and during his first televised presidential address, Nixon famously likened the Middle East situation to ‘a powder keg’, which needed to ‘be defused’ lest it provoke a ‘confrontation between the nuclear powers’.\textsuperscript{9} The keg was tightly packed however. Soon after the June 1967 War, both the Knesset and the Israeli cabinet under Levi Eshkol had resolved not to withdraw from territories seized


\textsuperscript{8} Geyer et al’s collection of primary source materials provides a complete record of exchanges in the channel, which shows that discussion of the Middle East was indeed sparse in 1969. Geyer et al., Soviet-American Relations: The Détente Years, 1969-1972 (United States Department of State Printing Office, Washington DC, 2007) See also Logevall and Andrew Preston ‘Introduction’ in Logevall and Preston, Nixon In The World, pp. 3-21; Bundy, A Tangled Web, pp. 57-58; Hanhimaki, The Flawed Architect, p. 34.

from Arab neighbours before directly negotiating peace treaties with them, a
determination which was reinforced in the face of the common ‘rejectionist’ or ‘three
noes’ position of no recognition of, negotiation, or peace with Israel adopted at the
Arab Summit in Khartoum in August 1967. Israel believed that it had ‘time is on its
side’, as the weakening regime of Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser (or a
successor) would eventual succumb to negotiation on Israeli terms. Confident of
defending its gains militarily and was not unduly fearful of Arab military action, but
was more apprehensive of external diplomatic pressure to prematurely relinquish
captured territories without achieving peace.

Israel was unwilling to reveal its territorial terms in advance of direct negotiations with
Arab neighbours, but in December 1968 Foreign Minister Abba Eban announced that
in order to secure Israeli navigation rights in the Gulf of Aqaba and Straits of Tiran, a
territorial settlement would require Israel to annex Sharm el-Sheikh at the southern
tip of the Sinai and a coastal strip connecting the port to Israel proper. Unlike the
‘Allon Plan’ for border changes in the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Sinai devised by
Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon in 1967, which divided the Prime Minister Levi
Eshkol’s cabinet and had not achieved the status of official Israeli government policy,
determination to annex Sharm el-Sheikh and the eastern Sinai was presented by Israeli

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10 Shalom and Vanetik offer a sympathetic account of the process leading to this Israeli decision arguing that it was taken only after the Arabs rejected an Israeli offer for restoration of their lands in return for peace, while Raz presents a more sceptical take, querying whether this offer was genuine. Shalom and Vanetik, *The Nixon Administration and the Middle East Peace Process*, p. 16-20; Raz ‘The Generous Peace Offer That Was Never Offered: The Israeli Cabinet Resolution of June 19, 1967’, *Diplomatic History*, 37/1 (2013), pp. 85-108.

11 Meital and Shemesh both offer more nuanced accounts of Egypt’s position in late 1967, arguing that the public ‘rejectionist’ position was adopted as a sop to the Jordanian Monarch, King Abdullah Hussein, to protect his flank against the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), and Nasser’s privately-expressed position showed more flexibility. Meital, ‘The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination’, *The Middle East Journal*, 54/1 (2000), pp. 64-82; Shemesh, ‘The Origins of Sadat’s Strategic Volte-Face (Marking 30 Years Since Sadat’s Historic Visit to Israel, November 1977)’, *Israel Studies*, 13/2 (2008), pp. 28-53.

officials as reflecting such as Ambassador to Washington Yitzhak Rabin as a concrete ‘cabinet decision’.  

Figure 1. Map of Sinai Peninsula and surrounding waterways.

With hardened positions on both sides, Nixon was pessimistic about the prospects of a negotiated settlement upon entering office in January 1969, and therefore reluctant to engage in an activist Middle East policy. The region was thus designated a State Department area of responsibility, in the hope that the State Department and the

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13 E.g. Memoranda of Conversation (Memcon) between Yitzhak Rabin and Harold Saunders at Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco’s Home, 20 June 1969. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973 Political and Defense, Box 2231, Folder POL ISR US to 17 1 ISR US.
Middle East would keep one another busy, allowing the White House to get on with the conduct of foreign policy elsewhere.14

**EARLY INVITATIONS: PRELUDE TO THE TWO-POWER TALKS**

While receptive to the new President’s call to negotiate, unlike Nixon, Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev was keen to make the Middle East a priority. On 30 December 1968, Soviet Chargé d’affaires in Washington Yuri Tchernikov delivered copies of a plan for Middle East settlement to outgoing Secretary of State Dean Rusk and to Robert Ellsworth, an aide to the president-elect. The plan called for a UN-supervised phased Israeli withdrawal from territories seized in 1967, in exchange for mutual commitments on ending belligerency and ‘respect for and recognition of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of each state in this area and their right to live in peace, in secure and recognised boundaries’ and ‘a justful settlement of the refugee problem’. UN peacekeepers would be restored on the Sinai Peninsula, at Sharm el Sheikh and in the Gaza Sector, ‘ensuring secure and recognised boundaries… [and] freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area’. The Soviet plan was, however, explicit about withdrawal from all occupied territories, rejecting the Israeli interpretation of ‘secure and recognised boundaries’ as meaning border changes, instead emphasising the ‘inadmissibility of territories acquired by force’ and calling for a return to status quo ante of 5 June 1967.15

In essence, the Soviet plan called for implementation of the Arab interpretation of UN Security Resolution 242’s ‘Land for Peace’ formula, with UN forces ensuring secure borders and navigation rights. As an implementation mechanism, the plan envisaged that Israel and its neighbours would ‘deposit with the UN appropriate documents’ on their respective commitments before withdrawal commenced. Once withdrawal was complete, the deposited documents would be ‘finally put into effect’, at that point establishing Arab recognition of Israel’s territorial sovereignty, security and navigation.

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rights.\textsuperscript{16} Nasser seemed to endorse the Soviet proposal during an interview with \textit{Newsweek} magazine in early February, stating that he was prepared to ‘accept all aspects’ of Resolution 242, and expressing willingness to ‘deposit a signed document with the Security Council agreeing on the essential elements of a solution’.\textsuperscript{17}

The Soviet proposal was followed by repeated entreaties to Washington to enter bilateral negotiations on the Middle East. France was also keen to get involved, issuing invitations to the US, USSR, UK to engage in ‘Four-Power Talks’ on a regional settlement based on the Soviet proposal. UN Special Envoy the Middle East Gunnar Jarring also welcomed the Soviet proposal, as did the UK, but Israel’s reaction was ‘negative’, balking at an ‘imposed solution’. Rogers viewed the French invitation as putting the US in an ‘awkward position’, as the incoming Nixon administration, keen to establish good relations with President Charles De Gaulle’s France, was reluctant to flatly decline his invitation to negotiate, but was likely to find itself isolated in Four-Power talks, defending Israel against pressure to compromise.\textsuperscript{18}

Eshkol wrote personally to Nixon in late January 1969, arguing that the aim of the Soviet proposal was to ‘establish its supremacy in the Middle East by securing international support for a settlement which would weaken and undermine Israel and thereby discredit America and the free world’. Citing a French decision to cancel the sale of fifty aircraft, which were ‘crucial to Israel’s defence’ Eshkol claimed to ‘observe an ever closer identification of General De Gaulle’s policy with that of the Soviet Union’, insisting that his proposals should also be rejected.\textsuperscript{19}

Given the complicated situation, Nixon’s National Security Council (NSC) was convened in early February to consider a range of Middle East policy options: to, as Israel preferred, leave the parties to resolve the situation for themselves; to support a

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Unclassified Annex: Line by Line Comparison of \textit{Newsweek} and MENA Texts of Nasser’s Interview, Undated. National Archives and Records Administration (NA), Record Group 59, General Records of the Department of State (RG 59), Box 1791 Pol Arab-Isr 12/16/68 to Pol Arab-Isr 1/1/69, Folder Political Affairs and Relations Arab-Israel 1 January 1969.
renewed Jarring effort, encouraging Israel to forward ‘more precise territorial terms’ and Egypt to ‘commit itself to a binding peace’; bilateral superpower negotiations as suggested by the Soviets; or as the French suggested, a Four-Power approach.\textsuperscript{20} NSC analysis was clear that avoiding military confrontation with Soviets was ‘the Number One priority’, but identified a basic dilemma in considering the US regional position. America’s ‘two fundamental purposes’, to ‘assure the survival of Israel’ and prevent ‘the land mass, population and resources of the eastern Arab world to fall under Soviet domination’ were at odds, as ‘given the underlying forces of conflict in the area, pursuit of either purpose tends to militate against the other’.\textsuperscript{21}

This conundrum opened a debate within the Nixon administration, dividing Kissinger from his colleagues. State Department and NSC Middle East specialists warned that America’s regional position, founded on cooperation with conservative Arab powers (Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia), the Northern Tier (Greece, Turkey, Iran), and Israel, was deteriorating as the region grew increasingly polarised and radicalised, creating vulnerabilities for the US and opportunities for the Soviets. NSC analysis pointed to dangers to US interests posed by ongoing Israeli occupation of extensive Arab territories, warning of

the possibility of a collapse of the regime in Jordan if it cannot recover the West Bank, with potentially dangerous repercussions elsewhere in the area; the growing strength of the fedayeen (Palestinian irregular forces) which could limit the freedom of action of the UAR [United Arab Republic] and Jordan to move toward a settlement; and the opportunity for the USSR to expand its influence with the Arabs under conditions of continuing Arab-Israeli hostility.\textsuperscript{22}

The State Department favoured a proactive, ‘evenhanded’ approach to resolving the dispute, avoiding either an openly pro-Israeli or pro-Arab position. The ‘evenhanded’ position recommended restraint on arms supplies to Israel, clearly declaring that Israel should withdraw from the occupied territories, and, accepting that formal treaties

\textsuperscript{20} State Department Memo, The Arab-Israeli Dispute: Principal US Options. NA, RG 59, JS Box 25, ME 1969.


\textsuperscript{22} Paper Prepared by the Interdepartmental Group for Near East and South Asia. 30 January 1969.
were for the time being unattainable, willingness to accept ‘peace agreements’ amounting to something less than this from the Arab parties.23

Kissinger, who, by his own admission, had little knowledge or experience of the Middle East, dissented from this consensus, seeing the tense status quo as favouring US rather than Soviet interests over the medium to long term. For Kissinger, the Soviets were the primary problem, to be removed from the picture in advance of moving towards settlement. Kissinger recommended a policy of ‘continued firmness’ in dealing with Egypt and Syria, arguing that the Arabs would come eventually to recognise the futility of relying on Soviet military support and would instead turn to Washington to deliver the occupied territories. Focusing on the global/Cold War aspects of the situation, Kissinger argued that the Soviets sought to exploit the situation through a strategy of ‘controlled tension’ whereby Moscow actively perpetuated the Arab-Israeli stand-off by rebuilding the Egyptian and Syrian militaries and by voicing occasional rhetorical support for military action to recapture the occupied territories. Confident that Moscow’s Arab clients were trapped in a dependent relationship, Kissinger reasoned that the Soviets would always stop well short of providing a feasible military option, as they had no more interest than the Americans in being drawn into a superpower confrontation over the Middle East.24

Nixon, who, in his own words, regarded the ‘June war as a tremendous victory for Israel and the USSR’\textsuperscript{25} shared Kissinger’s suspicions of Soviet motives, but tended to agree with the consensus that ongoing instability in the Middle East carried dangers for US interests. The President saw the Two-Power talks as an opportunity to embed the Middle East in his ‘linkage’ system and to ‘test’ Soviet intentions with regards to superpower negotiations not just on the Middle East, but globally. The Four-Power talks could provide multilateral ‘window dressing’ assuaging British and French desire to get involved, maintaining cursory dialogue on the basically insoluble wider Arab-Israel conflict while the superpowers got on with the serious business of developing an agreed document for Egypt-Israel settlement.\textsuperscript{26} After NSC deliberations in early February, Nixon overruled Kissinger’s objections, authorising State to go ahead with the Two-Power talks and Ambassador to the UN Charles Yost to engage with the Four-Power talks. Nixon announced these decisions, along with ‘all-out support’ for the Jarring mission during a 6 February press conference.\textsuperscript{27}

The Middle East thus almost immediately introduced an anomaly within Nixon’s foreign policy architecture, with two channels of negotiation with the Soviets running simultaneously, a dedicated Sisco-Dobrynin Middle East channel, and a broader Kissinger-Dobrynin channel. This would prove problematic, as the White House and State, and in particular, Kissinger and Rogers, seldom agreed on the best course. Although Nixon had deliberately kept Kissinger out of the Middle East, Kissinger wasted few opportunities to question and criticise Rogers diplomacy, insisting on ‘linkage’ of the Middle East to other issues, making every effort during 1969 to block a settlement in the absence of what he considered satisfactory Soviet behaviour with regard to Vietnam. Nonetheless, Nixon’s decision to accept the Soviet invitation and participate in the Two-Power Talks launched a process of engagement with the Middle

\textsuperscript{25} Nixon expressed this idiosyncratic view during an NSC meeting on 11 September 1969. FRUS XII, Doc. 78. \url{https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v12/d78}


East, and particularly with Egypt and Israel, which he had not initially planned on, but
would continue throughout his tenure, often demanding White House attention.

**The First Draft ‘Rogers Plan’, February 1969**

The Soviets agreed that substantive Middle East negotiations should be kept between
the superpowers. On 15 February, following consultations with Brezhnev, President of
the Supreme Soviet Nikolai Podgorny, and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, Dobrynin
delivered a message ‘personally approved by the top leadership’ conveying that the

Soviet leaders were full of goodwill and ready to move forward on a broad front... They were
especially prepared to proceed with bilateral discussion on the Middle East. They would prefer
to do this however, outside the UN framework.  

Even Kissinger found the ‘tone of the document’ to be ‘extraordinarily forthcoming’,
enthusiastic that ‘we have “the linkage”’, as the Soviets appeared ready to negotiate on
a range of global issues including Vietnam, arms control, and the Middle East. Our
problem is how to play it’. On the Middle East, Kissinger was pleased that the Soviets
packaged withdrawal with security guarantees, rather than as ‘successive actions’, and
was optimistic that resolution of thorny issues such as ‘refugee problems’ and
navigation rights, ‘would follow on agreement of the basic tenets’.  

In February 1969, even Kissinger, the Nixon administration’s leading cynic on Middle East, agreed that
the Soviet overtures carried promise for an agreed basis for Middle East settlement.

With the Two-Power Talks scheduled to commence in early March, the NSC set to
work on an American counterproposal. This opened with a preamble recognising ‘the
inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war, and... the need to establish a just
and lasting peace’, calling on Egypt and Israel to negotiate directly under Jarring to
conclude ‘a final and binding accord on a just and lasting peace’. The proposal called
on the parties to agree to a formal peace, accept UNSCR 242, and ‘implement it in

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28 FRUS XII, Editorial Note, Doc. 12. The Soviet leaders followed up with another note two days later,
expressing ‘[g]reat anxiety... caused by the tense and unsettled situation in the Middle East’. Referring
to their ‘concrete plan’ the Soviets emphasised ‘the necessity, on the one hand, that the Arab territories
occupied by Israelis be liberated, and, on the other hand, that the existence of Israel as an independent
state be guaranteed’. Note From Soviet Leaders to President Nixon Moscow, 17 February 1969. NPLM,
NSC Files, Box 340, Subject Files, USSR Memcons Dobrynin/President 17 February 1969. FRUS XII, Doc.
13.

29 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, Analysis of Dobrynin Message, 18 February 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 340,
Subject Files, USSR Memcons Dobrynin/President 17 February 1969. FRUS XII, Doc. 17.
good faith in all of its provisions’, agreeing on a package of ‘all provisions of a peaceful settlement... before implementation of a final accord would begin’. Both sides would commit to non-interference in one another’s affairs, mutual recognition of sovereignty, and the right to live in peace and territorial inviolability, terminating claims of belligerency, including ‘any warlike act or act of hostility conducted from the territory of one state, whether by government agencies, personnel, or private persons or organisations’, thus including an obligation for Egypt to accept responsibility for fedayeen groups based there. Both sides would agree to abide by the UN Charter, settling disputes peacefully.\(^30\)

The proposal included two further clauses on Palestine and Palestinian refugees. All sides would relinquish territorial claims on Gaza and accept UN administration of the enclave for the time being, and Egypt, Israel, and Jordan would eventually determine Gaza’s ‘definitive status’ through direct negotiations. Finally, the proposal called for a ‘just settlement of the refugee problem’ caused by the displacements of the 1948 and 1967 wars. Refugees would be offered an option of ‘repatriation to Israel or resettlement with compensation’ with arrangements to be worked out through direct negotiations under Jarring on a annual quota or ‘agreed ceiling on the number to be allowed into Israel’.\(^31\)

Much of the content of the American and Soviet proposals, such as calls for an overall settlement package, respect for territorial inviolability, a ‘justful’ settlement of the refugee problem, and a UN presence in Gaza, were similar.\(^32\) However, they differed


\(^31\) Ibid.

\(^32\) Quandt is somewhat misleading on this, as he argues that, from the American perspective, ‘The need for a package settlement was of fundamental importance. It meant that there would be no Israeli withdrawal until all elements of a peace agreement on all fronts had been achieved. This stood in stark contrast to the insistence of the Soviets and the Arabs that Israel should withdraw first, after which an end to belligerency and other issues could be discussed’. Quandt, Peace Process, p. 65. In fact, as shown above, the Soviets actually approached the Americans with a package deal before Nixon even took office, and in mid-February 1969, the White House was satisfied that the Soviets understood the withdrawal of Israeli troops would be discussed only in the context of a package settlement. This was again reaffirmed on 7 April, when Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko ‘stressed that Soviets are in full agreement with us that understanding on a “package” settlement must be reached first; then it can be
the on the critical points of whether Israel would commit to full withdrawal, whether Egypt would commit to direct negotiations, and whether it should terminate belligerency at the beginning or end of the negotiating process.

An early version of the American proposal encompassing fourteen points seemed closer to the Soviet position, but this was reduced to a thirteen point document by conflating and modifying two points on territory. Originally, point four called on Israel to ‘withdraw its armed forces... to the secure and recognised boundary provided for in Article [point] 5. The parties agreed to delineate this border on an agreed map’. Point five seemed to define this border in advance, stating that ‘the former international boundary between Egypt and the mandated territory or Palestine would be recognised by the parties as the definitive boundary between Israel and the UAR [Egypt]’. However, these points were reworked to state instead that ‘the former Egypt-Palestine border is not necessarily excluded as the future boundary’. Point ten of earlier drafts, stating that the entire Sinai would be demilitarised, was also modified to state that areas from which ‘Israel withdraws would be demilitarised’ and that ‘Arrangements would be worked out under Jarring for demilitarization and guaranteeing freedom of navigation’.

These marked subtle but very significant differentiations, pointing to the core differences between the two sides. As the remainder of this chapter demonstrates, the mythology of the Rogers Plan notwithstanding, no American proposal from 1969 unequivocally stated that Israel must withdraw fully from Egyptian territory. Instead while flirting the principal that Israel might withdraw fully, American proposals stated that in practice the extent of withdrawal and final boundaries would be determined

implemented in phases’. Embassy in the Soviet Union - Department of State, Moscow, 7 April 1969, 1640Z. NA, RG 59, CFP 1967–69, POL US–USSR. FRUS XII, Doc. 34.

33 In a later discussion of the American proposal with Dobrynin, on 12 June, ‘Sisco explained that Point 4 contained two aspects which closely linked withdrawal and boundaries. US position has been and remains that withdrawal should be to a secure and agreed boundary, which would take place after UAR and Israel have reached agreement on boundary and on all other aspects of final settlement and after agreement is signed and has become reciprocally binding’. Department of State Telegram - US Embassy Moscow, USUN New York, Secretary-Dobrynin Meeting 11 June on the Middle East. NA, RG 59, JS, Box 26, Folder, 2P May-June 1969.

through Egypt-Israel direct negotiations. While the former international boundary was ‘not necessarily’ excluded, it was not necessarily included on the negotiating agenda either, as, in accordance with Israel’s insistence, the agenda was to be determined by the parties without preconditions.

By ‘preconditions’, however, Israel meant Arab demands or external, superpower-imposed preconditions. Its own frequently-stated precondition annexation of Sharm el-Sheikh and the eastern Sinai coast were posited as the entry price for negotiations. For its part, Egypt insisted commitment to full Israeli withdrawal as a precondition of negotiations, rejecting all American proposals received in 1969 on this basis. To say that American proposals failed to reconcile these irreconcilable demands is no great criticism. But, as will be seen, this critical point was never resolved in the Two-Power Talks, and this tension was carried forward into the Rogers Plan, which basically fudged the issue by calling for Israeli withdrawal, but only in the context of a directly negotiated security presence in the Sinai, specifically at Sharm el-Sheikh.

NASSER’S WAR OF ATTRITION AND GOLDA MEIR’S ISRAEL, MARCH 1969

Even as the superpowers prepared to engage in talks on Egypt-Israel settlement in early March, Nasser opened what proved to be his last military campaign in earnest with a massive artillery barrage along the length of the Suez Canal. Four days later, on 12 March he announced that Egypt was no longer bound by the 1967 ceasefire. Israeli reprisals had relatively easily deterred attacks in late 1968, but in early 1969 Egyptian troops opened with small arms fire across the Canal, and, faced with a better prepared enemy, Israeli raiders struggled to achieve a similar impact.\footnote{Martin Van Creveld, The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force (Public Affairs, New York, 2002), pp. 211-212; Ahmed Khalidi, 'The War of Attrition', Journal of Palestine Studies, Vol. 3, No. 1, Autumn, 1973, pp. 60-87.} Over the following months, rhetoric escalated as Egypt attempted to exert military pressure on Israel’s static defence line. On 5 June, Fawzi announced a new phase of ‘Active and Positive Defence’ and the following month, on 23 July, the Egyptian President used his annual
Revolution Day speech to declare a ‘War of Attrition’ against Israel, which would involve a ‘long battle to exhaust the enemy’.35

Egypt’s new strategic concept was designed to capitalise on Egypt’s quantitative advantages in manpower and artillery. Mohammed Heikal, a confidant of Nasser’s and editor of his daily mouthpiece publication Al-Ahram, used the newspaper to boast that Egypt’s ‘manpower reserves’ could absorb 50,000 casualties, but Israel, lacking such reserves, would be compelled to stop fighting at a fraction of that number. Though hyperbolic, this statement pointed to an important reality for Israel’s small and closely knit people. By mid-May, Israel had suffered eighty seven casualties along the Canal, with twenty nine dead, an unsustainable and demoralising rate for a small, close-knit country fighting a war projected to continue indefinitely.36

Israeli determination to hold ground was, if anything, reinforced by the death of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol on 26 February 1969, and his replacement by former Foreign Minister Golda Meir in mid-March. For Meir, captured territories represented the most precious negotiating currency, to be relinquished only for maximum concessions.37 A resolute hawk, famous for her formidable willpower, Meir remained defiant in the face of pressures from any quarter, domestic or international, that Israel might give up occupied territories before achieving its objective of directly negotiated peace treaties with neighbouring Arab powers. Meir had served as Foreign Minister in 1957, when Israel was compelled to withdraw from the conquered Sinai without securing Arab recognition, and was determined not to repeat the experience. Meir and her political partner, Minister of Defence Moshe Dayan, queried whether Israel had ever in fact accepted Resolution 242, but in her analysis of the document, Meir ‘noted that it does not say that Israel must withdraw from all territories, nor does it say that Israel must withdraw from the territories, but it does say that every state in the area has a right to live in ‘secure and recognized boundaries’ and it does specify the ‘termination of belligerency’. For Meir, the resolution was not ambiguous, but

35 James, Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy (Palgrave, London, 2007), pp. 149-150.
37 Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining, p. 102.
had simply been ‘misinterpreted’. Acknowledging that ‘Eshkol, and later I, were branded expansionists for wanting... border adjustments between Israel and her neighbours... And of course ‘intransigent’ was to become my middle name’, Meir claimed to speak for ‘the vast majority of Israelis’ in that ‘we weren’t at all interested in a fine, liberal, anti-militaristic, dead Jewish state or in a settlement that would win us compliments for being reasonable and intelligent but would endanger our lives’. 38

Not given to mincing words, Meir used her first Prime Ministerial speech to convey her opinion on negotiating with the Soviets on a Middle East settlement. She viewed the exercise as ‘pointless’, and emphasised that Israel was ‘capable of withstanding big power pressure if such [pressure] should come’. 39 Presenting her cabinet to the Knesset on 17 March, Meir spoke out against ‘friendly intercession’ in the Arab-Israeli dispute, warning that ‘no decision can be adopted without us, nor can any “recommendation” be formulated without our consent’. Her government was ‘resolutely determined, as the previous government was, that there will be no return to the borders and conditions which existed up to the fourth of June 1967’. 40

Though Meir insisted that border changes would be necessary in any peace settlement, the nature and extent of these changes, and Israel’s exact plans for the occupied territories, remained unclear, perhaps even to her own government. Throughout 1969 Meir insisted that ‘the time has not yet come to draw maps’ insisting that Israel would reveal its territorial position during direct negotiations. She claimed that it was a ‘good thing’ that Israel had not formulated a detailed position ‘as long as there is no sign of readiness from the other side to make peace’. Instead Israel would continue to ‘concentrate... efforts on increasing... strength and consolidating our position while maintaining unity... without limiting... power of democratic decision at any time’. 41

41 Ibid.
As Defence Minister since the start of the June War, Dayan had assumed responsibility for the occupied territories, accruing major influence in Israeli politics. A hardline ‘annexationist’, in 1968 Dayan had attempted to outflank Eshkol and Allon on the right by proposing the construction of Israeli settlements in the Sinai and proclaiming that he regarded ‘Sharm el-Sheikh as an eternal base of the state of Israel. We must be there forever’.

Meir saw good relations with the Nixon administration as her first foreign policy priority, but her government’s uncompromising stance on the occupied territories placed them at odds with much of world opinion, including the US State Department, and in the spring and summer of 1969 the US and Israeli governments eyed one another warily. Eban visited Washington in early March, meeting with Nixon, Rogers, and Sisco to express concern about US participation in either Two-Power or Four-Power talks, and to set out the Israeli negotiating position. Israel insisted that ‘Arab governments must tell their people they must accept a sovereign Israel in a full and juridical sense’. ‘Arab signatures’ on ‘contractual’ peace agreements were ‘important because if one sided violates a clear agreement, the other is freed of its obligations’. While Israel would not disclose its territorial demands in advance of direct negotiations, Eban insisted on border changes (with the formulation that ‘secure and recognised boundaries must be different from armistice lines’, and be ‘based on agreement’). The new borders must ‘reflect Israel’s security needs’ and ‘preserve the

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As potential successors to Eshkol, Meir and Dayan had been rivals in early 1969 but overcame their differences during the summer, sealing the Meir-Dayan compact at the Labour Party Conference in August. Dayan’s full backing for Meir was reciprocated by Labour’s de facto adoption of Dayan’s annexationist position on the occupied territories, over the opposition of ‘doves’ such as Foreign Minister Abba Eban. Although conference failed to reach consensus on policy towards the occupied territories, the party’s written platform confined itself to bland generalities, an elaboration in the so-called ‘oral Torah’, asserted Israel’s right to a military presence in Sharm el-Sheikh, in eastern Sinai, and along the Jordan River and a non-specific endorsement of Jewish settlements.

Aronson, Conflict and Bargaining, p. 107; Korn, Stalemate, p. 129-130, 141; Meital ‘The Khartoum Conference’.
Jewish character of the state’. Finally, all elements of a peace settlement should be agreed in advance and ‘executed as a package’.  

Eban found Kissinger, who also encouraged frequent visits Rabin, sympathetic to Israel’s position. Kissinger made no attempt to disguise his doubts about State Department diplomacy, stressing that the White House made US foreign policy decisions and that if Israel should choose to resist State Department proposals, it need not fear for its relations with Nixon’s White House. Eban nonetheless impressed upon Rogers that Israel feared that US participation in either Two-Power or Four-Power talks carried dangers of ‘erosion’ in the American position. He complained that ‘the deck would be stacked against Israel in either group’, as the British, French, and Soviets would gladly sacrifice Israel’s security to protect their own Middle East interests, and that the very concept of the big power on talks the Middle East prejudiced Israel’s demand for directly negotiated peace treaties.

Rogers offered reassurances that although Washington would go ahead with talks, the Nixon administration had ‘no intention of changing the US-Israeli relationships’, and stressed a ‘desire to remain in close consultation with the Israelis’, whose concerns would be taken into account in framing the American approach to the Two-Power Talks. Rogers was as good as his word. Considering negotiating tactics as the Two-Power talks approached, in the effort ‘to meet some of Israel’s requirement that these specifics be worked out by the Arabs and Israelis themselves’, Washington decided against introducing the thirteen-point US proposal as a basis for negotiation – in effect a counter-proposal to the Soviet deal offered in December 1968. Instead, rather than forward a concrete policies or state American terms, Sisco would merely outline the American position ‘in terms of a set of carefully worded principles’. Thus, in

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44 NSC Memo, Summary of Eban’s Talks in State, 13 March 1969, Memo Kissinger-Nixon, Your Talk with Abba Eban, 14 March 1969. NPLM, NSC File, Country Files, Middle East (henceforth CF/ME), Box 604, Folder Israel Vol 1. (Ends 5/31/69) 1 of 2.

45 Korn, Stalemate, p. 154-155; Shalom and Vanetik, The Nixon Administration, p. 34.

46 Intelligence note State Department Director of Intelligence and Research George C. Denney Jnr – Rogers, 10 March 1969. NA, RG 59, CF 1967-1969, Box 2225, Folder Isr 1/1/69.

47 Department of State to Embassy Tel Aviv, Secretary-Eban, 20 March 1969. NA, RG 59, SNF 1967-1969, Box 2225, Folder Pol 7 Isr. 1/1/69.

deference to Israel, the Nixon administration entered the Two-Power Talks without the intention of presenting actual policy positions for negotiation, instead presenting a general outline for settlement, to be worked out in detail during direct Arab-Israeli negotiations.

THE ‘STRIPTEASE’: REVEALING THE ‘ROGERS PLAN’ TO THE RUSSIANS, MARCH–MAY 1969

The Two-Power Talks commenced in Washington on 18 March, the day after the Eban-Rogers meeting. Dobrynin and Sisco met nine times over the next five weeks, continued with three days of intensive negotiations in Moscow in mid-July, but then had no further meetings until the opening of UN sessions in New York in September. Agreement was soon reached on several general principles: that the Two-Power Talks should focus exclusively on Egypt and Israel rather an a wider settlement; that the objective was a ‘real settlement’ or ‘just and lasting peace’ rather than ‘another armistice’ and that Egypt must accept Israel’s ‘right to exist as an independent state’; and that agreement should cover ‘all the issues listed in the UN resolution as a package’. Egypt and Israel should participate in negotiations so that ‘the question of imposing a settlement does not arise’. Instead, ‘any US-Soviet views must go to the parties through Jarring, at least officially’.49

But while the superpowers achieved agreement on abstract principles without major difficulty, reconciling, on the one hand, Israel’s demands for agreed border changes and directly negotiated peace treaties in advance of withdrawal with, on the other, Egypt’s refusal ‘to negotiate with the pistol of Israeli occupation at their heads’ or to contemplate relinquishing territory, proved elusive, as did finding an agreed definition of the ‘obligations of peace’.50 During a visit to Washington in early April the Jordanian monarch King Abdullah Hussein brought word that Egypt would accept

agreement to free navigation in all waterways, including the Suez Canal, for all nations, including Israel.\textsuperscript{51} But this left the problem of controlling Palestinian militant groups, collectively known as fedayeen. Egypt and Syria were unwilling to provide Israel with guarantees against future fedayeen attacks, and in any case the Americans and Israelis regarded both governments as unreliable.\textsuperscript{52}

On the key issue of border changes, the Americans were unsure of their own position, as the US and Israeli positions were furthest apart on territory, and nothing had been agreed between them on this. The US basically agreed with the Soviets (and the British and French) that ‘rectifications in terms of a few kilometers’ were appropriate, with the possibility of greater movement ‘if some reciprocal exchange could be arranged (e.g. Gaza to Jordan)’. Washington was unwilling to endorse annexation of the eastern Sinai (or the West Bank), but it had ‘not come up yet with satisfactory alternatives to Israel’s plans for these areas’.\textsuperscript{53} Moscow experienced parallel difficulties in deliberations with Cairo, as while the Soviets indicated willingness to consider minor border rectifications, the Egyptians expressed outrage at the notion.\textsuperscript{54}

The prospects of resolving these notoriously difficult political problems were effectively nil while Sisco remained ‘handicapped’ by US unwillingness to reveal its own position. American tactics created a situation of ‘trying to argue Dobrynin toward our position without being able to surface practical suggestions of our own’.\textsuperscript{55} On 14 April, four weeks into the talks with Sisco, Dobrynin visited Kissinger to complain that ‘Moscow was prepared to come to an understanding on the Middle East as rapidly as possible’ but that the talks ‘were proceeding too abstractly. The principles put forward by Joseph Sisco were all very well, but the key issue was the location of the frontiers and other matters’. The US demanded a contractual agreement without clarifying what this meant, and border rectifications without presenting a line or map. Dobrynin emphasised ‘that the Soviet Union would do a great deal to make an agreement’ but

\textsuperscript{51} Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, p. 363.
\textsuperscript{52} Sisco reported that in the prevailing political climate ‘No Arab state feels able to confront the fedayeen, and continuation of an impasse on a settlement will strengthen them’. Memo Sisco-Nixon, \textit{Next Steps on the Arab-Israeli Dispute}, 17 April 1969.
\textsuperscript{54} Korn, \textit{Stalemate}, pp. 152-153.
\textsuperscript{55} Memo Kissinger - Nixon Washington, 30 March 1969.
required specifics, requesting an American ‘proposal which would be kept in strictest confidence and the Soviet Union would see whether they could turn it into a joint offer to both sides’. Moscow was indifferent to ‘whether the borders were 30 miles east or west... as long as both sides agree’ and ‘did not care about Golan Heights or the Gaza Strip’.56

After six weeks of procrastination, the NSC was convened on 26 April to consider progress in the Two-Power talks. Rogers, supported by Sisco, Yost, and CIA director Richard Helms, persuaded Nixon that the US tactics were futile, and that there was little to be lost by introducing the American settlement proposal.57 Meeting Dobrynin again on 6 May, Sisco explained to Dobrynin that Washington ‘wanted a joint document for which both the US and USSR would take the credit and the blame’. Over this and the following meeting, Sisco undertook what Dobrynin termed a ‘striptease’, slowly unveiling the US settlement proposal point by point, with the US position on boundaries finally revealed on 14 May.58 The territory-withdrawal question remained ambiguous as while ‘raising the possibility of withdrawal to pre-war borders’ as a major concession to Egypt, Sisco emphasised the need for a quid pro quo, asserting that

Tied to this point is the question of Sharm el-Sheikh which Israel feels it needs to keep the Gulf of Aqaba open.... this is a critical point to which the parties must find an answer. The US does not want to return to 1967 when Nasser broke commitments obtained by the US and closed the straits.59

Nasser’s agreement to free navigation had evidently failed to impress. While the US was ostensibly open to the possibility of full withdrawal, this was linked to direct Egypt-Israel negotiations on an Israeli military presence in the Sinai in order to secure navigation rights, a stipulation which by definition precluded full withdrawal. Dobrynin warned that ‘the most important question—withdrawal and boundaries’

57 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 365; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 77.
58 That the critical issues of borders and withdrawal (covered in points 4-5) were omitted was not lost on Dobrynin, who commented that Moscow required ‘our entire document before giving a positive reply, and what Sisco had given him so far left out the key issues for the entire settlement—borders and withdrawal’. Memo Saunders- Kissinger, Washington, 8 May 1969. Memo Saunders- Kissinger, 10 May, 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 725, CF/E, Sisco–Dobrynin Talks, Part II, May 1969. FRUS XII, Doc. 45, 47.
was omitted, and that while ‘Israel’s demands’ were ‘clearly stated... points important to the Arabs’ were not, predicting that Egypt’s reaction would be ‘negative’.

He also expressed disappointment with US conduct in the Two-Power Talks, claiming that the ‘USSR is trying to meet US and Israeli wishes, but has not gotten anything on boundaries in two months’, and complaining that, in fact, the US had regressed from the position of the previous Johnson Administration, which had accepted that Israel must return to the international border.

Neither were the Egyptians or Israelis impressed. Sisco briefed Rabin and Egyptian Charge d’affaires in Washington Ashraf Ghorbal after his presentation to Dobrynin, spurring protest from both sides. Meir wrote directly to President Nixon in mid-May, warning against a repeat of ‘the errors of 1957’ and insisting that Israel must negotiate its own affairs with its neighbours directly, without externally set preconditions. Meir complained that big power negotiations encouraged ‘Arab leaders to think they can get away with blackmail and avoid the necessity of accepting true peace’, and that the American proposal basically adopted the Soviet position as a basis for settlement.

Rabin, accompanied by Minister Shlomo Argov and Foreign Ministry representative Moshe Bitan visited Kissinger on 13 May to demand an explanation of ‘the purpose of the current talks on the Middle East’, sparking another round of American reassurances and Israeli protestations. Although the American position stipulated a binding peace agreement, guaranteed Israeli navigation rights, and directly-negotiated security arrangements, it fell short of Israeli demands for border changes and full normalisation of relations including the exchange of ambassadors and trade relations.

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60 Ibid.
61 Kissinger’s key Middle East expert and advisor, NSC Member Harold Saunders, advised that the US had indeed rolled back from its previous position. On 2 November 1968, in discussions with Egyptian and Soviet Foreign Ministers Mohammed Riad and Andrei Gromyko, Rusk had presented a seven-point agreement, which was ‘more specific on withdrawal’, including a call for a return to the former international border. But during the Two-Power Talks Sisco had ‘for bargaining purposes, been less specific... Rusk talked about Israeli withdrawal from the UAR to the old international border’. While ‘thinking along these lines’, the Nixon administration had avoided being that specific. Memo Saunders-Kissinger, Washington, 21 May, 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 725, CF/E, Sisco–Dobrynin Talks, Part II, May 1969. FRUS XII, Doc. 49. See also Telegram From the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State New York, 3 November 1968. NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL 27 ARAB-ISR. FRUS 1964–1968, Vol. XX, Doc. 301. James, Nasser at War, p. 153.
Argov insisted that peace was not a matter of separating Israelis and Arabs, ‘but should on the contrary enable them to get at each other on a massive scale’, meaning full normalisation of relations through ‘open borders and the free flow of people and commerce’. As long as this was unattainable, Argov stressed, ‘Israeli withdrawal is unattainable’, a position which the State Department regarded as ‘unrealistic’.  

At Israeli request, Meir was invited to the White House for a state visit to discuss matters personally with Nixon at the highest level (originally intended for mid-July, but postponed until late September due to conflicts in Meir’s schedule). Rogers, Kissinger, Sisco, and US Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour nonetheless faced a deluge of Israeli queries and criticisms on US conduct in the Two and Four power talks over the following weeks, despite repeated assurances that any ‘erosion’ was in the Soviet rather than the American position, as the Soviets had already agreed to minor border changes and to peace rather than another armistice.

Even as the Nixon administration worked to get its affairs with Israel in order, the Soviets laboured to carry along their Egyptian client. In early June, Dobrynin informed Kissinger that although Egypt’s initial response to the American proposal was ‘very negative’ Moscow had ‘induced Cairo to take a calmer look’. Soviet Minister Andrei Gromyko, who had personally flown to Egypt, ‘was in Cairo to try to see how much give there was in the Egyptian position’. For its part, the ‘Soviet Union was perfectly willing to discuss a rectification of the borders even if it did not promise to agree right

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63 Memcon Yitzhak Rabin, Ambassador of Israel, Moshe Bitan, Israeli Foreign Ministry, Shlomo Argov, Israeli Minister, Kissinger, Saunders, 13 May, 1969, in Kissinger’s Office. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 604, Folder Israel Vol. 1. (ends 5/31/69) [1 of 2].
64 The invitation did not quell Israeli tempers in the meantime. A remark from Saunders that it was difficult to know Israel’s territorial position sparked angry exchanges over dinner at Sisco’s house. Rabin insisted that since November 1968 Israel had been clear that Israel required control of Sharm el-Sheikh with land access, but that all statements on territory were ‘illustrative’ as Washington ‘had repeatedly been told that the Israeli Cabinet would take no position until the Arabs sat down to negotiate’. Kissinger suggestions that the time was coming when ‘it would be to Israel’s advantage to state more precisely its territorial requirements and to come out from behind the screen of “sacramental words” – “just and lasting peace” and “secure and recognised boundaries” left Rabin ‘as angry and disgusted as I [Saunders] have ever seen him’. Memcon Rabin-Saunders, At the Sisco’s Home, 20 June 1969. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973 Political and Defense, Box 2231, Folder POL ISR US to 17-1 ISR US.
away’. Kissinger’s response, that ‘if Vietnam were settled, we could certainly give more top level attention to the Middle East’ not-too-subtly hinted that American procrastination and White House disinterest in the Two-Power talks was not attributably simply to outstanding Arab-Israeli differences, but also due to ‘linkage’ with progress elsewhere.67

THE PHANTOM MENACE, SUMMER 1969

A Soviet counter-proposal on the ‘Basic Provisions’ of Middle East settlement was transmitted on 17 June. The proposal opened by recreating verbatim American and Israeli language on the need to implement Resolution 242 in ‘good faith’, for ‘just and lasting peace’ and a ‘final and mutually binding understanding’. However, this was to be achieved ‘by means of contacts through Jarring’, avoiding direct negotiations. The proposal reiterated the previous Soviet proposal’s call for full Israeli withdrawal in two stages over two months, with 30-40km from the Suez Canal suggested for the first stage, and Egyptian administration of the Sinai restored a month thereafter. DMZs would be established on both sides of the border and Egypt would consent to a UN force stationed at Sharm el-Sheikh.68

The Americans were disappointed that the Soviet proposal continued to reject border changes, direct negotiations, and Egyptian responsibility for controlling fedayeen, but the Soviets suggested another round of talks in Moscow, in a continued effort to reach an agreed document. Despite pessimism about the prospects of success, Washington felt compelled to take up the invitation, as with Kissinger dissenting, the Nixon administration consensus held that there was ‘little question that prolongation of the current impasse works against us’.69

67 Memo Kissinger-Nixon, Memcon with Dobrynin, Washington, 13 June 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Part 1. FRUS XII, Doc. 56.
With Sisco slated to visit Moscow from 14-16 July, Rogers suggested new approaches on direct negotiation and the territorial question. Invoking the precedent of negotiations held at Rhodes during January-March 1949 under the auspices of the UN Acting Mediator, Ambassador Ralph Bunche, Rogers suggested introducing a ‘Rhodes Formula’ for Egypt-Israel negotiations. This had involved Bunche meeting separately with the delegations to develop positions and narrow gap on substantive issues, before holding informal joint meetings, and thus combined direct and indirect negotiations. In a similar way to key provisions of UNSCR Resolution 242, the Rhodes formula could be interpreted as either expressing the Arab (indirect talks) or Israeli (direct talks) position.70

On territory, the latest Soviet proposal made ‘plain... that the Soviets are not likely to consider serious concessions until we... state a concrete position on borders’, which in turn created difficulties with Israel, as the US did not ‘agree with Israel’s territorial ambitions (as we understand them)’.71 In an effort to avert deadlock, Rogers suggested that Sisco take a ‘fall-back position’ to Moscow whereby Israel would agree to return to the pre-war border, contingent of satisfactory security arrangements including DMZs and safeguards for navigation in the Straits of Tiran. This formulation was intended to allow for Israeli military control of Sharm el-Sheikh without endorsing outright annexation, thus reconciling Israel’s demand for a security presence with Egypt’s demand for sovereignty over the Sinai. This compromise was at the heart of ‘Rogers Plan’ speech in December 1969, but in mid-June after private discussion with Nixon, Kissinger instructed Sisco that he was authorised only ‘to present our counter to the Soviet counterproposal with the provision that he could not modify our position beyond a few verbal changes. Specifically the fall-back position was not approved’.72

David Korn, Chief of the Political Section of the US Embassy in Israel at the time, notes that with this decision, Sisco was sent to Moscow ‘essentially empty-handed’.73 Instead, his brief was similar to that of the Washington talks. Unauthorised to discuss

70 Quandt, Peace Process, p. 66.
72 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, July 2 NPLM, NSC Files, Box 649, CF/ME, Middle East Negotiations. FRUS XII, Doc. 66, Note 1.
73 Korn, Stalemate, p. 156.
territorial specifics, Sisco was dispatched with ‘three main aims’, to engage in ‘broad-ranging general discussion’ explaining the rationale and principles underlying the American approach, to discuss arms control in the Middle East, and make ‘counter suggestions’ to the recent Soviet proposal. He reported that the Moscow talks, although featuring some blunt exchanges, but produced some positive signs, with the Gromyko seeking ‘to give an overall impression of flexibility’. The Soviets argued that de jure peace was impossible under international law while Israel remained in occupation of Arab territories, but pointed to their solution of distinguishing between de facto and de jure peace, insisting that direct negotiations were unnecessary to produce a ‘legally tight’ agreement. While evasive on control of the fedayeen, Gromyko ‘intimated’ acceptance of other obligations of peace, and made no mention of full withdrawal or 5 June 1967 boundaries.

Important points of difference also persisted, however. Citing the inadmissibility of territorial conquest, Moscow argued that Gaza should be restored to its pre-war status. While the US preferred to limit the scope of the Two-Power Talks to Egypt-Israel settlement, the Soviets called for ‘a multilateral document’ including Jordan as well. The sides continued to disagree on specific withdrawal clauses, direct negotiations, border changes, DMZ locations, guarantees of navigation explicitly stated by Cairo (rather than in UN resolutions), and refugees, and the Americans remained evasive on territorial terms.

The Two-Power talks adjourned after Sisco’s Moscow visit, as the superpowers digested one another’s positions and awaited the resumption of UN sessions in September in New York, but fighting escalated across the Suez Canal as negotiations

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74 Rogers – Beam, July 1, 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 649, CF/ME, Middle East Negotiations, June 1969. FRUS XII Doc. 62.
75 Memo, Aspects of Soviet Position on a Middle East Settlement which were clarified in Moscow, Undated. NARA, RG 59, JS, Box 25, Folder Middle East 1969. Telegram Embassy in the Soviet Union to Department of State Moscow, 14 July 1969, 2205Z. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 710, CF/E, USSR, Vol. III. FRUS XII, Doc. 67.
stalled in the summer of 1969.\textsuperscript{77} Israel switched tactics in the War of Attrition during July as the Israeli Air Force (IAF) launched ‘Operation Blossom’, a campaign of systematic bombing against Egyptian positions in and around the Suez Canal zone using qualitatively superior Israeli air power to overcome the Egyptian numerical advantage in guns. The campaign was facilitated by the Nixon administration’s approval of Israeli requests for expedited delivery of F-4 Phantom fighter-bombers (promised by former US President Lyndon Baines Johnson), and agreement to consider the sale of an additional twenty-five Phantoms and one hundred A-4 Skyhawks. The supersonic Phantom F4s represented the state-of-the-art warplanes of their day, carrying a payload of eight tons of high explosive deliverable from very low level, and as such virtually invulnerable to Egypt’s existing Surface to Air Missile (SAM)-2 defence system, which was capable of intercepting only high-altitude aircraft. Unmatched by anything in Egypt’s arsenal, the Phantoms facilitated a drastic reduction in Israeli casualties by destroying Egyptian positions with near-impunity, and decisively seizing the upper hand in the War of Attrition. By the end of 1969, Egypt’s entire Suez Canal zone artillery positions and air defences were destroyed, with the loss of only a single Phantom, and the IAF was struggling to find purely military targets.\textsuperscript{78}

The Soviets soon began to consider a military response, although this took over six months to develop. Soviet naval facilities at Port Said and Alexandria were already protected by sophisticated air defence units, and in autumn Defence Minister Andrei Grechko began to assemble a volunteer force ready to fulfil their ‘international duty – to protect Egyptian skies from Israeli aggression’. The military mission, known as \textit{Operation Kavkaz} (Caucasus), began recruitment and training in October and November 1969 in strict secrecy. The Egyptians were not informed, and potential

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Memo Aspects of Soviet Position on a Middle East Settlement which were clarified in Moscow, Undated. NARA, RG 59, JS, Box 25, Folder Middle East 1969. Telegram Beam – Rogers, Kissinger. NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1967–69, POL US–USSR. FRUS XII, Doc. 72.}

Soviet moves against Israel went undiscovered by the US and Israel until Soviet units actually deployed in the Suez Canal zone in February 1970.79

In early August 1969, London’s Daily Telegraph leaked the news that the Phantoms would be delivered at a rate of four per month from early September, news that was greeted with uproar in the Arab world.80 The Phantoms soon became focal points for Arab protest against perceived American oppression, frequently alluded to in Egyptian rhetoric and propaganda, and the source of complaints from Arab leaders both friendly to the US and otherwise.81 Although the Israeli Phantoms were not nuclear-ready, ‘press, private and official speculation that the US may be supplying Israel with an aircraft specifically equipped for nuclear delivery’ was rife.82 Delivering a mid-August election speech, Dayan did nothing to alleviate impressions that Israel was more interested in American firepower than mediation, predicting that

The diplomats will come and go and come again, Sisco will tell Dobrynin this and Dobrynin will tell Sisco that, the powers will see that things do not get settled and they will get sick and tired of it.. and they will go for their Christmas holiday and meanwhile the planes will be arriving.83

Dayan’s words were prophetic. As seen in the following section Nixon, if not Rogers, did indeed tire of Middle East negotiations even as the IAF decimated Egyptian positions in the Suez Canal zone during the autumn and winter of 1969, and by the turn of 1970 had begun to lean towards encouraging military pressure on the Egypt-Soviet axis.

80 Telegram Embassy London – Department of State, NA, RG 59, SNF 1967 1969, Box 1559, Folder Def 12-5 Isr 7/1/69. See also Kochavi, Nixon and Israel, p. 11.
81 In January 1969 both Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Ahmed Rashid and Libyan Prime Minister Mummar Gadhafi had expressed concern at American intentions to sell Phantoms to Israel, and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammed Riad expressed ‘regret’ ‘sadness’ at the news agreement to do so in August. The Nasserist Gadhafi’s sudden overthrow of the conservative monarch King Idris of Libya in that month heightened fears that the Arab world was tipping further towards anti-American radicalism under the prevailing political circumstances. Telegram Embassy Jidda - State Department, King Faisal and SAG reaction to Phantom Deliveries, 9 September 1969. Telegram USINT Cairo – Rogers, 6 September 1969. NA, RG 59, SNF 1967-1969, Box 1559, Def 12-5 Isr 9/1/69. Airgram American Embassy in Tripoli to Department of State, Phantom Sale to Israel, 18 February 1969. NA, RG 59, SNF 1967-1969, Box 1558, Def 15-5 Isr 1/1/69. Quandt, Peace Process, p. 66.
When Richard Met Golda, Autumn 1969

The Soviet negotiating position seemed to have moderated when the Two-Power talks resumed in mid-September, indicating substantial agreement with the US in most important areas. The Soviets would agree to ‘Rhodes-type talks’ in return for a US position on pre-war boundaries. There was ‘no problem’ on the obligations of peace, as while Sisco resisted dropping obligations to control the fedayeen altogether, the Americans ‘agreed it might be moved elsewhere in the document’. The superpowers were ‘close to agreement’ on DMZs. There was agreement on the American refugee plan in principle, which Sisco suggested could be ‘left to Jarring to work out with the parties’. On Gaza, Sisco emphasised that this was a serious security issue for the Israelis, who were unlikely to accept Arab sovereignty and a UN force, but accepted that the American call for trilateral (Egypt-Israel-Jordan) direct negotiations was ‘redundant’.84

Only on boundaries and Sharm el-Sheikh was there a lack of movement. The Soviets again called for a phased (two-step) withdrawal, differentiating between ‘de jure and de facto peace so as to create points both at the beginning and at the end of withdrawal when positive steps toward peace could be identified’, and the negotiators agreed on ‘a further effort… to find language that would not get tangled up with the legal status of peace and would meet the problem of Egyptian and Israelis mutual suspicions’. Sisco did not reveal the fallback position however, merely suggesting discussing territory again ‘at a later stage’. He recognised that both Washington and Moscow did ‘not disagree with the idea of a UN guarantee’, but insisted that ‘the idea of a UN force is unacceptable to Israel’.85


While Sisco felt that the Soviet concessions represented ‘some progress – or least flexibility towards progress’, Kissinger’s chief Middle East advisor, NSC staff member Harold Saunders, emphasised that ‘the fact remains that we are still working around the two main issues – peace and security’ and that the negotiations were ‘still missing the key ingredient: How much would the Russians press Nasser if we were willing to press Israel on boundaries?’

But pressurising Israel was far from the agenda of President Nixon at this time, who was scheduled to receive Meir on 25 September. Although Meir endured unproductive meetings with Rogers beforehand, she got on famously with Nixon, reaching agreement in several important areas. Firstly, Nixon agreed to give ‘serious and sympathetic consideration’ to Israel’s arms requests and promised that this would not affect Israeli negotiating position as they would not need to ‘give up their stance in order to get arms’. Nixon assured Meir that ‘as long he was president of the United States and made the decisions, Israel would never be weak militarily’, and that any controversies notwithstanding, Phantom deliveries would continue. Nixon and Meir agreed that Israeli strength was preferable to the US ‘fight[ing] Israel’s battles’ and that ‘Nasser would become more moderate only if faced with overwhelming power’. Though avoiding explicit item-by-item commitment to fulfilling Meir’s ‘shopping list’ which included the previous requests for one hundred A4 Skyhawks and twenty-five F4 Phantoms plus $200m in credits to pay for them, Nixon promised ‘sympathetic consideration’ and that the United States would trade ‘hardware for software’. This, in Kissinger’s account ‘meant that he would be responsive to Israeli requests for armaments if Israel gave some latitude in negotiations, which he strongly implied would not amount to much’.

But, secondly, the ‘latitude’ expected of Israel in negotiations was minimal. Meir was noncommittal on the Rhodes formula, and, indeed, ‘did not agree to do anything’ while insisting ‘that Arabs must make it completely clear that they intend to seek a

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86 Memo Saunders – Kissinger, Washington, 19 September 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 339, Subject Files, Kissinger/Sisco. FRUS XII, Doc. 80.
lasting peace with Israel and to renounce their previously stated goal of eventual
destruction of Israel’. Meir confided to Nixon that she worried that big-power
negotiations would someday produce an unacceptable American settlement proposal
and that then ‘Israel would be in the position of having to say no to its best friend’. The President stressed that there was ‘no cause to fear a danger to Israel’s vital
interests since he was personally supervising the negotiations and held in his hands
the reins of the negotiators’ and would see that little would come of State
Department diplomacy. State Department policy pronouncements were not to be
taken seriously, and Israel should listen to the White House rather than the State
Department to understand the Nixon administration’s true Middle East policies.

Thirdly, Nixon agreed to quietly accept Israel’s possession of a nuclear arsenal.
Although shrouded in great secrecy, it has long been known that Nixon and Meir
discussed the question of Israel’s nuclear weapons, and some evidence of their
agreement on the matter has come to light. Israel had developed the capacity to build
a nuclear bomb by late 1966, but did not conduct tests while retaining the ambiguous
formulation that Israel would not ‘be the first to introduce nuclear weapons to the
Middle East’. Israel argued that to ‘introduce’ indicated testing and formally declaring
possession of nuclear weapons, rather than merely possessing them. During
bilateral discussions in the spring and summer of 1969, the Nixon administration had
requested that Israel agree to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and give
assurance in writing that by ‘to introduce’ Israel meant ‘to possess’ nuclear weapons,

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88 Rogers - Department of State New York, Discussion of Middle East at Rogers–Gromyko meeting 26 September, 27 September 1969, 1817Z. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 292, Agency Files, Rogers Bilateral Talks at UN, 9/15/69–10/7/69. FRUS XII, Doc. 87.
90 This phrase was recalled in later conversation between Kissinger and Rabin. Memcon Rabin, Kissinger, Saunders, 26 December, Kissinger’s Office. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 605 Folder Israel Vol. 3 Oct 69 - 28 Feb 70 Part 1-2. On the occupied territories, Nixon expressed sympathy, remarking that ‘if I were an Israeli, I would find it truly difficult to give up the Golan Heights’. Daigle The Limits of Detente, pp. 71-72; Rabin, Memoirs, pp. 119-121. Israeli also records show that Nixon conveyed that he personally monitored Middle East and reviewed ‘all the principal documents and proposals’. He strikes out many things, rejects many things’. Shalom and Vanetik, The Nixon Administration and the Middle East Peace Process, p. 48.
and that it would not deploy nuclear capable missiles. But Nixon, who later asserted that when he met Meir he was certain that Israel possessed a nuclear bomb, decided to accepted her differentiation between non-introduction and non-possession, endorsing Israel’s possession of the bomb. In return, Meir offered assurances that Israel would not deploy strategic nuclear missiles for three years, until 1972.

Fourthly, Nixon and Meir agreed to establish a direct, personal line of communication relayed through Kissinger and Rabin. The Kissinger-Rabin channel did not just bypass the usual foreign policy structures, but also installed some of the most strident and least conciliatory members of their respective governments at each end of this channel. As has been seen, Kissinger was hostile to Middle East negotiations from the outset. For his part, Rabin’s reputation for selectivity in receiving, interpreting and reinterpreting information in line with his own obsessions, air strikes chief among them, and a tendency to interpret anything less than direct objection to his ideas as tacit endorsement, have earned him both notoriety and ridicule. Rabin, along with Allon and General Ezer Weizman, the head of the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) General Staff Division (and former IAF commander), had lobbied Jerusalem for extending aerial bombing beyond the Suez Canal zone into Cairo and into the Egyptian hinterland throughout the autumn and winter of 1969. Rabin was firmly convinced that this was what the Nixon administration required of Israel as a condition of granting it arms requests. Very much in line with Nixon’s penchant for secretive, backchannel


93 Cohen and Burr, ‘Israel Crosses the Threshold’.

94 Rabin, Memoirs, p. 121.

95 Rabin had repeatedly cabled from Washington to assert that the Nixon administration was disappointed with Israel’s military performance, and that further arms supplies were contingent on bringing the War of Attrition to an early conclusion. Demonstrating a complete disregard for the Two-Power and Four-Power talks, and a working assumption that the White House was of the same view, on 19 September Rabin cabled Jerusalem to claim that ‘There is a widespread feeling here that the Soviets are not willing to make concessions in order to reach agreement with the United States about the conflict in the Middle East. The National Security Council is considering the impact of Israeli military operations against Egypt... The following lines of thought are beginning to emerge: Continuation of Israeli military operations, including air attacks, is likely to lead to far reaching results. Nasser’s
diplomacy under his personal control, the new Kissinger-Rabin channel bypassed both the US State Department and the Israeli Foreign Ministry, institutionalising two tiers of bilateral relations, as a disempowered State Department façade of public diplomacy masked private negotiations conducted by the White House.

The Nixon-Meir meetings thus marked a qualitative change in the hitherto somewhat distrustful relations between their governments. Welcomed by an exceptionally receptive Nixon, Meir seemed to have admirably accomplished her objectives of filling what she famously referred to her ‘shopping bag’ with armaments, dissipating potential American pressure on Israel, and establishing close personal contacts at the highest levels in Washington. In particular, Nixon’s openness allowed her to understand that Israel’s disagreements with the State Department did not preclude warm relations with the White House. Indeed, Nixon emphasised that ‘it wouldn’t hurt if the PM were to even publicly mention that we have our disagreements’, which Meir understood to mean that Nixon did expect Israel to compromise its negotiating position, merely to direct its criticism away from the White House.96

**The Joint Working Paper, October 1969**

This tactic of allowing Rogers to continue to push for agreement with the Soviets, while secretly encouraging American Jewish and Israeli leaders to attack and undermine State Department efforts, formed Nixon’s *modus operandi* with regards to standing could be undermined, and that would in turn weaken the Soviet position in the region... A man would have to be blind, deaf, and dumb not to sense how much the administration favors our military operations... the willingness to supply us with additional arms depends more on stepping up our military activity on Egypt than on reducing it’. Rabin, *Memoirs*, p. 119.

However, the majority view within the Meir Cabinet, including Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Foreign Minister Abba Eban, remained sceptical of Rabin’s interpretation, worrying that escalation might provoke a reaction from Moscow, and/or place strains on relations with Washington, when Israel anxiously awaited a decision on its outstanding request for twenty-five Phantom F4s and one hundred A4 Skyhawks. Shlaim and Tanter, ‘Decision, Process, Choice and Consequences’.

On another occasion, Rabin pointed to the fact that Sisco ‘did not fall from his chair’ in response to a suggestion that the IDF should march on Cairo as evidence of American support for this proposition. Gideon Rafael, Director of Israel’s Foreign Ministry at the time, reports that Rabin’s ‘concluding from the Secretary’s sedentary stability that the United States was in sympathy with such a far-reaching Israeli action... was received in Jerusalem with considerable scepticism’. Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy: a Personal Memoir* (Stein and Day, London, 1981) p. 205. On Rabin’s selectivity in processing and transmitting information see also Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 179

Middle East negotiations for the remainder of 1969. After meeting Meir, Nixon was convinced that ‘the point is we can’t deliver [the Israelis]’. Dismissive of recent developments in the Two-Power Talks, he accepted Kissinger’s argument that there little was to be gained from revealing the fallback position and should stall on responding to the latest Soviet proposals. Though the Soviets might achieve concessions in areas such as trade negotiations, Nixon would be ‘be damned if they get the Middle East’.\textsuperscript{97} For Nixon, the State Department had ‘talked themselves out of the ballgame’ and as such he resolved to ‘cool off Rogers’.\textsuperscript{98}

Unaware that White House support, tenuous from the beginning, was flagging further, Rogers handled three days of fruitless Middle East negotiations with Gromyko in New York in late September and early October. Gromyko expected full withdrawal from Gaza and the Sinai in exchange for Rhodes-style talks, without explicit commitments to control the fedayeen, and rejected a quota for returning Palestinian refugees. As this was ‘not... a satisfactory deal’ Rogers ‘held basically to our present position and did not put our fall-back position on the table’.\textsuperscript{99}

The Rogers-Gromyko talks marked the end of American patience with the Soviets quibbling over details in the effort to reach an agreed document. Saunders advised Kissinger that the ‘long and short’ of the Rogers-Gromyko meetings was ‘that we may move toward a much shorter document containing only the key elements. That would leave the tough issues for negotiation, which would suit Israel’.\textsuperscript{100}

The renewed drive to develop a US-Soviet ‘Joint Working Paper’ based on recent American-Israeli understandings signalled the final phase of the Two-Power Talks, leading to so-called ‘Rogers Plan’ speech in early December. Rogers informed Nixon that he intended to present the Soviets with a formal proposal based the positions developed during the Two-Power talks compromised of separate settlement packages

\textsuperscript{97} Transcript of Telephone Conversation (Telecon) Nixon - Kissinger, Washington, 27 September 1969, 4:40 pm. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 489, President’s Trip Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger, 1969, Part 1. FRUS XII, Doc. 86.

\textsuperscript{98} Daigle, \textit{The Limits of Detente}, p. 72; Hanhimaki, \textit{The Flawed Architect}, p. 95.


\textsuperscript{100} Memo Saunders-Kissinger Washington, 1 October 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 650, CF/ME, Middle East Negotiations, July–October 1969. FRUS XII, Doc. 91
for Egypt and Jordan on 14 October. Though recognising that it was unlikely that the
Soviets, Israelis, or Egyptians would readily accept the American terms, Rogers hoped
to strike a balanced ‘position that both sides will criticize, but neither can really assail
effectively... as position we can stand on both in Israel and the Arab world as
reasonable’. Nixon preferred to delay until after he had delivered a major speech on
Vietnam scheduled for 3 November, but deferred to State Department preferences
and permitting Sisco to introduce the Joint Working Paper at the Two Power talks on
28 October.\textsuperscript{101}

The ten-point Joint Working Paper presented the American position in its entirety,
including the ‘fallback position’ on borders and Sharm al-Sheikh and an additional
paragraph establishing the interdependence of Egyptian and Jordanian aspects
particularly with reference to refugees.\textsuperscript{102} The core of the Joint Working Paper
consisted of a five-point ‘package within a package’ which Sisco warned ‘must stand or
fall together as far as the US is concerned’. He emphasised that the positions in the
Joint Working Paper were not new, but presented the paper as established US
positions restated in language developed through negotiation and without
consultation with the Israelis. As such, the proposal was intended to be mutually
acceptable and was non-negotiable, as ‘the rubber band had been stretched to fullest
extent’.\textsuperscript{103}

The sub-package covered direct negotiations, withdrawal from occupied territories,
language on peace, and DMZs and practical security arrangements. Washington
expressed openness about re-establishing the pre-war Egypt-Israel border, but this,
along with security arrangements and the extent of withdrawal, was to be negotiated
directly between the parties. On the core territorial issues, Sisco stressed that once a
common document was established and the parties began exchanging views through

\textsuperscript{101} Daigle, The Limits of Détente, pp. 59-63.
\textsuperscript{102} Department of State - Embassy in the Soviet Union Washington, Sisco–Dobrynin Meeting on ME 28
October, 29 October 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 650, CF/ME, Middle East Negotiations, July–October
1969. FRUS, Doc. 92.
\textsuperscript{103} ibid.
Jarring, the superpowers could bring their influence to bear to close gaps on DMZs, Sharm el-Sheikh, Gaza and whatever other difficulties emerged.104

Although Nixon had personally approved the introduction of the Joint Working Paper, the document did not enjoy the President’s support. Nixon’s peculiar methods in restraining his State Department’s drive for a Middle East settlement have become notorious. On 2 October, the day after the Roger-Gromyko talks concluded, on Nixon’s instruction Kissinger carried two messages to the President’s Advisor on Jewish affairs, Leonard Garment. Nixon chose to use Garment to inform Rabin that ‘understanding on the nuclear issue’ was confirmed, meaning that Washington would drop calls for Israel to sign the NPT, tacitly accepting Israel’s possession of nuclear weapons on condition that Israel would not declare or test these devices, and would not deploy nuclear-armed missiles before 1972. Garment was also to ‘organise some Jewish community protests against the State Department’s attitude on the Middle East’. Garment duly ‘promised to take prompt action’, on the understanding that the White House ‘wished to remain clear of the action he was taking’.105 The manoeuvre was repeated towards the end of the month. Even as Nixon authorised the Joint Working Paper, Kissinger recalls that

Characteristically, he sought to hedge his bets by asking John Mitchell and Leonard Garment – counsellor to the President and adviser on Jewish affairs – to let Jewish community leaders know his doubts about State’s diplomacy. Nixon implied strongly to them that nothing would come of the very initiatives he was authorising.106

The Israelis and American-Jewish community did not disappoint Nixon in their opposition to the State Department initiative. Meir herself, as understood from her meeting with the President, pointedly avoiding criticising Nixon. Instead, both in the Knesset and in a personal letter which made headline news in the US and Israel, she heaped praise on his 3 November ‘silent majority’ speech as encouraging to small nations fighting for survival.107

104 Ibid.
106 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 372. See also Quandt, Peace Process, p. 67.
107 Kochavi, Nixon and Israel, p. 22.
Tabling the Joint Working Paper, and also a US decision to resume participation in the Four-Power talks, against specific Israeli requests, were different matters however.108 Israel’s supporters generated a severe public backlash throughout November 1969, denouncing the Joint Working Paper as an ‘imposed settlement’ and ‘sell out’ of Israel.109 Rabin relayed the official Israeli response to the Joint Working Paper, expressing ‘great concern’ that the US had undermined Israel’s negotiating position. Rabin himself insisted that if the US had already decided the form of Israel’s boundaries, negotiations, whatever the format, were pointless from the Israeli perspective.110 Israeli officials nonetheless made a series public statements, against State Department pleading not to do so, making clear that Israel would accept ‘Rhodes formula’ negotiations only on the understanding that this format stipulated direct negotiations at the first stages. Sisco and Saunders were agreed that Israel’s purpose in their response to the Joint Working Paper was ‘to make an absolutely clear record of disassociating themselves’ from it, creating a firm foundation for resisting any future pressures to accept it.111 Egypt also reacted negatively to the proposal, which they framed within the context of Israel’s devastating air campaign across the Suez Canal, facilitated by ongoing American shipments of Phantom F4s. Cairo suspected a tactically motivated trap to force Egypt into accepting direct negotiations with Israel from a position of strategic weakness. The official Soviet publication TASS International took up this line on 31 October, charging the United States with using ‘diplomatic corridors to cover up their support for Israel and their aggressive actions’, and blaming the lack of tangible results in the Two-Power talks on ‘the obstructionist line of Israel and the one-sided attitude taken by representatives of some Western states who assume that Israel should benefit from the aggression it committed’. In a combative speech to the Egyptian National Assembly on 6 November, Nasser declared ‘that there is now no alternative to battle. Despite his losses, the enemy continues his pressure and arrogance. The

108 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, A Second Look at Resuming the Two-Power Talks, Undated. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 650, CF/ME, Middle East Negotiations, Nov 69, 1 of 2.
109 Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p. 82, Korn, Stalemate, p. 160.
enemy’s friends, with the USA foremost among them, continue to give him aid, thus helping him continue his aggression’. The Egyptian National Assembly passed a resolution categorically rejecting the American proposal on 18 November. Within a month, Nasser was in Moscow requesting that the Soviets take over Egypt’s air defences (unaware that preparations for this move were already well underway) and, soon thereafter, at the Arab Summit held in Rabat during December 1969, imploring his fellow Arab leaders to forward hard currency to pay for the regeneration of Egypt’s armed forces.\footnote{Adamsky, ‘Zero-Hour for the Bears’; Ginor, ‘Under the Yellow Arab Helmet Gleamed Blue Russian Eyes’; James, ‘Military/Political Means/Ends: Egyptian Decision making in the War of Attrition’, in Ashton ed., \textit{The Cold War in the Middle East}, pp. 92-111; James, \textit{Nasser at War}, p. 159.}

Fierce public criticism of a document tabled in private placed Rogers in a difficult position. While Israel alleged that the joint working paper sacrificed vital Israeli interests and negotiating rights, Arab and Soviet propaganda painted a picture of complete US-Israel alignment, with the US acting as Israel’s lawyer even while supplying its devastating air campaign and underwriting its occupation of Arab territories. Apprehensive that the upcoming Arab summit at Rabat might call for action against US regional interests, and/or wholesale rejection of 242, the Jarring mission, and other mediation efforts, Rogers decided to go public with his initiative in early December, presenting the terms of the Joint Working Paper in a major policy address.\footnote{Korn, \textit{Stalemate}, p. 160.}

**A LEAD BALLOON: THE ‘ROGERS PLAN’ UNVEILED, DECEMBER 1969**

Rogers outlined the provisions of the Joint Working Paper during a hastily-arranged public address before the Galaxy Adult Education Conference in Washington DC on 9 December 1969, which soon became known as the ‘Rogers Plan’. Rogers presented what he felt was a ‘balanced’ policy, calling on ‘Arabs to accept a permanent peace based on a binding agreement and... the Israelis to withdraw from occupied territory when their territorial integrity is assured’. Rogers defined the ‘basic and related
issues’ addressed in Resolution 242 as ‘peace, security, withdrawal, and territory’, identifying these as the ‘three principal elements’ of his proposal.\(^{114}\)

On peace, Rogers stressed that a ‘peace agreement between the parties must be based on clear and stated intentions and a willingness to bring about basic changes in... attitudes and conditions’. Rogers stressed the importance of specific statements on respect for sovereignty and the obligations of peace, including navigation rights and controlling irregular forces, but he declared that true peace would involve much more than this, as it was also ‘a matter of the attitudes and intentions of the parties’, calling for ‘a live-and-let-live attitude replace suspicion, mistrust and hate’. Rejecting ‘allegations’ of efforts to secure a separate Egyptian peace, stressed that agreement on aspects of settlement related to Jordan and a ‘just settlement’ Palestinians refugee problem were also essential.\(^{115}\)

The status of Gaza and security safeguards, including DMZs and arrangements at Sharm el-Sheikh would be established through Rhodes-formula negotiations under Jarring. Rogers proclaimed that ‘in the context of peace and agreement on specific security safeguards, withdrawal of Israeli forces from Egyptian territory would be required’. He summarised by arguing that

\[
\text{Such an approach directly addresses the principal national concerns of both Israel and the UAR. It would require the UAR to agree to a binding and specific commitment to peace. It would require withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from UAR territory to the international border between Israel and Egypt which has been in existence for over half a century. It would also require the parties themselves to negotiate the practical security arrangements to safeguard the peace.}\]

\(^{116}\)

The ‘Rogers Plan’ received some plaudits from European capitals and in liberal US media outlets such as the *New York Times*, but a hostile response in the pertinent centres of power. Israel rejected the proposals on 10 December, and in an NSC meeting on the same morning, Kissinger attacked not just the speech, but Middle East negotiations as a whole, arguing that Moscow was never interested in real peace,


\(^{115}\) Ibid.

\(^{116}\) Ibid.
merely in retrieving its client’s territory at a low cost and claiming vindication for his persistent pessimism. For Kissinger ‘firmness’ was the way forward, as

The longer Israel holds its conquered Arab territory, the longer the Soviets cannot deliver what the Arabs want. As time drags on, the Arabs must conclude that friendship with the Soviet Union is not very helpful.

Nixon agreed, but went further, seeing military pressure as the key to softening not just Arab, but also Soviet attitudes. For Nixon, if the Americans wanted ‘the Soviets to help, Israel is producing that result by scaring them. Why should it not be our policy to let Israel scare them a little bit more?’

Meir was of a similar mind, believing that the emphasis should be on military power rather than political conciliation. She vowed not to withdraw without a ‘true peace leading to secure, agreed and recognised boundaries’ before the Knesset on 15 December, expressing faith in Israel’s ‘military power… now stronger than ever before’ to hold fast, as ‘no solution to the conflict would be possible unless it was acceptable to the countries themselves’.

Eban met with Rogers to convey ‘a sense of emergency in Israel’ and express ‘deep concern at some aspects of US-Israeli dialogue’. The Israelis were dismayed both by the formulations of the Joint Working Paper and by Rogers’ speech, which they regarded as prejudicial to ‘vital Israeli positions’. Rogers disputed this, inquiring whether Israel would accept the State Department position if it got ‘what it wanted at Sharm el-Sheikh’, and stressing that any view of his stance as ‘excluding a position as Sharm el-Sheikh’ was ‘wrong’. His position on the international boundary was that this was subject to a directly negotiated agreement satisfactory to Israel. Explaining why he had felt compelled to publicly state the US position, Rogers cited concern for Israel’s position in the international community, which clearly had ‘eroded’ based on evidence from discussions at the UN General Assembly and in NATO. Eban was not
mollified however, repeating his concerns to Kissinger two days later, particularly that the Rogers Plan compromised Israel’s prerogative of negotiating its own borders.\footnote{122 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, My Talk With Foreign Minister Eban, 18 December 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 605, Vol. 3 Oct 68 – Feb 70, Part 1-2.}

Already vocal Israeli criticism escalated to new levels when, on 18 December, Yost introduced a parallel Israel-Jordan settlement plan at a resumed session of the Four Power Talks in New York. This plan stipulated mutually-agreed ‘insubstantial changes’ of boundaries in the West Bank and Israeli-Jordanian co-administration of Jerusalem. Although Yost submitted the proposal ‘in a context which everyone knew was not operational’ and Nixon sent Meir private word that the US ‘would go no further and would not press our proposal’, the Israeli reaction was severe.\footnote{123 Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, p. 376.} Meir used the Kissinger channel to privately lament a ‘tragic day’ in US-Israel relations, and publicly denounced the American proposals in their entirety as ‘suicidal’ for Israel, claiming that any Israeli government attempting to implement the plans would be ‘guilty of treason’. Rabin was recalled to Israel for immediate consultations on the state of US-Israel relations and the appropriate Israeli response to the Rogers Plan.\footnote{124 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, Israeli Cabinet Statement, 29 December 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 605, Vol. 3 Oct 68 – Feb 70, Part 1-2.}

In Washington, Garment relayed the ‘extremely bitter reaction of the Israelis’, who were full of ‘anger… specifically at State’.\footnote{125 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, Israeli Reaction to Jordanian Paper, 20 December 1969. Ibid.} An ‘extremely agitated’ Argov expressed grave concern at ‘stories all over town about the US intention to withhold further financial and other help from Israel, and State’s determination to separate the US once and all from Israel’, but noted that ‘these stories are not associated with the White House’.\footnote{126 Memo Garment-Kissinger, 20 December 1969. Ibid.} Rogers met with the most prominent American Jewish leaders on 22 December, who conveyed that ‘the American Jewish community has never been so aroused since 1947 as they are now’. Once again attempting to allay fears of an imposed settlement, Rogers argued that there had been ‘no erosion or concession in the US position’, but rather the Soviets had conceded to a final, signed, contractual peace and acknowledgement of Israel’s right to exist, secured Israeli navigation rights, direct negotiations under the Rhodes formula, and a package deal with ‘nothing... to
happen on the ground until agreement is reached’. Rogers stressed that the US proposals on Egyptian and Jordanian aspects of a settlement were ‘entirely consistent’. Both assumed ‘that agreement between the parties must be reached before any withdrawal’ and that the US was ‘not asking to withdraw from occupied territories except under safeguards which Israel itself would negotiate with the Arabs’. This comprised ‘the essential difference between 1957’ and the Joint Working Paper. Similarly any refugee solution was dependant ‘on agreement between the parties’.  

Arguing that their ‘differences were only ones of emphasis’, Rogers stressed that he had acted out of concern for Israel. Before Rogers’ speech, it had ‘appeared to the public that the US was totally on Israel’s side’ but now ‘the public declaration of US policy would make life more difficult for the Soviets who’ had ‘been fishing in the troubled waters of the Middle East and been pleased by the declining US position there’. Israel’s refusal to use the word ‘withdrawal’ and insistence on direct negotiations at the first stage had alienated the international community. Deploiring public equations of the Rhodes formula with direct negotiations, Rogers warned that ‘face-to-face talks at the outset would not work; this Israeli precondition is the toughest they could possibly lay down’.  

Kissinger met with Dobrynin on the same day, again conveying Nixon’s disinterest in resolving outstanding Middle East problems under the prevailing circumstances.

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127 Memcon American Jewish Leaders – Rogers, 22 December 1969. Participants Rabbi Herschel Schacter, Chairman of the Conference of Major American Jewish Organisations, Mr. Jordan Band, Chairman, National Jewish Community Advisory Relations Council, Mr. Bernard Dierenfeld, Commander, Jewish War Veterans, Rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, President, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Mr. Yehuda Hellman, Executive Vice Chairman, Conference of Presidents, Mr. Philip Hoffman, President, American Jewish Committee, Mr. Irving Kane, Chairman, American Israel Public Affairs Committee, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, President, American Jewish Congress, Rabbi Israel Miller, Chairman, American Zionist Council, Mrs. Faye Schen, President, Hassadah, Rabbi Soloman Sharfman, President, Synagogue Council of America, Mr. Jacob Stein, President, United Synagogue of America, Mr. Jacques Torczyner, President, Zionist Organisation of America, Dr William A. Wexler, President, B’nai B’rith, Rogers, Sisco, Atherton, Mark C. Lissfelt, NEA/IAI. NA, RG 59, SNF 1967-1969, Box 2231, Folder POL ISR US to 17-1 ISR US.

128 Ibid.

Noting that the Kremlin and White House had agreed that ‘the Middle East and other issues could be settled only on the highest level’, but Nixon ‘had also indicated that there could be no contact on any level except the diplomatic level until Vietnam was settled’, Dobrynin queried whether this meant the White House ‘not believe that there could be any progress in our relations with the Soviet Union?’ The pair could only agree that ‘Middle East negotiations were stalled’.130

Dobrynin delivered Moscow’s response to the Joint Working Paper the next day. Moscow stated that the paper did not provide ‘sufficient grounds for a joint Soviet-American document’ but stressed that ‘naturally’ Moscow was ‘not abandoning the idea of jointly working one out’. While reiterating ‘package’ settlement, free navigation, and lasting peace, the Soviets resisted terminating belligerency before withdrawal, again arguing that their formulation of de facto peace at the beginning of withdrawal and de jure peace at the end ‘would correspond to the interests to both sides and remove mutual suspicions’. The Soviet critique held that the proposal left too much, including refugee arrangements and the timing and extent of withdrawals, to direct negotiations, a problem which had been aggravated by public acrimony over the meaning of the Rhodes formula.131 Dobrynin stated that ‘in view of comments made by various parties regarding formula, [the] Soviet side now felt [the] Rhodes formula should not be used’, but added that Moscow was ‘prepared to find something similar... involving Jarring which would be close to Rhodes formula; using this formula now would mean trouble from the start’.132

1969’s last high-level US-Soviet meeting on the Middle East once again rehearsed the familiar points of agreement and difference. Although Kissinger made it clear to Dobrynin that further negotiations were unlikely to produce results and that the Nixon administration was unlikely to make any serious attempt to implement the ‘Rogers Plan’, Dobrynin nonetheless argued against assertions that the Two-Power talks had been fruitless, emphasising what had been achieved. Dobrynin cited Arab movement

on non-recognition of Israel, the fedayeen issue now being ‘handled satisfactorily’, superpower ‘near agreement’ on the refugee problem, and that the ‘Egyptians seemed willing to accept some formulation regarding the Strait of Tiran’ as examples of progress. The discussion closed with a reiteration of the familiar disagreement about security arrangements, but here Sisco complained that after his visit to Moscow, the Soviets had falsely conveyed the impression to Egypt that he had proposed Israeli troops be stationed at Sharm el-Sheikh. The Americans had recently taken weeks to correct inaccurate representation, attempting to make it understood that ‘because Israel could be expected to press an Israeli presence and Arabs a UN presence, that he came up with idea of neutral formulations prejudicing neither side’s position’.133

Sisco had put his finger on the central problem. The fallback position was an effort at a compromise, but it was a compromise which neither the Egyptians nor Israelis accepted. In Israel’s view, as the existing borders, even reinforced by international guarantees and UN forces were inadequate to provide for its security, calls to withdraw to the previous international boundary appeared prejudicial against its interests. In the view of the Egyptians and Soviets, as Israel was determined to secure border changes and control of Sharm el-Sheikh as a precondition of negotiations, stipulating direct negotiations was prejudicial against Egypt’s position.

Rabin returned from Jerusalem on 26 December, with ‘with approval to launch a public campaign against the ‘Rogers Plan’, and an oral message from Meir to Nixon. Meir complained that having met Nixon, she believed Israel had ‘a friend in the White House’, and while she ‘continued to adhere to this impression... recent developments... caused grave concern’. US policy statements of 28 October and 18 December had, according to Meir, constituted a ‘serious deterioration in the US position’, struck ‘the gravest blows to Israel’s most vital interests’, and undermined Israel’s bargaining position.134

133 Ibid.
But while the Israelis were preparing for ‘a major political battle with the United States’, Kissinger pointed out that the White House had remained silent on State’s initiative. He opined that Israel was welcome to speak its mind with regard to Rogers and his plan, but warned: ‘don’t attack the President!’ This was followed by what Rabin described as an ‘incredible move’, an invitation to an unscheduled meeting with the President, who expressed a desire to shake hands with the Ambassador. A friendly Nixon was waiting, along with Defence Secretary Melvin Laird, with the message that ‘the Israeli government is perfectly entitled to express its feelings and views, and I regard that with complete understanding’. Nixon reminded all present that he had ‘promised that we would not only provide for Israel’s defence needs, but her economic needs as well’, reassuring Rabin that he was ‘particularly aware’ of Israel’s defence needs, and that he should not ‘hesitate to approach’ Kissinger about ‘all matters concerned with arms supplies’. Rabin came away from his unexpected encounter the President wondering ‘Was he inviting me to drive a wedge between these two branches of the administration or merely trying to ensure we kept our fire from the White House?’

The answer came soon enough, in perhaps the most notorious incident in the Nixon’s campaign against the Rogers Plan. With Meir scheduled to return to the United States for a speaking tour in early January 1970, Nixon instructed Garment to meet her at the airport and to '[t]ell her wherever she goes, in all her speeches and press conferences, we want her to slam the hell out of Rogers and his plan'. Meir and her colleagues were only too willing to oblige Nixon in what Garment termed his ‘creative duplicity’ of ‘requesting a foreign head of state to undercut the U.S. secretary of state at the instruction of the president of the United States’. Argov had already drafted a paper personally attacking Rogers and denouncing the ‘Rogers plan’ as ‘retrogressive to peace’, of which the Israeli embassy in Washington distributed 15,000 copies to Congressmen, American Jewish leaders, and media outlets. The Knesset rejected the American proposals on 29 December, issuing a communique warning that ‘Israel

135 Rabin, Memoirs, p. 126. See also Korn, Stalemate, p. 163; Yaqub, The Politics of Stalemate, p. 40.
137 Garment, Crazy Rhythm, p. 192, cited in Kochavi, Nixon and Israel, p. 11.
138 Memcon Rabin, Kissinger, Saunders, 26 December, Kissinger’s Office. Aronson, Conflict and Bargaining, p. 113; Korn, Stalemate, p. 160.
will not be victim to any big power or inter-power policy and will reject any attempt to impose a solution’.  

Nixon, for one, was convinced. He ordered the discontinuation of American involvement in the Two-Power talks during the first of 1970, and settling on a unilateral approach to Arab-Israeli conflict for the new year.

**CONCLUSION: THE LEGEND OF THE ‘ROGERS PLAN’**

What became known as the ‘Rogers Plan’ was not Rogers’ brainchild of late 1969, but the established policy and strategy of the Nixon administration, initiated in February 1969 and by the NSC, the core institution which Nixon himself had enshrined as the locus of his foreign policy making system and refined throughout the next eight months of negotiations with the Soviets. For all the complexity of the negotiations, only two Soviet and three American proposals were presented. Washington had the initial Soviet terms in hand in December 1968, but did not reveal its own position until May 1969, and then only in partial form, omitting terms on territory. A Soviet response and American counter were delivered in June and July, and after this discussion focused on refining language.

The proceedings of the Two-Power Talks foreshadowed the ‘Rogers Plan’ speech, and its reception by the Soviets and Arabs in December 1969. While in American eyes the ‘Rogers Plan’ offered a generous settlement, to the Arabs it seemed to offer only direct Egypt-Israel negotiations on withdrawal after Egypt had recognised Israel. Israel would not withdraw any troops before negotiations were completed, including a termination of belligerency, but was committed in advance of negotiations to annexation of Gaza, the West Bank, Sharm el-Sheikh, plus an as-yet undisclosed area of the Sinai, which for Golda Meir’s Labour government represented non-negotiable demands. Thus, from the Egyptian-Soviet perspective, the thirteen-point American plan presented in May, which was eventually publicised in shortened form as the ‘Rogers Plan’, appeared as little more than an offer for Moscow to accept the Meir Government’s maximalist position on Nasser’s behalf.

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The Nixon White House regarded the Soviet response to the Joint Working Paper as a ‘cavalier’ rejection of generous settlement terms that wrecked the negotiating process,\textsuperscript{141} an interpretation reproduced by sympathetic historians such as Daigle and Korn, who regard this as the ‘death blow’ or ‘death knell’ of superpower efforts to find agreement on Middle East.\textsuperscript{142} But the Soviet response, as summarised above, and as discussed by Dobrynin with Rogers on 24 December, was actually more qualified. In essence, Moscow neither accepted nor rejected the Joint Working Paper as the final word on boundaries. Instead they restated what they considered to be the vital unanswered questions as negotiating terms, particularly on Israeli withdrawal.\textsuperscript{143}

It is by no means clear that Egypt or the Soviet Union rejected a full ‘land for peace’ deal and abandoned the principle of direct negotiations overnight, thereby wrecking the American settlement proposal and superpower negotiations on the Middle East. Instead, in their response to the American Joint Working Paper the Soviets restated the Arab position that full withdrawal was a precondition of direct negotiations, while attempting to step away from the language of the ‘Rhodes formula’, which, along with other elements of the ‘Rogers Plan’ had become mired in a massive public controversy – a destructive and arguably unnecessary controversy in which they, the Americans, the Egyptians and the Israelis had all played a part in creating.

But in any case, Nixon who, on 13 December 1969, referred to the Rogers Plan as a ‘charade’\textsuperscript{144} never took these terms seriously or intended them to be implemented. As he acknowledged in his memoirs,

\begin{quote}
I knew that the Rogers Plan could never be implemented, but I believed that was important to let the Arab world know that the United States did not automatically dismiss its case regarding the occupied territories or rule out a compromise of the conflicting claims. With the Rogers plan on the record, I thought it would be easier for the Arab leaders to propose reopening
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{141} Saunders complained to Kissinger that ‘What most strikes me after completing this review of the documents is the cavalier nature of the December 23 Soviet reply. After actively discussing a joint document between June 17—when they produced a draft of their own—and 30 September, they simply turned aside our October 28 formulation—containing the position they wanted from us on boundaries—as providing no basis for a joint document’. Saunders – Kissinger, Washington, 31 December 1969. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 711, CF/E, USSR, Vol. VI.

\textsuperscript{142} Daigle, \textit{The Limits of Détente}, p. 96; Korn, Stalemate, pp. 163-164.

\textsuperscript{143} Telegram From the Department of State to Certain Posts, Washington, 24 December 1969, 0034Z. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 711, CF/E, USSR, Vol. VI. FRUS XII Doc. 109.

\textsuperscript{144} Kochavi, \textit{Nixon and Israel}, p. 11.
relations with the United States without coming under attack from the hawks and pro-Soviet elements in their own countries.\textsuperscript{145}

Indeed, in private conversation with Rabin, Meir, and her personal assistant Simcha Dinitz (who later succeeded Rabin as Ambassador to Washington) in September 1970, Nixon conveyed that ‘there was no Rogers plan as such’.\textsuperscript{146} Nixon did not merely fail to support Rogers, but actively colluded with Rabin, Garment, and Meir to derail his diplomacy from early October 1969, well before authorising the Joint Working Paper, by actively encouraging the anti-Rogers campaign which reached a crescendo in late December.

Korn, echoed by Daigle, present Nixon’s decision to discontinue the Two-Power Talks as being prompted by the Soviet response to the Joint Working Paper. Both conclude their discussion of 1969 Middle East negotiations by citing a Nixon-Sisco meeting where Nixon accepted Sisco’s recommendation that as the Soviets had ‘failed the test’ of acting as responsible negotiating partners and representatives of Egypt. Nixon is said to have decided at this point that ‘from now on, we’re going to go at it alone in the peace process’.\textsuperscript{147} Yet as Yaqub rightly argues, this assessment overlooks the major role Nixon himself played in rigging this test.\textsuperscript{148}

The two tracks of Nixon administration Middle East diplomacy diverged more sharply in October 1969. The Nixon–Meir meetings in late September set the political context for the final of stages of 1969’s inconclusive superpower negotiations on the Middle East. When Nixon finally authorised the ‘fallback position’ in October, he did so in bad faith, having no intention to deliver, and actually inciting a powerful public defamation campaign against Rogers and his policy. Yaqub asserts that Nixon’s stratagem of allowing the Rogers Plan to ‘go on the record’ with no intention of delivering, although ‘cunning in theory… was unworkable in practice’, as it ‘was unrealistic to suppose that the Rogers Plan’ would sit inertly ‘on the record’.\textsuperscript{149} But in the main aspect envisioned by Nixon, as a (negative) public relations stunt, the ‘Rogers Plan’ fiasco can be seen as

\begin{flushright}
147 Daigle, \textit{The Limits of Détente}, p. 82, Korn; \textit{Stalemate}, p. 164.
149 Ibid.
\end{flushright}
very successful, ridding the White House of responsibility for faltering Middle East negotiations, even as American-supplied Israeli air power stepped up pressure on recalcitrant Soviet allies. This is discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2.
PARADIGM SHIFT OR COMING OUT?

INTRODUCTION

The Nixon administration faced a series of rapidly evolving challenges in the Middle East during the first nine months of 1970, as the Egypt-Israel War of Attrition across the Suez Canal produced a singular series of events, unprecedented in any Cold War theatre, forcing frequent tactical re-evaluation. Israel committed to a major escalation by launching Operation Blossom on 7 January, a campaign of so-called ‘deep penetration’ aerial bombing raids on targets throughout the Nile Delta, prompting Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin to issue a strongly-worded cease and desist warning through the top-level Kremlin-White House channel at the end of the month. President Nixon’s initial response was dismissive, but the discovery of a massive influx of Soviet forces (Operation Kavkaz) west of Suez weeks later, ready to engage the Israeli Air Force (IAF), forced reconsideration of American policy and military options in the Middle East.

The IAF/Soviet clash over the summer of 1970 raised the spectre of superpower confrontation over the Arab-Israel conflict, creating a dangerous situation that was unwelcome to either Moscow or Washington. US Secretary of State William Rogers managed to broker a ceasefire in early August, but Nixon was enraged when the Egyptians immediately expanded their surface-to-air missile (SA-3) shield eastward, despite having just agreed not to ‘introduce or construct any military installations’
within 50 kilometres of the Suez Canal. Although Israel had dominated throughout most of the War of Attrition, this had not translated into American strategic advantage. Little diplomatic progress had been achieved, the Soviet regional military presence had increased significantly, and insult was added to injury by violation of a major agreement upon which the ink was barely dry.

The relative calm brought by ceasefire was short lived. A Palestinian militant, or fedayeen, group known as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) hijacked and redirected several American and Swiss civilian passenger airliners to Dawson’s Field, a remote airstrip in northern Jordan on 7-8 September. The hijackings sparked an international hostage crisis which rapidly escalated into civil and interstate war, pitting the forces of Jordan’s monarch, King Abdullah Hussein, a key American regional ally, against the fedayeen and the Syria’s Baathist regime, which sent columns of tanks across Jordan’s northern border to seize the Irbid, Jordan’s second city. Against all expectations, the crisis ended favourably from the American perspective, as Hussein’s forces managed singlehandedly to drive off the Syrians and decisively defeat the fedayeen, thus stabilising the king’s position and dealing a blow felt throughout Arab radical circles (among whom this episode is known as ‘Black September’).

September 1970 has long been regarded as a watershed for the Nixon administration in the Middle East. The historiographical consensus, shared by orthodox and revisionist schools of thought, holds that the crisis represents a turning point or agenda-setting event for US policy, shaping Nixon’s approach to the Arab-Israel dispute until the next round of open warfare in October 1973. In this interpretation, the crisis convinced Nixon to abandon the ‘evenhanded’ approach hitherto pursued by the State Department under Secretary William Rogers in favour of the partisan pro-Israel line recommended by Advisor for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger.

The orthodox account, based on self-congratulatory memoirs from Kissinger and Israeli Ambassador to Washington Yitzhak Rabin, accepts their portrayal of the crisis as a Cold War proxy conflict in which the US prevailed with Israeli assistance. (The Israeli Defence Force [IDF] positioned units in the Golan Heights ready to strike against Syrian

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1 The full text of the ceasefire agreement is reproduced in Korn, Stalemate, Appendix E, p. 287.
forces moving into Jordan, but did not actually attack). Revisionists argue that American and Israeli manoeuvres had little real impact on the course of events, but what was basically an intra-Arab conflict was misread by Nixon, who in Seymour Hersh’s pithy phrase, suffered from an ‘inability to recognise that the Soviets were not behind every sand dune in the Middle East’.

This chapter challenges both orthodox and revisionist positions on Nixon administration Middle East diplomacy from January-September 1970, arguing that the established thinking, particularly on the supposed impact of the Jordan crisis, is founded on a misunderstanding of Nixon’s policies from the beginning of his presidency. The first section focuses on the deep penetration bombing campaign, the famous Kosygin letter and the Nixon administration’s response, arguing that the White House demonstrated little interest in any conciliatory or ‘evenhanded’ approach, at first almost welcoming the Soviet reaction as a sign of weakness and discomfiture. The second section focuses on ceasefire diplomacy in the spring and summer of 1970, contending that while the Soviet intervention caused Nixon to tread more carefully, changes in approach reflected tactical adjustments rather than any fundamental strategic reassessment. Rogers’ ‘Stop Shooting, Start Talking’ initiative ended the War of Attrition in early August, but unlike the ‘Rogers Plan’ of 1969 (which Nixon colluded in torpedoing), this was premised and authorised precisely on grounds that ceasefire was not linked to terms for overall political settlement.

The third section examines policy deliberations during the three distinctive phases of the Jordan crisis (the hostage crisis, civil war, and Jordan-Syria conflict), showing that, by consensus, Nixon’s foreign policy establishment never believed the Soviets to be more than tangentially involved. Indeed, albeit for different reasons, Cairo, Moscow and Washington were actually unanimous in viewing the situation as unfortunate and dangerous, and united in their calls for de-escalation and calm. But when the crisis had abated by 24-25 September, Nixon saw a public relations opportunity not just to promote his personal stature as a Commander in Chief who had successfully ‘stood down the Soviets’, but also to provide post-hoc justification for a massive increase in

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military aid to Israel. This decision had little to do with Jordan and more to do with Egypt-Soviet actions in the War of Attrition, in particular cheating on the ceasefire agreement, a provocation which Nixon was keen to avenge, if not to discuss publicly.

This chapter therefore argues that far from representing a turning point, Nixon’s response to the Jordan crisis was a continuation and escalation of the uncompromising Cold War agenda he brought to the Arab-Israeli conflict from the outset. Thus while the chapter engages with and expands upon the existing literature on Nixon’s Middle East diplomacy from January to September 1970, the overall argument holds that an excessive emphasis on tactical deliberations has obfuscated basic conceptual and strategic continuity.

DEEP PENETRATION BOMBING AND KOSYGIN’S WARNING, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1970

OPERATION BLOSSOM

Having largely destroyed Egyptian military positions in the Suez Canal zone by the turn of 1970, on 7 January the IAF escalated its offensive by launching Operation Blossom, a campaign of so-called ‘deep penetration’ strategic bombing on targets throughout the Nile Delta, reaching as far as Cairo’s outer suburbs. While the IAF merely announced three ‘routine’ daylight attacks on Egyptian targets in the delta region, the action was immediately recognised by the Nixon administration and Israeli press as a major escalation, designed to exert political pressure on Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser.4 Assistant Secretary of State for Near and Middle Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco advised Rogers that the strikes were ‘the deepest raids in this heavily populated area since the 1967 war’ and that the significance of the attacks lay ‘in the closeness

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4 The Israeli daily Haaretz identified ‘a sharp turning point... not solely... an attack on military targets but an effort to go farther and hit targets which will be more painful to the Nasser regime’. US Embassy Jerusalem - Rogers, Nile Air Delta Raids, 8 January 1970. NA, RG59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2050, Folder Pol 27 Arab 1/7/70.
of the targets to the most heavily populated and politically important areas of the country.\(^5\)

Operation Blossom’s stated objectives were to compel ceasefire observance, reduce Egypt’s military presence along the Suez Canal, and deter future attacks on Israeli positions. Although Prime Minister Golda Meir denied that the intention was to topple Nasser, it is widely accepted that this formed an unstated objective of the campaign, which was openly discussed in Israeli public dialogue.\(^6\) Sisco believed Operation Blossom to be ‘part of a broader strategy’ designed to, on the one hand, underline the futility of militarily challenging Israel, while on the other, ‘knowingly making it more difficult for Nasser to come to a settlement’. Israel could thus maintain the territorial status quo ‘worrying unduly’ about Egypt accepting US negotiating terms, preventing ‘any rapprochement between Washington and Cairo’. The intention was to reduce Nasser’s options to carrying on with a losing war or sue for a ceasefire from a position of military and diplomatic weakness, risking destabilisation of his rule either way.\(^7\)

The campaign lasted until mid-April, with in excess of 3,300 sorties delivering a payload of over 8,000 tons of high explosive with no IAF losses. Although Jerusalem insisted that only military installations were targeted, in practice this was unachievable while bombing in the Nile Valley and Cairo suburbs, which were among the world’s most densely-populated areas. Civilian casualties were high, as schools

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\(^7\) Information Memorandum Sisco – Rogers, Israeli Raids on the Egyptian Delta Region, 7 January 1970.
and factories as well as barracks were damaged or destroyed, killing and injuring hundreds of Egyptian and Soviet citizens, and even several American expatriates. The American charge d’affaires in Cairo Donald Bergus was ‘greatly concerned’ that the IAF would become ‘bolder and bolder in their efforts to topple Nasser from the air’, fearing that ‘the Israelis, accurate bombardiers that they are, may miss Nasser but destroy American interests and any hope for peaceful settlement’.  

Two particularly controversial incidents involved strikes on a suspected training camp in close proximity to a school catering to American children in the suburb of Maadi, and the bombing of the Abu Zaabal metalworks, causing fifty civilian deaths and sixty-nine injuries. Faced with official American expressions of concern at the threat to lives of American and foreign diplomatic children, Israeli Minister Without Portfolio Shlomo Argov inquired whether the Americans had given thought to moving the school because of its proximity to military targets. Military Attache Colonel Moshe Yeki, celebrating ‘a number of nice kills’, dismissed the outcry at civilian casualties, insisting that the ‘Egyptians would simply have to understand that these things happened from time to time. The Israelis did not deliberately bomb civilian targets, but the civilians sometimes got in the way’. However, there was some concern in Israel that the Abu Zaabal incident might affect American willingness to meet arms requests, and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan took a more conciliatory line, stressing that the bombing ‘could only have been the result of a mistake’ or ‘technical error’ and forwarding Cairo information on how to defuse an unexploded four-hundred pound time bomb that was still live in the facility.

10 Memcon, Colonel Moshe Yeki, Israeli Military Attache, Arbuthnot Bumphandler, Chicago Daily Ubermensch, 12 February 1973. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2050, Folder Pol 27 Arab 2/11/70. There is some evidence from the Meir Cabinet that, at a minimum, the early stages of Operation Blossom did involve civilian targeting. According to Gideon Rafael, Director General of the Israeli Foreign Ministry 1968-1972, after the Meir cabinet rejected a motion to accept a ceasefire proposed by Eban on 8 February 1970, as a compromise Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan ‘imposed three restrictions on the air force: it would refrain from bombing objectives in the vicinity of Cairo, avoid civilian targets and any other activities likely to be interpreted as pre-war softening up blows’. Rafael, Destination Peace, p. 215.
11 Intelligence Brief Director of Intelligence and Research Ray S Cline – Rogers, Israel: Civilian Casualties near Cairo Set Off Tremors in Israel, 12 February 1970. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2050, Folder Pol 27 Arab 2/11/70. Barbour commented that the ‘G[overnment] O[ff] [I]srael and especially IDF, rarely
The deep penetration campaign produced what US Ambassador to Moscow Jacob Beam referred to as waves of ‘rage and indignation’ and hostile propaganda from the Arab world and the Soviet Union, directed not just at Israel, but also the United States, which was regarded as Israel’s armourer and facilitator. Ongoing shipments of F4-Phantoms, including an additional sixteen in the first week of 1970, made the campaign possible, a fact which was given great emphasis in the Arab world, and interpreted as indicating full American support. This impression was reinforced by a 30 January announcement that President Nixon would reach a decision on Israel’s outstanding arms requests, including an additional twenty-five Phantom and one hundred Skyhawk aircraft, within thirty days. The consensus in the Arab world, Israel, and Soviet Union alike held that a positive decision was a ‘foregone conclusion’. While the Arabs believed the announced period of anticipation represented an intimidation technique, in Israel it was thought that unless the decision would be affirmative, it made little sense for Nixon to announce his deliberations in advance.

**The Kosygin Letter**

Dobrynin hand-delivered a letter from Premier Kosygin to President Nixon on 31 January, warning against continued deep penetration bombing. In essence, the famous Kosygin letter contained three elements. First, it complained about military escalation ‘including bombings of population centers’ in Egypt and Jordan. Second, the bulk of the communiqué consisted of a series of carefully worded warnings that Nixon personally underlined in the text. Kosygin cautioned that the campaign brought a danger that UN Security Council and General Assembly decisions would ‘weight in the eyes of world public’, and possible ‘highly risky consequences... both from the

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point of view of the situation in the Middle East and international relations as a whole’. The Soviet Premier warned that persisting could ‘widen and deepen the conflict’, and that in the case of continued Israeli ‘adventurism’ Moscow would ‘be forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal, with the help of which a due rebuff to the arrogant aggressor could be made’.14

Finally, these warnings were offset by an expression of a ‘conviction that stable peace can and should be established’ and calls for a resumption of Two-Power and Four-Power talks to ‘1) ensure speediest withdrawal of Israeli forces from all occupied Arab territories, 2) to ensure the establishment of peace in the Middle East’. Identifying withdrawal as ‘the key question for establishing peace’, Kosygin anticipated that with this solved other issues could be achieved without ‘particular difficulties’. He closed by beseeching Nixon to consider the superpower’s ‘special responsibility for the maintenance of peace’, claiming that on the Soviet side that was ‘no lack of goodwill... as well as resolution to act in the interests of peace in the Middle East’.15

Nixon’s response would normally have been handled discreetly through ‘the Channel’, but as French President George Pompidou and UK Prime Minister Harold Wilson had received near-identical messages, which had been leaked to the UK press, there was little alternative but to include the State Department.16 For once, Kissinger and Rogers concurred in their analysis and recommendations. Both stressed that Israeli military superiority was based on qualitatively superior technology and personnel, as the Soviets were well aware. Threats to send increased quantities of ineffective materiel equipment were therefore assumed to be hollow, and indicative of a position of weakness.17 They agreed that the Kosygin letter should be downplayed, as Washington could not Soviet accept ‘ultimatums’.18

14 Letter Kosygin - Nixon, Moscow, 31 January 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 340, Subject Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger. FRUS XII, Doc. 121.
15 Ibid.
17 Rogers advised Nixon that ‘Short of nuclear weapons, the Soviets know as we do, that more matériel to the UAR cannot have an immediate effect on the arms balance or result in a sharp increase in UAR effectiveness, since the problem is not hardware but Egyptian lack of training and overall qualitative capacity. Memo Rogers-Nixon Washington, Soviet Message of 31 January on the Middle East, 2 February 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 340, Subject Files, Dobrynin/Kissinger. FRUS XII, Doc. 125.
Rogers saw the possibility of a ‘signal that Nasser may be about ready to give up... his war of attrition’, and with the Soviets in ‘somewhat of a squeeze at the moment’ hoped that ‘in time a more responsive reply’ to the Rogers Plan might ‘come forth’. Kissinger, his later claims of foresight notwithstanding, at the time concurred and seemed pleased with the results of the campaign, gloating that ‘the ill-timed demand for a cease-fire played into our hands quite nicely’, and claiming to detect ‘evidence that the combination of our firmness and the Israeli raids are hurting Nasser’ and that the ‘Soviets seem to have become increasingly concerned about a peace plan with a US label on it’.19

Nixon responded to Kosygin with his own tough note on 4 February, rejecting the Soviet attempt to apportion blame, calling for mutual ceasefire observance, including imposing restraint on fedayeen attacks against Israel, and issuing a counter-warning that ‘the United States is watching carefully the relative balance in the Middle East and we will not hesitate to provide arms to friendly states as the need arises’, a pledge which he repeated in his foreign policy address to Congress on 18 February.20

According to influential insider accounts from David Korn and Richard B. Parker, the consensus across Washington’s foreign policy establishment was that Kosygin’s warning was little more than a bluff, which Nixon swiftly dealt with in his response.21

But the relevant chapter of Craig Daigle’s monograph, ‘The First Soviet Threat January-May 1970’, which borrows its title from a Kissinger comment on the Kosygin Letter, utilises declassified materials to argue that the letter quickly grabbed the attention of

In Kissinger’s assessment, ‘The most basic fact about the Egyptian forces is that, despite all the equipment the Soviets have provided since the 1967 war, they are still no match for the Israelis. This is particularly true of the Egyptian air force and air defense system’. Memo Kissinger-Nixon Washington, Further Background on the Kosygin Letter, 6 February 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 711, CF/E, USSR, Vol. VII. FRUS XII, Doc. 128.


Nixon’s foreign policy advisors’ and that ‘the White House gave the utmost consideration on how to respond to such a threat’.22

In fact, the response to the Kosygin letter was neither as dismissive as depicted by Korn and Parker nor as alarmist as claimed by Daigle. The initial reaction was indeed blasé, but as the White House gave the Middle East greater focus in February 1970, complacency turned to real concern. While Kissinger did identify this as ‘the first Soviet threat’, the complete paragraph reads as follows:

The tone is relatively moderate, but nevertheless this is the first Soviet threat to your Administration, so the tone of your reply will be important. The Soviets avoid directly threatening action of their own. So far, it would seem that they are loath to make this a US–USSR confrontation.

For Kissinger, as for Rogers, the ‘overall conclusion from the message and the circumstances surrounding it is that they are not in the stronger position vis-à-vis us’. It was in this context of a presumed position of American strength and Soviet weakness that he recommended coming ‘down very hard on the Soviet threat’.23

While Korn and Parker have conveyed the initial misinterpretation of the Kosygin letter as empty bluster, what is perhaps underappreciated is the sense of self-satisfaction with which Nixon and Kissinger privately received the Soviet demarche. Assuming that Soviet motives must involve compelling Israel to desist, splitting the Western powers, and maintaining Moscow’s reputation as the protector of the Arabs, Kissinger thought it ‘doubtful whether in fact any of these purposes will be accomplished’. But, according to Kissinger, it should not have been difficult to realise that Washington and Jerusalem would respond with a call for a reciprocal ceasefire, offering a win-win scenario for the United States. Whether fighting continued, or either Cairo or Moscow showed flexibility on a ceasefire or previous proposals, Washington would ‘get the credit’ for facilitating ‘Israeli military pressure’ and ‘standing firm in the face of Soviet threats’, all of which would ‘make us appear as the most influential outside power in the region’. Kissinger only worried that ‘if for some or all of the above reasons the Soviet move is inept, it is also disturbing’. Nixon

22 Daigle, The Limits of Detente, p. 92.
23 Ibid.
concurred, annotating his copy of the Kissinger’s memo with the observation that ‘Confused men do unexpected and wrong things’.  

But concern at supposed Soviet ineptitude, confusion, and lack of intelligence soon began to shade into complacency. Kissinger assumed that the Soviets appeared to be responding ‘emotionally’ to the killing of Soviet advisers and out of ‘frustration’ over their inability effectively respond. He speculated that Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev might ‘be worried that his own position is vulnerable to charges of softness’, and even fretted that the presumably inevitable ‘failure of his initiative may make him even more vulnerable’, noting that Brezhnev himself had made reference to the strain that he was under twice in the previous two months.  

Nixon chimed in with a historical precedent for General Secretary’s presumed distress, noting that Thomas Jefferson had complained about having headaches every afternoon for the last three years that he was President.

Unwilling or unable to recognise the Kosygin letter as a plainly worded statement of position in response to deep penetration bombing, Nixon and Kissinger instead began to entertain the notion that a powerless Brezhnev was beginning to crack under the pressure being exerted in the Middle East. They would soon have cause to revise these presumptions.

FROM COMPLACENCY TO APPREHENSION: SOVIET INTERVENTION AND ISRAELI ARMS REQUESTS IN ABEYANCE, MARCH – MAY 1970

Kosygin’s message was no bluff, but a serious diplomatic effort to curb deep penetration and a final warning before committing to military intervention. Neither American nor Israeli intelligence had detected the imminent Soviet deployment, but within six weeks of the Kosygin letter, the IAF found itself confronted by Operation Kavkaz, an initial deployment of 1,000-1,500 combat troops which rapidly grew to an estimated 10,000 to 15,000, the largest ever Soviet military deployment in a non-

24 Memo Kissinger-Nixon Washington, Further Thoughts on Kosygin Middle East Message: An Inept Performance, 4 February 1970. NSC Files, Box 653, CF/ME, Sisco Middle East Talks, Vol. III.
25 Ibid.
communist country. Ground units operating the SA-3, the most effective and sophisticated Soviet surface to air missile system, capable of downing F4 Phantoms, were supported by three squadrons of Mikoyan-Gurevich (MiG) 23 interceptors. By mid-April, Egyptian-marked but Soviet-piloted MiGs were running intercept missions, directly engaging the IAF, creating an undeclared minor Israel-Soviet war.27

Although the immediate American reaction to the Kosygin letter was complacent, doubts soon began to emerge. Nixon convened his dedicated international crisis management unit, the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), on 9 February (six days after responding to the Kosygin letter), to consider ‘Possible Soviet Moves in Egypt’. This was the first occasion on which the prospect of the Soviet Union taking over Egypt’s air defences was seriously considered, and more generally, a realisation that the White House was not fully prepared with adequate information or effective policy and military options for all contingencies began to emerge. An Ad Hoc Committee considering the question of supplying Israel with more arms in response to Soviet moves was established immediately, and a joint CIA-State Department study on US policy options and military power balances throughout the Middle East was commissioned. Findings were considered at two further WSAG meetings scheduled for 11 and 16 February.28

Kissinger attempted a clarification rowing back from Nixon’s initial high-handed response to the Kosygin letter on 10 February, indicating that, in contrast with 1969, the White House was now prepared to discuss the Middle East in the top-level Kissinger-Dobrynin channel. Kissinger warned however, that ‘the introduction of Soviet military personnel in the Middle East would be viewed with the gravest


28 WSAG Minutes, Possible Soviet Moves in Egypt, Chairman— Kissinger, State Mr. Rodger Davies, Defense Mr. Richard Ware, Mr. Robert Pranger, JCS Lt. Gen. John W. Vogt, CIA, Mr. Thomas H. Karamessines, NSC Staff, Mr. Harold Sanders, Col. Robert Behr, Mr. Keith Guthrie, Washington, 9 February 1970, 10:21–11:02 am. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–114, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1969 and 1970. FRUS XII, Doc. 130.
concern’ with possible ‘grave consequences’. Dobrynin, who claimed that Kosygin had been ‘astonished to read in the American press that his letter was intended as a threat’, took a tough line, which was repeated by Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko during a meeting with Beam the next day. The Soviets complained that Nixon’s reply to Kosygin was not constructive, merely reaffirming at the highest level the ‘one-sided, pro-Israeli approach of the US Government to settling Middle East issues’ which encouraged Israel ‘to engage in new provocations’. The Soviets were unwilling to consider a ceasefire or superpower agreements to limit arms to the region under the circumstances, but promised that once Israel withdrew from occupied Arab territories ‘tremendous difficulties on limiting arms deliveries’ were unlikely.

Dobrynin reported that for Washington, ‘direct participation’ of the Soviet military in combat was ‘primarily and precisely the crux of the matter’. This was an accurate assessment of American anxieties. On 11 February, CIA Deputy Director Thomas Karamessines reported to the reconvened WSAG that, in closed session with senior officials, Nasser had announced that the Soviets had promised him support ‘by all necessary means’ indicating willingness to provide MiGs and its most sophisticated air defence systems if the US provided Israel with more Phantoms. This information sparked a speculative WSAG debate on types of equipment Moscow might dispatch to Egypt, whether Soviet troops would be deployed, and, if so, whether in offensive or defensive capacity, and in what area of operations. Wary of the possibility of superpower confrontation in the event of a Soviet attack against Israel, Lieutenant General John Vogt of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) warned that the US ‘could mount a strike; but if the Soviets responded, they could rapidly outbid us’. Alexis Johnson of the State Department stressed that ‘all the analysis done so far had shown that the Soviets would be in a superior military position in the event of a crisis in the Middle East’. This contrasted sharply with the sanguine attitude of Kissinger and Rogers two

weeks previously, and Kissinger now stressed that the President should be apprised of the Soviets apparent superiority.\(^{33}\)

The WSAG consensus recognised that neither side would agree to pull back from the Suez Canal under the circumstances, and that ‘the basic problem remained the Israeli penetration attacks’. Even Kissinger, usually the leading advocate of confrontational responses to Arab and Soviet pressures, realised that the time had come to restrain Israel, and ‘recognised that diplomatic and supply pressures on Israel were an important part of the inventory of measures which the US might take’.\(^{34}\) Attempting to reconcile restraining Israel with default Cold War toughness, it was decided to warn the Soviets against further intervention while simultaneously submitting diplomatic proposals at the Four Power talks. The proposals would call for a ceasefire but also be geared towards ‘dealing with public opinion pressures, staving off a further Israeli request for aid, and placing the onus on the Soviets for escalating the Arab-Israeli conflict’.\(^{35}\)

Despite the initially blasé attitude, Israel’s deep penetration campaign and Kosygin’s warning had prompted serious reflection in the White House from mid-February 1970, creating an unanticipated, uncomfortable and complex context for the decision on Israel’s arms requests. NSC and State Department analysis identified a multiplicity of factors impinging on the decision. The Abu Zaabal bombing had not just ‘charged up the emotional atmosphere’ but ‘dramatically highlight[ed], as have the deep penetration raids… Israeli military superiority’. A special review group created to consider the military necessity and political ramification of Israel’s arms requests had concluded that Israel could maintain its superiority for at least the period covered by the specific requests, 1971-1972.\(^{36}\) With specific regard to the request for one


\(^{34}\) Ibid.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.

hundred A4-Skyhawks and twenty-five additional Phantom F-4s, the study concluded that this was ‘a number of aircraft well in excess of our estimate of need’.37

Nixon’s Middle East team deliberated on the appropriate response to Israel’s arms requests during February 1970, in the context of the ongoing deep penetration bombing campaign, weighing the likely impact of the decision, particularly to expand Israeli airpower, on relations with the Arab world, Israel, and the Soviet Union. Kissinger’s key Middle East Advisor, NSC member Harold Saunders, posed the question of whether ‘the US view of the Middle East had changed in a simple but fundamental way since Washington had received Kosygin’s message?’38

Saunders noted that while Washington had hitherto viewed the struggle ‘as primarily an Arab-Israeli conflict with the US and USSR having obvious interests on each side’, it now seemed ‘to be talking more in terms of the US-USSR contest for dominance in the Mid-East, with the Arab-Israeli conflict in a subordinate role in the vehicle of that larger context’. Noting that neither the US nor the USSR had ‘chosen on its own initiative to escalate to the military level their contest for pre-eminence in the Mid-East’, (having being previously ‘content to compete on the political level’ using arms aid and fleet movements as ‘political tools’), Saunders came to his second question: ’Would Israel’s stopping attacks on the Nile Valley to decrease pressure on the USSR be a sufficient setback to US prestige to warrant the risk of escalation that would follow from continued attacks?’39

The Israelis argued that that a positive response to Israel’s arms requests was consistent with US interests and an appropriate response to the USSR, and in Sisco’s view, had attempted to make the ‘decision on arms a test of our relations’.40 NSC and Department of Defense analysis was critical and sceptical of Israel’s approach, stressing that

Israel still believes that it can achieve something like absolute security, ignoring the fact that its size makes this inherently impossible, and that absolute security for Israel means absolute

37 Draft Memo, Response to Israel’s Arms and Economic Assistance Requests, 11 February 1970, Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Action Memo Sisco-Rogers, Israel’s Requests for Arms and Economic Assistance, 18 February 1970.
insecurity for its neighbours. Israel already is strong enough to defend itself, and it already has complete air superiority. It does not need more U.S. jets for this purpose, at least now. Rather it needs them to support its present activist strategy, and it needs them as concrete evidence of U.S. support for this strategy -- evidence which it expects will be seen as a warning to the Soviets to limit their own role, at risk of direct confrontation with the U.S.41

Kissinger complained that even though Nasser had publicly acknowledged his helplessness against the IAF campaign, ‘the only Israeli answer’ to requests to confine their raids to the ceasefire line ‘was that stopping the raids would be seen as a sign of weakness unless Nasser publicly agreed to restore the ceasefire on his side’.42 Nasser himself, who numerous sources had reported was ‘obsessed’ and ‘almost psychotic’ about the Phantoms, was waging a massive propaganda campaign against deep penetration bombing and supply of further aircraft. Arab powers better-disposed towards the US such as Tunisia, Morocco and Saudi Arabia had advised the State Department against a favourable decision on Israel’s arms requests as particularly inflammatory at this time, while King Hussein of Jordan warned that if the US went ahead with the move he would be left ‘in a weaker position to resist Soviet arms’.43

Kissinger presented these concerns and dilemmas to the President, stressing that

42 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, Escalation in the Middle East, Undated. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 605, Folder Israel Vol. III Oct 69-28 Feb 70 Part 2. [1 of 3].

The Israelis were no more interested than the Soviets in a simple ceasefire. On 13 February Undersecretary of State Elliot Richardson warned Rabin of that an emerging ‘critical’ and ‘intractable’ situation was emerging at the superpower level, urging him to recommend Jerusalem agree to a ceasefire. But Rabin, on other occasions quick to emphasise the coincidence of American and Israeli interests in exerting military pressure on Egypt, now reminded Richardson that Israel had to consider its own position, arguing that the Kosygin letter made it more important to ‘bring realities home’ to Nasser, and ‘That to stop now would be a sign of weakness’. Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p. 98.

While Rabin’s predilection for air power solutions and brash personal style may partially account for this dismissive attitude, it should be remembered that, in his relationship with the Nixon administration, Rabin was the Israeli equivalent of Anatoly Dobrynin- an Ambassador to Washington serving as middle-man linking a direct backchannel from President Nixon to his own head of government, bypassing the State Department by way of Henry Kissinger. As seen in the previous chapter, Nixon had personally impressed upon Meir and Rabin that State Department initiatives were not to be taken seriously, that the real voice of the White House was to be heard through the Kissinger-Rabin backchannel, and had even actively colluded with the Israelis against the Secretary of State and the ‘Rogers Plan’. Given this context, it seems unsurprising that Rabin gave little credence to the half-hearted American ceasefire proposal, delivered by a relatively inconsequential figure in the established pecking order.
43 Action Memo Sisco-Rogers, Israel’s Requests for Arms and Economic Assistance, 18 February 1970.
The Israeli raids, therefore, jeopardize two major US interests—minimising the risks of a US-USSR confrontation and preventing a step towards Soviet predominance in the area. Yet they are not essential for Israel’s survival or military security.  

Deep penetration bombing continued unabated as Washington deliberated, and by early March seemed to be succeeding in softening up the Egypt-Soviet position. The Soviets broke the diplomatic silence at the Four-Power talks and with personal visits from Dobrynin to Kissinger and Rogers in early February, proposing a defacto (but unannounced) ceasefire and resumption of the Two-Power Talks, premised on a new trade of concessions. Nasser was ready to respect mutual ceasefire observance and to engage in direct negotiations with Israel (as long as something other than the ‘Rhodes formula’ was used), expressing willingness to discuss a formal peace and accept ‘minor rectifications’ of the Israel-Jordan border. On the critical issues of sovereignty and security arrangements in the Sinai, Cairo ‘recognized that Sharm al Sheikh and surrounding territories would be put under a UN force which could be removed only by the unanimous vote of the Security Council’s permanent members’, thereby accepting an American veto on removing the force. Cairo would take responsibility for fedayeen groups operating from their territory, ‘preventing guerrilla style attacks against Israel and Israelis’. In return, Cairo required a definite position on Egyptian sovereignty over Sharm al-Sheikh and the withdrawal of troops from Gaza and restoration ‘to its pre-June 1967 borders with the previous situation there re-established’. Dobrynin warned that ‘Without exact formulations on these questions there can be no possibility of moving towards an overall settlement’.  

Kissinger welcomed this shift in position as more evidence of the surety of his favourite theme: that ‘firmness… paid off on all contested issues… offering no concessions was the right course’.  The White House was satisfied enough to recommend Jerusalem accept a ceasefire, this time using the Kissinger-Rabin channel, with Nixon offering to replace up to eight lost Phantoms and twenty Skyhawks as an incentive. Israel replied affirmatively on 17 March, conditional on doubled

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44 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, Escalation in the Middle East, Undated. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 605, Folder Israel Vol. III Oct 69-28 Feb 70 Part 2. [1 of 3].
replacement figures and a public commitment to maintain the regional military balance in Israel’s favour.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, p. 568. On the same day, Nixon grumbled to Kissinger that ‘It is time for Israel (and I don’t think it will do any good to suggest this the American Jewish community [sic]) to face up to the fact that their only reliable friends are the hawks in this country . . . we are going to stand up in Vietnam and in NATO and in the MidEast, but it is a question of all or none. . . . We are going to be in power for the next three years and this is going to be the policy of this country. Unless they understand it and act as if they understood it beginning now they are down the tubes’. Cited in Kochavi, \textit{Nixon and Israel}, p. 7.}{47}

The White House had assumed, with satisfaction, that the more conciliatory terms had been offered from a position of Soviet-Egyptian weakness, but this sense of gratification was quickly soured by the realisation that Moscow’s diplomatic offensive was based not just on political concessions, but also on military consolidation west of Suez. On 18 March American intelligence confirmed that substantial Soviet armaments had arrived in Egypt, including SA-3 Surface to Air Missile systems never before deployed outside the Soviet Union, manned by some 1,500 Soviet military personnel, marking the first Soviet military deployment in a non-communist country.\footnote{Adamsky, ‘Disregarding the Bear’}{48}

Kissinger swiftly confronted Dobrynin with the news that having learned of the Soviet intervention, Nixon had cancelled his request to the Israelis for a ceasefire. Reminding the Soviets that they had been warned about the ‘serious consequences’ of introducing combat personnel, Kissinger insisted that Moscow ‘had to learn that the President could not be dealt with on this basis’.\footnote{Memcon Dobrynin – Kissinger Washington, 20 March 1970, 2:15 pm. LOC, MD/KP, Box TS 36, Geopolitical File, 1964–1977, Soviet Union, Chronological File, 3/69–6/70. FRUS XII Doc. 145.}{49}

But while angered by the Soviet intervention, Nixon was not in a position to directly confront the Soviets in the Middle East, and was unwilling to inflame the situation further. To Israeli dismay, on 23 March Rogers announced that, in US estimation, Israel’s air capacity was ‘sufficient to meet its needs for the time being’ and that Nixon had decided to hold his decision on Israel’s aircraft requests ‘in abeyance’. In a typical example of Nixonian two-tier public and private policy and diplomacy, American Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour quietly conveyed to Jerusalem that the United States would provide replacement aircraft to Israel, and additional planes if this became necessary, and Israel would also receive $200m dollars in economic...
credits, and enjoy continued access to other military equipment. Barbour claimed that the statement that ‘Israel’s air capacity is sufficient to meet its needs’ was intended not as a rebuke to Israel, but a warning to the Soviet Union against expanding its military capacity in Egypt, lest Washington reassess Israel’s needs.50

These compensations and reassurances did not quell Israeli disappointment. The Israeli embassy in Washington launched a vigorous protest campaign on Capitol Hill, distributing a briefing paper to congressmen, media outlets, embassies and US government departments entitled ‘The US response to Israel’s Aircraft Needs – An Assessment’. This document stridently contested the US assertion that Israeli air defences were sufficient, claiming the US decision would ‘serve to encourage those in the Arab world bent on launching war in an effort to vanquish Israel’.51

Although Nixon disagreed with the Israeli assessment that dispatching further Phantoms was the best counter to the Soviet deployment in Egypt, the President was nonetheless reportedly ‘furious’ about the Soviet intervention. Daigle, who regards the Soviet ceasefire offer as a ‘deceptive plan’ or ‘ruse’ to conceal its military deployments, recounts that Nixon, though wary of further escalation and the dangers of a superpower confrontation over the Middle East, ‘was not about to back down in the face of Soviet aggression’. The president therefore retaliated by ordering CIA director Richard Helms, in a manner that Helms reported was ‘as emphatic on this as I have ever heard him on anything’, to be ‘as imaginative as he could’ in escalating worldwide ‘black operations’. Without specifying exactly what he in mind, Nixon ordered the CIA to ‘Just go ahead. Hit the Soviets, and hit them hard’.52

A peculiarly partisan mentality is required to join Daigle in viewing the provision of air defences to civilian population centres undergoing aerial bombing as a case of ‘Soviet

aggression’. But in any case, these allegations of bad faith and deception are premised on an artificial separation of political and military aspects of diplomacy, and seem particularly ironic when voiced by Nixon, Kissinger and their apologists. Moscow had employed its top-level channel to the White House warn, in very plain terms, that it would take necessary measures to halt bombing in the Nile Delta and the Cairo area. Short of revealing deployment plans, it is hard to see how the Kremlin could have been more explicit, but ill-informed advice from Kissinger and Rogers had framed the Soviet protest against deep penetration bombing as an indication of weakness. Unwilling or unable to consider the actual content of the Kosygin letter, and blissfully unaware that the Soviets had been developing a military response to American-supplied Israeli air power for over six months, and were ready to move to confront Israel in a matter of weeks, Nixon had responded dismissively, only to discover that the American-Israeli estimate of the regional balance of power was in error and that Moscow was ready to match deeds to words. When diplomatic efforts to terminate deep penetration bombing repeatedly failed, Moscow began to reveal its military hand, while continuing to call for a ceasefire and renewed political process. Nixon’s plan from two months previously, to allow the Israel to ‘scare’ the Soviets, had backfired.\(^{53}\) Loath to makes terms from a position of relative weakness, unable to match the Soviet deployment with US military and political capital already overstretched in Vietnam, and unwilling to escalate by sending more Phantoms, a move which would heighten risks of a serious Israeli-Soviet clash and further damage the American position in the Arab world, Nixon had been outplayed in the poker game of rising antes and calculated gambles.

STOP SHOOTING, START TALKING

Superpower diplomacy over the Arab-Israel conflict remained on hiatus for the remainder of the War of Attrition. Rogers formally responded to the Soviet proposal on 28 March, welcoming ‘with satisfaction’ Soviet emphasis on ‘the need for a just and

\(^{53}\) FRUS XII, Doc. 104.
lasting peace’ and expressing accepting the invitation to resume the Two-Power talks. A series of four further Dobrynin-Sisco meetings in March consisted largely of a rehearsal of familiar positions, with little progress on the familiar sticking points of direct negotiations, withdrawal, security arrangements. By April, both sides were frustrated and the talks were again discontinued.

Sisco attempted an alternative to superpower diplomacy in mid-April, personally touring the Middle East and attempting to bypass Moscow by pitching the Rogers Plan directly to the Egyptian and Israeli leadership. Sisco brought no new proposals, but ‘urged both Nasser and Mrs Meir to seek compromise and move from their maximal positions’, accepting that while Egypt could not expect full withdrawal or a refugee settlement compromising the Jewish character of the Israeli state, neither could Israel expect to annex substantial territories. Neither side was willing to budge, with Sisco finding instead that a ‘deep sense of fatalism has gripped the leaders in the area’. Nasser was disappointed that Sisco ‘brought zero’ in terms of new proposals, and seemed ‘resigned to reliance on Soviets and with a fixation on “Phantoms”’. Meir, for her part, considered negotiation with Nasser ‘impossible’, and she and her cabinet were ‘greatly preoccupied with and deeply concerned with direct Soviet involvement in Egypt’. Sisco was taken aback by what he called Dayan’s ‘astounding statement... that he thought US backed deep penetration raids’ warning that ‘it would be a serious mistake for Israel to bomb SAM-3 sites around heavily populated areas’.

54 State Department - Embassy in Moscow, Washington, 28 March 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 653, CF/ME, Sisco Middle East Talks.
55 Saunders saw the Soviets as attempting to use the meetings to wipe the ‘slate clean of Sisco’s Moscow talks last July and Secretary Rogers’ New York talks in September which provided the basis for our October 28 document... going back to June 1969’. Memo Saunders - Kissinger Washington, 8 April 1970. Renewed Dobrynin Talks on Mid-East—Recapitulation. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 653, CF/ME, Sisco Mideast Talks, Vol. III.
58 Barbour – Rogers, For President and Secretary From Sisco, 17 April 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, CF/ME, Box 606, Folder Israel Vol. 4 01 May 70 - 21 May 70 to Vol. 4. 01 Mar – 20-21 May 70.
59 Ibid.
as the Soviets could not ‘afford to appear to be taking a licking from a small power’. Rather than seeking military solutions, Sisco advised that Jerusalem should be thinking in terms of diplomatic credibility, as ‘Israel’s world image’ required ‘rebuilding’ as it ‘had lost much support’, bringing ‘practical political consequences’. While ‘sympathy and support’ for Israel in the US remained strong despite the climate created by the Vietnam War, there was a ‘feeling that Israel’ had ‘not been sufficiently vigorous in taking needed steps toward peace’. Sisco put the onus for flexibility on Jerusalem, stressing that ‘the type of initiative… required can come only from Israel’s Prime Minister’.

Meir was unresponsive to suggestions that conciliatory gestures from Israel might be helpful. She continued to reject any mention of withdrawal, and remained unmoved by pleas that the impasse contributed to radicalisation and the spread of Soviet influence, and caused President Nixon deep concern. As though to underline this point, widespread rioting erupted at the news of Sisco’s imminent arrival at next scheduled stop in Amman. As Sisco ‘had nothing new to give Hussein’ and ‘it was not worth risking American lives in Amman’, the visit was cancelled.

While Sisco had been attempting to bypass the Soviets, Dobrynin had been trying to bypass Sisco, requesting that Kissinger get involved in Middle East negotiations, as ‘talking to Sisco was a waste of time’. Kissinger claimed that a previous effort to intervene in the situation was ruined when the White House was ‘tricked by the Soviet introduction of SA-3s’, but nonetheless found a tentative Soviet offer to restrict Combat deployments to Alexandria, Cairo and the Aswan Dam ‘worth considering’.

The idea of separate Israeli and Soviet zones of operation was already under consideration in Israel, where the ‘Sovietisation’ of Egypt’s air defences (a term coined

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61 Telegram Barbour – Rogers, Sisco Meeting with Prime Minister Meir, 16 April 1970.
62 Telegram Barbour – Rogers, For President and Secretary From Sisco, 17 April 1970.
by Dayan in his first public reaction to the news of the Soviet deployment on 20 March) had opened a major public debate. Israelis agonised over whether this was a direct response to deep penetration bombing or a move with a longer gestation, and while there was a consensus that the Suez Canal zone must be kept free of SA-3s or other effective air defences, the appropriate means of achieving this goal was debated. Experienced IAF pilots flying Phantoms were more than a match for Soviet piloted MIGs, but providing a ‘purely Israeli deterrent’ directly engaging the Soviet military carried its own obvious risks. In a public speech on 9 April, and article in the IDF weekly Bamachaneh, Dayan suggested that a de facto Israel-Soviet ceasefire could be achieved by the Soviet military and IDF confining themselves to separate zones of operation. Israel would only attack SAM-3 sites in ‘certain areas’ such as the Suez Canal, allowing to Soviets to avoid Israeli bombing altogether by deploying elsewhere. Deep penetration raids were discontinued on 13 April, signalling Israel’s willingness to abide by these proposed terms.

An indication of the Soviet response arrived on 18 April, with word that in addition to ground crews manning SA-3s, Soviet pilots had ‘scrambled’ in response to an Israeli air raid (though had not actually engaged). Meir personally appealed to Nixon calling for ‘a clear and vigorous public reaction on the highest level of authority’ and a revision of the abeyance decision in light of the confrontational Soviet move, but American patience was wearing thin. Nixon’s reply emphasised the need for ‘firmness but also calm and prudence’, offering only a noncommittal pledge to be ‘in touch... at the earliest possible date in the matter of your request for additional aircraft’. Weary of what it regarded as intransigence, recklessness, and ‘hackneyed and transparent’

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64 Telegram Barbour-Rogers, 4 April 1970, Israel Ponders SAM-3s and Soviet Involvement in Middle East Conflict. NA, RG59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2051, Folder POL ARAB ISR 2/15/70 to POL 27 ARAB ISR 3/20/70.


Dayan argued that his ‘distinction between Cairo and Aswan and Alexandria on the one hand and the canal region on the other also holds for the Russians... I hope with this policy we can make sure we avoid involvement in a formal way with the Russians but that we will also avoid the physical need to cause Soviet casualties, and avoid Soviet soldiers firing on our aircraft’. Cited in Korn, Stalemate, p. 196.

efforts to convince Washington it would appear weak unless aircraft were dispatched, the Nixon administration had deliberately ‘left... uncertainty in the minds of the Israelis’.  

Nixon did order a quick and comprehensive review of the Middle East situation on 30 April, but his attention was elsewhere. On the same day, after weeks of bureaucratic infighting, the White House announced an imminent invasion of Cambodia by 32,000 US ground troops. This decision was Nixon’s most controversial to date, sparking stiff Congressional resistance, nationwide protests, including pockets of civic unrest which lead to the Ohio National Guard shooting dead four unarmed students and wounding nine others.  

To this Israel added a massive publicity campaign, headed by Rabin himself, targeting members of Congress, media, and prominent private American institutions and individuals. The Israeli Embassy circulated copies of yet another policy briefing paper, this time entitled ‘The Soviet Role Assumes Combat Role Against Israel’, highlighting Soviet ‘combat missions’ against the IAF and Soviet determination to exacerbate and exploit Middle East tensions, themes which received considerable attention in American public discourse over the following weeks.

Nasser’s annual May Day speech appeared to offer an opportunity for reprieve from an unexpected quarter. Nasser reeled off a litany of alleged American offences against Egypt, but in an apparent response to Sisco’s presentation weeks earlier went on to invite a new American initiative, though warning President Nixon that there was a ‘forthcoming decisive moment in Arab-American relations’ that would either lead to a permanent rupture or a new beginning’.  

Shortly afterwards, the Egyptians approached both Donald Bergus, the American Charge d’affaires in Cairo, and the Italian Ambassador in Cairo, Piero Ferraboschi, with a message to pass on to

68 Siniver, The Machinery of Crisis, pp. 93-98. Detailed coverage and in-depth analysis of the Cambodia decision can by found in p. 71-114.
Washington, that ‘the US must try to understand the overtures to the US intended in Nasser’s speech’. While a ‘positive decision concerning US arms for Israel would endanger US relations with Cairo… a contrary decision would open the way for better understanding’.  

According to NSC staffer William B. Quandt, Nasser’s speech marked the ‘turning point’ in one aspect of American diplomacy, as ‘the fiction’ that arms supply would not be used as leverage against Israel was then ‘dropped’. Already in a minority among his colleagues in his calls for a more confrontational approach in the Middle East, Kissinger found himself more isolated than ever during deliberations under the shadow of the ‘Cambodia hysteria’. A briefing paper prepared for review at a top-level meeting of CIA, NSC, Pentagon and State Department representative in early May found that the White House lacked the domestic support for a Middle East confrontation, and if unwilling ‘to attack Soviet forces… should not assume that a show of force will produce a negotiated settlement’.  

With Israel’s aircraft procurement contracts expiring in July, Nixon himself received Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban on 21 May to discuss the future of the US-Israel military relationship. Arguing that Soviet involvement had altered the military balance, Eban pleaded for Washington to meet Israel’s aircraft requests and to ‘make a clear statement’ to the Soviets about the limits of what the US would tolerate in the Middle East. While avoiding specifics on aircraft, Nixon offered assurance that the flow of other military supplies would soon resume, but urged that this not be publicised and that Israel show ‘greater flexibility’ in considering a ceasefire requesting a public statement from Israel on willingness to trade land for peace.  

Forgetting her prior scepticism as to ‘the myth’ of Israel’s acceptance of UNSCR 242, Meir delivered a major foreign policy address to the Knesset on 26 May, which corrected those who ‘claim[ed], among them Arabs, that we have not accepted the

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72 Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 88.
73 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 573.
74 Cited in Daigle, The Limits of Detente, p. 110.
United Nations Resolution of November 1967, whereas we have’. This was a first-time endorsement from an Israeli Prime Minister.76

With Egypt and Israel finally appearing to soften their positions, on 19 June Rogers unveiled his new simplified ‘Stop Shooting, Start Talking’ initiative, which called for a simple ceasefire and return of the Jarring mission without pre-conditions. Kissinger vehemently opposed the initiative from the beginning, recreating Israeli arguments that as the Soviet military presence in Egypt was not addressed, the new initiative indicated an admission of weakness. Kissinger’s colleagues perceived his objections to be motivated as much by hostility to initiatives he did not conceive or control, and by professional jealousy of Rogers, however, and Nixon overruled Kissinger on 18 June, approving the initiative.77

Despite earlier promising signs, initial reactions from Egypt and Israel appeared negative. Meir immediately conveyed a ‘strongly adverse’ reaction, complaining that ‘Israel was being asked to accept weakening of IDF as basis for negotiation’ although Egypt ‘would remain free to carry on [the] War of Attrition, receive unlimited military supplies from USSR, and continue negotiations indefinitely without concessions’.78

Nasser delivered a fiery speech in Benghazi on 25 June, warning that withdrawal from all Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian occupied territories was non-negotiable and denouncing ‘American imperialism’ driving ‘Israeli aggression’. Meir responded in a Knesset address on 29 June, rejecting the ceasefire as offering an opportunity for Egypt to regroup for more intensified warfare which Nasser was ‘taking pains to give... a pan-Arab character’. But that evening, Soviet-Egyptian air defences brought forward to within twenty miles of the Suez Canal downed five Phantom F4s, the worst single-day losses in IAF history. Israel held out for several more weeks in the face of mounting aircraft losses and a precipitous decline in American support for its military

76 Korn, Stalemate, p. 244; Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 98.
77 While several scholars have approvingly quoted White House Chief of Staff Robert Haldeman’s remark that Nixon realised Kissinger was ‘jealous of any idea not his own’, it is difficult to find any effort to dispute this assessment. Haldeman and Ambrose, The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House (GP Putnam’s, New York 1994), p. 3. See also Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining pp. 125-126; Bundy, A Tangled Web, p. 180; Korn, Stalemate, p. 244, Quandt; Peace Process, p. 89; Bar-Siman-Tov, The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969-1970, p. 177; Shalom and Vanetik, Nixon administration p. 189.
campaign. Rabin advised Kissinger of the new military situation and Israel’s plans to attack Soviets positions if necessary in early July, but even this information failed to move a specially convened NSC Special Review Group to authorise new aircraft for Israel, as withholding replacements until scheduled deliveries from September presented the best available leverage for convincing Israel to accept the ceasefire.79

Nasser flew to Cairo for three weeks of intensive medical treatments and discussion with the Kremlin after delivering his Benghazi address, and upon returning to Cairo on 23 July, he made the surprise announcement that Egypt accepted the Rogers initiative. To his inner circle, Nasser claimed that the new initiative required no concession from Egypt, presenting a win-win situation. If the United States could broker a deal on acceptable terms, well and good, and even if not, in the meantime Egypt could use the respite to rebuild and consolidate its military situation.80 However, Palestinian activists saw the Rogers initiative, with its narrow focus on Egypt-Israel ceasefire, as dividing Cairo from the fedayeen by ignoring the Palestinians as an independent force in regional affairs. Nasser’s acceptance of the Rogers Initiative was immediately condemned by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) chairman, Yasser Arafat, and other fedayeen leaders as surrender to American imperialism and a tacit acceptance of Israel’s existence, and it sparked major demonstrations in Amman and Beirut.81

With Egyptian acceptance in hand, Nixon wrote personally to Meir stressing that he expected ‘a prompt affirmative reply’ to the ceasefire proposals. Nixon restated the

79 Daigle, The Limits of Detente, pp. 126, 128.
80 Whether Egypt’s acceptance of the Rogers initiative was contrary to Soviet wishes or made under pressure from Moscow has long been the subject of debate, but American records seem to indicate an independent Egyptian move. Discussing this point with the Israeli cabinet a year later, Sisco reported that at the time the Russians claimed Egypt ‘was all against this unilateral move’ but accepted ‘because of our pressure’. However, unnamed Egyptians visited Sisco’s office a day later, claiming that ‘we have accepted this despite Soviet opposition’. The Egyptians offered oral acceptance of the ceasefire and the principle of no military advantage, but ‘did not want us [the Americans] to show it to the Russians as far as details were concerned’, indicating a degree of disagreement and autonomous action. Memcon Meir - Sisco, 2 August 1971. Present Mr. Allon, Mr. Dayan, Mr. Eban, Mr. Gazit, Mr. Herzog, Mr. Rabin, Mr. Raphael, Mr Dinitz, Mr. Sisco, Mr. Atherton, Mr. Barbour, Mr. Zurhellen, Mr. Smith NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134. Various interpretations of Nasser’s decision are offered in Heikal, Secret Channels, p. 156; Herzog, The War of Atonement The Inside Story of the Yom Kippur War (Greenhill Books, London, 2003), pp. 9-10; James, Nasser at War, p. 165; Rubinstein, Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship since the June War (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1977), pp. 120-123; Shalom and Vanetik, The Nixon Administration and the Middle East Peace Process, p. 96. 81 Chamberlin, The Global Offensive, pp. 109-110.
US position that ‘final borders’ must be directly negotiated between Egypt and Israel, the Israel would not be pressed to accept a solution to Palestinian refugee problem which would ‘fundamentally alter the Jewish character of the State of Israel or jeopardise Israel’s security’, that Egypt and Israel must undertake ‘reciprocal obligations’, and that ‘No Israeli soldier should be withdrawn... until a peace agreement satisfactory to you has been achieved’. The Meir Cabinet voted to accept the Rogers initiative on 31 July, although at the cost of the resignation of Minister without Portfolio Menachem Begin and the five ministers from his expansionist Gahal party. A final controversy arose around the exact text of the wording the text, causing Sisco, Rogers and Kissinger in turn to raise their voices at Meir, who had complained that despite Nixon’s reassurances, American ‘conduct... was an insult to Israel, its government, and its people... this attitude bears the mark of dictation, not consultation’.82

The ‘Stop Shooting, Start Talking’ initiative, a 90-day ceasefire which came into effect on 8 August, succeeded in ending the War of Attrition largely because of differences from previous efforts. The simplified ‘Rogers Initiative’ required only Egypt and Israel as signatories, and for them to agree only to refrain from attacks or changing the military status quo, and to enter into talks, without any stated preconditions, under the auspices of UN special envoy to the Middle East Gunnar Jarring. Rogers’ minimalist approach obviated the need either for agreement on the terms of political settlement before ceasing hostilities and entering negotiations, thus delivering on Israel’s long-standing demand for negotiations ‘without preconditions’, and also incidentally eliminated the Soviet role as a direct party to the negotiations, the stated central objective of his rival Henry Kissinger, who had bitterly resisted the initiative.

**THE JORDAN CRISIS**

The ceasefire was called into question almost before it came into effect. IAF pilots reported that convoys of vehicles began advancing to the west of Suez shortly before

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midnight on 7 August, but were denied permission to attack. Israel formally complained to the United States on 9 August, citing photographic and video evidence that the Egyptians had begun to erect new Surface to Air Missile sites in violation of the ceasefire. A US response to Israeli complaints was partially delayed by Egyptian and Israeli resistance to ceasefire monitoring, including Israeli threats to shoot down American reconnaissance aircraft, but by 22 August Operation Even Steven, using high-altitude U-2 aircraft to photograph the Suez Canal zone, revealed that both sides had violated their agreement to a military standstill as Egypt had installed several SAM batteries, while Israel had refortified the Bar Lev line and developing supporting road networks.\(^\text{83}\)

The ceasefire violations rekindled debate along familiar lines within the Nixon administration. Downplaying the military significance of the Egyptian violations while emphasising the new diplomatic opportunities presented by the ceasefire, Rogers resisted making any immediate public statements for fear of jeopardising the upcoming Jarring talks, an attitude that Kissinger vigorously opposed. The pair traded allegations as Rogers accused Kissinger of ‘attempting to foment a crisis by being so insistent on ceasefire violations’ while Kissinger accused Rogers of dangerous, wilful denial of the situation. But, to the dismay of the Israelis, despite their complaints of a direct ‘Soviet threat... designed to bring Israel to its knees’, Washington remained silent on the issue throughout August. A small compensatory new arms package valued at some $7m and including cluster bombs capable of destroy SAM installations was quietly offered, but with requirements that Israel would ‘not be used by Israel unless the ceasefire is broken by resumption of hostilities by the other side’, and that if use became necessary activity would be restricted to a zone within 50km of the Suez Canal. Cluster bombs should ‘under no circumstances be used against anything other than clearly military targets’, and Washington expected Israel to hold the agreement ‘very closely’ as ‘it would be most unfortunate if this sale became public knowledge during the ceasefire’.\(^\text{84}\)

\(^{83}\) Korn, Stalemate, p. 265-266

\(^{84}\) Memo Talking Points for Meeting with Ambassador Rabin, Washington, Undated. NPLM, NSC, HAK/me, Box 134, Folder Rabin/Kissinger, Vol. 2 1971, [1 of 1].
Nixon finally registered official complaints about the illegal missile redeployments with Cairo and Moscow 3 September, omitting mention of the smaller arms package, but pointedly informing the Egyptians and Soviets that he had authorised the sale of a further eighteen Phantom F4s to Israel in response to ceasefire violations.\textsuperscript{85} The Egyptians responded with mealy-mouthed excuses, claiming that any changes were due to regular maintenance rotations, or in one incidence, the work of an over-active unit commander, while the Soviets simply pointed out that they were not signatories to Rogers’ Initiative and therefore not bound by it or responsible for its observance. Israel announced its withdrawal from the scheduled Jarring talks in protest against ceasefire violations on 6 September. The Rogers initiative had succeeded in halting the shooting, but the start of talks was postponed indefinitely.\textsuperscript{86}

Despite violations on both sides and the suspension of talks, the ceasefire had held for a month, when the sudden emergence of a crisis in and around Jordan temporarily shifted the focus of Middle East diplomacy. On 4 September 1970 militants from the radical fedayeen group known as the PLFP, led by the iconoclastic Palestinian Christian George Habash, hijacked three commercial airliners, two American and one Swiss. One of the American planes was flown to Cairo, evacuated and blown up on the runway, a symbolic insult to Nasser for his acceptance of a ceasefire with Israel. The other planes were landed in Dawson’s Field, a remote airstrip in northern Jordan. A fourth hijacking attempt was foiled by Israeli air marshals in London, but the PLFP seized another airliner three days later, which was also landed in Dawson’s field. Hundreds of American, European, and Israeli civilian hostages were detained, with the release of thousands of Palestinians incarcerated in Europe and Israel demanded in exchange for their release. A 72 hour deadline was set, sparking an international hostage crisis.

Within Jordan, the situation was volatile. Fedayeen, which had periodically harassed and occasionally threatened the Hashemite throne since Israel’s war of independence in 1948, had proliferated since after the occupation of the West Bank in June 1967,

recognising neither Amman nor Jerusalem’s authority. Hussein attempted to avoid conflict with Palestinians, but found himself under severe internal pressure from the fedayeen and external pressure from Israel, which expected him to prevent guerrilla attacks not just within Israel proper, but also on the IDF occupying the West Bank. Tensions had escalated throughout 1970. A series of assassination attempts against the king had sparked armed clashes between his forces and fedayeen militants, but Iraq, which had had between 16,000 and 20,000 troops stationed in Jordan since 1967, warned that it would not tolerate military action against Palestinians. Syria openly supported a putsch against Hussein by PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. Thus before the hostage crisis broke, Jordan was in a state of deep instability. Hussein was facing internal armed subversion, frequent incursions into his territory by Israeli forces, and direct threats from Arab neighbours.87

The hijackings made Hussein appear weaker than ever. In Washington, the consensus held that whatever the outcome of the crisis, Hussein could not hold his throne, but on 15 September the king replaced his civilian cabinet with a military government, and the following day he took action against fedayeen positions in Amman. The superpowers warned one another off intervention as Jordan descended into civil war, but on 20 September a force of Syrian tanks crossed the northern border and seized Jordan’s second city, Irbid. In a response discussed with Washington, IDF forces moved into position in the Golan Heights, from which they could strike at either Irbid or into Syria itself, including Damascus. In the end, the Jordan-Syria conflict was resolved bilaterally when Hussein’s combined tank and air forces were able to inflict substantial damage on the Syrian tanks that were unsupported from the air, which withdrew across the border on 23 September. Hussein’s forces were then able to concentrate on the fedayeen and decisively defeat them. The series of events became known in Arab radical circles as ‘Black September’ because it ended in decisive defeat, with their objectives unfulfilled, their prestige and military power broken, and their rival, King Hussein, reseated firmly on his throne.

Orthodox historiography of the Jordan Crisis tends to echo the White House’s trumpeting of ‘Black September’ as a Cold War victory, with the triumph of moderate over radical Arabs, and Soviet-backed Syrian intervention repulsed by a demonstration of Israeli military power underwritten by American guarantees. Rabin succinctly relays the orthodox version of events:

Israeli-US cooperation in planning the IDF intervention, together with the troop concentrations near the Syrian border, convinced the Soviets and the Syrians that they were best off halting the advance into Jordan… “Hints” of that nature may or may not have been subtle but they were certainly effective, for soon afterwards the Syrians soon withdraw from Jordan and the risk of broader war was averted.  

Although Rabin does not explain how the Soviets and Syrians might have been aware of ‘Israeli-US cooperation in planning the IDF intervention’, the outcomes of the Jordan crisis are nonetheless presented as a demonstration of Israel’s value to the United States. Douglas Little’s account of the Jordan crisis, is a good example of how the ‘official’ account has impacted upon orthodox historiography. Little argues that at the brink of war, ‘Moscow evidently told Damascus to stop. With Israel’s warplanes poised for attack, Syria’s tanks reversed course and clanked back out of Jordan on September 22’, and that the crisis’ outcome convinced ‘top US policymakers,’ of ‘what Ben-Gurion, Eshkol and Meir had been saying for a decade’, namely that ‘Israel could serve the United State as a strategic asset’. Rabin is the only source cited in support of this assertion, and like Rabin, Little omits any mention of Jordan’s air strikes on the Syrian forces, but soberly relays the excesses of the Jordanian army in moving against ‘the Palestinian guerrillas and their families’.  

Even Chamberlin’s recent work, although offering rich detail on US-Palestine politics and a sceptical take on US, and particularly Nixon administration, policies in the Middle East, readily accepts the thesis that the Jordan crisis cemented Israel’s position as a ‘strategic asset’, framing Syria’s military defeat with reference to Israeli rather Jordanian action. According to Chamberlin, 

88 Rabin, Memoirs, pp. 148-149. Rabin avoids mentioning Jordanian air strikes against Syria. 
89 Douglas Little, American Orientalism: the United States and the Middle East since 1945 (University of North Carolina Press, Virginia, 2008), p. 106. Similarly, Kalb and Kalb claim that: ‘It was clear that in this venture the United States only had one ally, Israel’. Kalb and Kalb, Kissinger, p. 204.
Under pressure from the United States, Israel mobilised its air force and prepared to intervene in order to halt the Syrian advance... Facing resistance from Jordanian forces and the prospect of Israeli intervention, Damascus blinked.90

Prioritising the view from Washington, orthodox accounts express the significance of Jordan’s civil war in terms of either its ‘lessons’ for American regional policy. Kaufman neatly summarises the argument:

> Jordan's civil war had a major impact on Nixon's Mideast policy. First, it seemed to undermine all the assumptions on which Secretary of State Rogers had based his approach to the Middle East. It also appeared to confirm Kissinger's views that Arab radicals would not come to the peace table until they were persuaded to do so and that the Soviet Union was behind most of the trouble in the Middle East.91

In a message made famous through its reproduction in Rabin’s memoirs, Nixon assured Meir he would ‘never forget Israel’s role... the United States is fortunate in having an ally like Israel in the Middle East. These events will be taken into account in all future developments’.92 After September 1970, Nixon shifted decisively account in Kissinger’s partisan pro-Israel approach, focused on minimising Soviet regional influence, and implemented by maintaining Israeli military preponderance and ‘stonewalling’ Soviet-aligned Arab radicals. Already tenuous, White House support for State Department mediation efforts dropped further in the wake of the Jordan Crisis.

More critical ‘revisionist’ accounts have queried not whether these ‘lessons’ were drawn, but whether the interpretation of events from which they were drawn is adequate or even accurate. William Quandt, a member of Nixon’s NSC, has posed an influential challenge to the orthodox narrative with his own accounts drawing on insider knowledge. Quandt argues that the Cold War interpretative framework imposed by Washington during and after the events has obscured regional dynamics more relevant to explaining both the outbreak and resolution of the crisis.93 While Washington was quick to attribute both Palestinian guerrilla actions and Syrian intervention to Moscow’s influence, revisionists point instead to intra-Arab politics as primary factors causing both events. Nasser’s acceptance of a US-brokered ceasefire

93 Quandt, Peace Process, pp. 94-95.
in July 1970 was denounced by the fedayeen as an abandonment of the armed struggle against Israel, and triggered their challenge to Hussein’s authority. This was hardly inspired by the Soviet Union, which had little interest in an anti-Nasserite Palestinian movement overthrowing the Hashemite monarchy on its own initiative, and thus potentially outshining Egypt’s radical and anti-Israeli credentials.

The Israeli establishment also has an obvious vested interest in the orthodox reading of the Jordanian civil war, and Rabin’s and similar accounts should be read in this light.\textsuperscript{94} Cockburn and Cockburn emphasise that Nixon had already committed to a $500 million increase in military aid to Israel and accelerated delivery of Phantom jets on 17 September, \textit{before} Syrian intervention. Over the next three years Washington transferred $1,608 million to Israel, more than the previous total aid ($1581 million) since the state’s founding.\textsuperscript{95}

Further, the idea of Soviet ‘puppeteers’ directing Syrian tank columns into Jordan has little evidence to support it.\textsuperscript{96} Garthoff finds that ‘Kissinger and Nixon... greatly exaggerated the Soviet role in stimulating the Syrian decision both to advance and then to withdraw... in fact, the Soviet Union was only marginally and indirectly involved’.\textsuperscript{97} Similarly, Neff cites Talcott Seelye, the diplomat who headed the State Department special task force during the crisis, to the effect that:

\begin{quote}
Moscow’s involvement in fomenting the crisis did not exist to the best of our knowledge. In fact, we had reliable intelligence reports indicating that the Soviets sought to restrain Syria...The White House contention that we stood down the Soviets is pure nonsense.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

In a 2003 interview given to the British scholar Nigel Ashton, Kissinger himself revised the position taken in his memoirs, stating that he now believes the Syrian intervention was 'tolerated but not sponsored' by Moscow.\textsuperscript{99}

\textsuperscript{94} Lenczowski notes ‘the theme of Soviet mischief as the real cause of protracted conflict between Arabs and Israelis had been reappearing with various conversations that Israeli leaders had with the President’ since 1969. Lenczowski, \textit{American Presidents and the Middle East}\textsuperscript{G} Lenczowski, \textit{American Presidents and the Middle East} (Duke University Press, 1990).G Lenczowski, \textit{American Presidents and the Middle East} (Duke University Press, 1990), p. 121.
\textsuperscript{95} Cockburn and Cockburn, \textit{Dangerous Liaison}, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{96} Kaufman’s phrase, Kaufman, \textit{The Arab Middle East and the United States}, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{98} Cited in Neff, \textit{Fallen Pillars: US Policy Towards Palestine and Israel since 1945} (Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut, 1995), p. 175.
In any event, the vulnerability of Syrian armour to Jordanian air power obviated the need for American or Israeli intervention. As Hussein ultimately provided his own military solution, revisionists show that the ‘lessons’ drawn from the Jordan Crisis are based on a set of counterfactuals and presumed outcomes. Israel did not actually intervene, and Washington did not actually commit to providing an anti-Soviet ‘umbrella’.

A more thorough critique from publisher, commentator and speechwriter Adam M. Garfinkle argues that even these contingencies did not exist in the form portrayed by either orthodox or revisionist scholarship. Basing his analysis on a close reading of works by Kissinger, Quandt, and Rabin, and interviews with some key actors, Garfinkle finds no record of any coherent American-Israeli ‘plan’ or Jordanian ‘plea’ for intervention, and that while American and Israeli officials did indeed wrangle over an American ‘umbrella’ for Israeli intervention, Washington proved reluctant to provide this guarantee. Apparently the sole dissenter from the broad consensus among first generation scholars of the Jordan Crisis, Garfinkle stresses that

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\text{Nixon... never “authorised” an Israeli ground attack of any kind... Nor did Nixon ever pledge in unequivocal terms that the United States would protect the Israeli rear flank against possible Soviet or Egyptian intervention, as is universally claimed in the literature.}\]

Quandt and Garfinkle differ on their challenge to the orthodox narrative in two major respects. Quandt argues that the White House firstly, misinterpreted the Jordan Crisis, and secondly, ‘fell into a perceptual trap of their own making’ imposing poorly drawn Cold War lessons onto Middle East policy for the next three years (until finally forced to re-assess by the outbreak of war in October 1973). Garfinkle regards this second point as an exaggeration, arguing that ‘to attribute the failings of US policy

\[\text{99} \text{ Lack of air cover for the Syrian advance was in all likelihood due to personal rivalry between General Hafiz al-Assad, Commander in Chief of the Syrian airforce, and Ba’ath party deputy secretary and defacto Syrian leader Salah Jadid. Assad soon thereafter led a bloodless coup, imprisoned Jadid and President Nureddin al-Atassi, establishing himself as president by mid-November. Ashton, ‘Cold War, Hot War and Civil War’ in Nigel Ashton ed., The Cold War in the Middle East, pp. 189-209.}\]

\[\text{100} \text{ Nigel Ashton, ‘Pulling the Strings: King Hussein’s Role During the Crisis of 1970 in Jordan’, The International History Review, 28/1 (2006), pp. 94-118.}\]

\[\text{101} \text{ This was the term used in American-Israeli crisis discussions. Rabin, Memoirs, pp. 188-189.}\]


\[\text{103} \text{ Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 127.}\]
between October 1970 and the October War, as Quandt seems to do, is stretch
the causal relationship a bit too far’. On the first point he makes a bolder claim
than Quandt, arguing that the crisis was not simply misunderstood but deliberately
misrepresented. In his view, conventional historiography has been taken in by Nixon
and Kissinger’s (mis)use of the Jordanian civil war as a means to promote both their
general strategic approach and their favoured policy line in the Middle East. According to this view, Kissinger’s remark about ‘stereotype Soviet’ posturing, that ‘evidently they hope to inspire the impression after the event of having been a principle factor in resolving the issue’, may contain an element of irony, hypocrisy, or even Freudian projection.

At the heart of this critical debate on America’s role in the Jordan Crisis are questions
about how American planning and American-Israeli cooperation during the crisis
impacted on subsequent US policy in the region. Surprisingly, these questions have
not been taken up by more recent scholarship enjoying access to a wealth of relevant
declassified materials. Instead, more recent contributions from the likes of Daigle and
Chamberlin seem content to rehearse the interpretations of the 1970s, overlooking
Garfinkle’s penetrating contribution. The remainder of this chapter will seek to
redress this situation, examining materials now available to give a robust, archive
based account of the view from Washington during the crisis, arguing that Garfinkle
offers the most reliable analysis.

THE HOSTAGE CRISIS

Taking an international perspective, the crisis can be divided into three phases. The
first phase, the hostage crisis, lasted ten days. The hijackers surrounded by Jordanian
forces at Dawson’s field were themselves trapped in an intensely pressurised

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105 Ibid., 137. Garfinkle claims that ‘post hoc manipulation of the Jordan Crisis by Kissinger and Nixon
was deliberate, skillful, and, by the light of the time, justifiable’, attributing reproduction of these
fabrications in ‘first draft’ history to a narrow source base, ‘inherent scarcity of privileged knowledge
from participants, and interested scholars ‘few in number and in possession of a similar set of
intellectual predilections’.
106 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 600.
situation. Within a week, the PLFP were internally divided, expelled from the PLO’s central committee, their actions denounced by ‘moderate’ and ‘radical’ Arab governments alike, including Iraq and Syria, as well the UN Security Council, including the Soviet Union. Although none of their demands had been met, of several hundred, all but fifty-four hostages with supposed connections to Israel had been released by 13 September. Hussein formed a military government to move against the fedayeen on 15 September, signalling the second phase of the crisis, Jordan’s descent into civil conflict. Syrian tanks invaded and captured Irbid, Jordan’s northern second city on 20 September, escalating the crisis to its final stage of Jordanian/Syrian inter-state conflict, which was resolved with Syria’s defeat and retreat on 22-23 September, allowing Amman’s forces to overwhelm the fedayeen.

US decision makers did not enjoy access to recent, detailed and accurate information during the crisis, relying instead on diplomatic correspondence with friendly powers, particularly Israel and the United Kingdom, and on reports from the US embassy in Amman. The embassy reported ‘a gloomy picture of the security situation in the capital’ on 7 September, the day after the first hijackings, with ‘a near anarchical situation in most areas of the city, with instances of shooting, auto theft, and persons subjected to fedayeen roadblocks’. Neither embassy personnel nor King Hussein enjoyed free movement, with Hussein confined to his palace and external communications cut.107

The WSAG convened on 9 September to discuss contingencies and policy options, agreeing that the possibilities of rescuing hostages through US military action were remote, and should only be considered if a massacre appeared imminent. Even in this scenario, Jordanian forces had already surrounded Dawson’s field and agreed with Washington that if hostages were murdered on mass, Jordanian forces should endeavour to kill rather than capture PLFP militants. Intervention in order to evacuate US citizens in the case of serious fighting in Amman or to militarily ‘prop up’ King

Hussein against the fedayeen, and possibly against Iraqi forces near Amman, were also considered. It was agreed that US forces were better suited for the former task, Israeli forces the latter, since a logistical/military operation of this magnitude in the heart of the Middle East would absorb the entire American strategic reserve, and was ‘out politically’, according to CIA director Richard Helms. Kissinger envisaged the US as providing the ‘missing ingredient’ to the proposed Israeli operation, providing ‘enough of a show of force to keep the Soviets and the Egyptians out’. Sisco thought it unlikely that the Egyptians would intervene, but concurred that the US ‘would have to provide the ring as far as the Russians were concerned’. But for all of this, both men agreed that while outright defeat of Hussein was unacceptable, military rescue by Israel was in any case a political death warrant, which ‘would finish the King’.

Rogers organised a meeting of Arab Chiefs of Mission on 8 September, with the purpose of making a ‘humanitarian appeal’ on behalf of the hostages. Representatives from Kuwait, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, UAR, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, and Algeria were present. The Dean of the Arab Diplomatic Corps, Kuwaiti Ambassador Ghoussein, replied on behalf of the Arab Ambassadors, expressing appreciation that Washington correctly understood ‘that this radical group [was] not controlled by any Arab government or even moderate fedayeen organizations’, and was ‘acting on basis [of] its own ideology and often against the wishes of other Arab governments and peoples’. Rogers explicitly confirmed stressing that his ‘humanitarian appeal’ in no way implied that the US government held Arab governments responsible for acts ‘by group[s] such as PLFP, which the US also fully appreciates is not even under control of more moderate fedayeen’.

Moscow took a similar line, issuing a statement criticising ‘extremist’ elements seeking to escalate the crisis, while praising moderates working to calm the situation. *Pravda* criticised the ‘regrettable hijackings by extremist groups of the Palestinian

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109 Department of State - Certain Diplomatic Posts, Washington, 9 September 1970. NA, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, AV 12 US.
On 9 September, Soviet chargé d’affaires in Washington Yuli Voronstov informed Sisco Moscow had appealed to that ‘Iraq and Jordan to demonstrate farsightedness and reasonable restraint’, expressing ‘concern... that a fratricidal fight among Arabs could cause heavy damage to their own interests, first of all, and secondly to the cause of establishing peace in the Middle East.’ Later that day the UN Security Council unanimously adopted a resolution ‘expressing grave concern at the hijackings, and calling for the release of the passengers’. Kissinger reported to Nixon that ‘the resolution puts both the Soviets and the Syrians squarely behind the appeal for the release of the hostages’. By 13 September, as hostage releases were being organised, Rogers reported that there was ‘a split among the fedayeen which created confusion on the ground’, as ‘[c]learly there was no one in charge on the fedayeen side’.

These exchanges demonstrate that from the beginning of the crisis, there was an agreed understanding across the US foreign establishment that the hijackings were undertaken by independent militants, and not sponsored by Moscow or any Arab government. Nor was the immediate Soviet reaction to attempt to exploit the crisis in Jordan in order to generate direct conflict between the Hashemite regime and neighbouring governments.

The international atmosphere was tense during the first days of the Jordan crisis, but not one of superpower confrontation. Rather, Washington and Moscow demonstrated concern that the intra-Jordanian crisis could spill over into a regional and potentially even wider conflict, situations they both sought to avoid. While the WSAG considered contingency plans for evacuation of US citizens by US forces, military support of King Hussein by Israel against the fedayeen and perhaps Iraqi forces, and US protection for Israel against the Soviets in this eventuality, there is no evidence to suggest that American policymakers believed that this first phase of the crisis had been somehow incited, conspired or engineered by any of these powers.

111 Department of State - Certain Diplomatic Posts, 10 September 1970. NA, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 23 JORDAN. FRUS XXIV, Doc. 220.
On 15 September, Hussein advised the US embassy that he was ‘moving tonight to an all or nothing showdown with the fedayeen in order to establish “law and order”’.

Having waited three days, Hussein was ‘determined now to compel fedayeen to implement the ceasefire agreement and remove their forces from Amman’. The crisis was moving into its second phase, in effect a civil war between the Hashemite regime and the rebellious fedayeen. For now, ‘King Hussein urgently requested that the US take steps to assure the Israelis do nothing to prejudice or aggravate the situation’, while stressing that ‘depending on fedayeen reactions, he may need to call for US and Israeli assistance’.

Kissinger warned that if the fedayeen were able to force a weak civilian government on Hussein, the ‘[p]rospects for a Palestinian settlement soon on terms that Israel would consider would drop to almost zero’, and ‘Nasser’s ability to negotiate a settlement with Israel and Soviet ability to support a negotiated settlement would diminish sharply’. Under these circumstances, Israel would likely at ‘some point feel compelled to seize more territory in Jordan’.

The WSAG convened to discuss the situation early in the morning of 17 September, unanimously agreeing that ‘victory for Hussein is essential’. Helms emphasised however, that ‘if the US intervenes, we must make it crystal clear that it is against Iraq and Syria, not the fedayeen. The fedayeen are the darling of the Arab world’, and as such the US should avoid a situation of defending Israel against the fedayeen. Kissinger saw this as a further argument for using Israeli forces, but he struggled to sway Nixon, who had a ‘strong feeling’ that if the Iraqis and/or Syrians moved, US

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114 Ibid.
airpower should ‘knock the bejesus out of them’. Convinced that Hussein’s action was ‘a result of our encouraging him’ Nixon felt that he ‘ought to be backed up’.\textsuperscript{117}

American and Jordanian confidence grew as Hussein’s forces went on the offensive against fedayeen positions in Amman and in the west and south of Jordan. By 17 September the CIA reported to the WSAG that Hussein had secured Zarqa and most of Amman, with ‘no indication of Iraqi or Syrian movements’. Rabin agreed that ‘thinks things look good’.\textsuperscript{118} An ebullient Nixon ordered the US naval presence in the Mediterranean reinforced, and, through a briefing to Chicago newspaper editors, made an indirect public statement to the effect that

If the Syrians or Iraqis intervene in Jordan there are only two of us to stop them, the Israelis or us. It will be preferable for us to do it. The Russians are going to pay dearly for moving the missiles in. The Israelis are going to get five times as they would have if the missiles would not have moved. We are embarking on a tougher policy in the Middle East. The Sixth Fleet is going to be beefed up... We will intervene if the situation is such that we will make a difference.\textsuperscript{119}

Although he made clear that if intervention became necessary, he planned to use American forces, Nixon was in earnest about increased aid to Israel. That evening he authorised an increase $500 million in aid to Israel, with accelerated delivery of Phantom jets. On the next day, he conveyed the news, along with promises to give further Israeli arms requests ‘sympathetic attention’, personally to Golda Meir, who was in New York City in a personal capacity on a fund raising visit.\textsuperscript{120}

The Jordan situation was discussed only very briefly, with the premiers agreeing not to act ‘precipitously’ by intervening. Nixon stressed that ‘it was important that both the U.S. and Israel do nothing which would make King Hussein’s position in the Arab world’, with Meir agreeing that she ‘preferred to have the King solve the problem himself’. Indeed, Meir was more concerned with the Suez Canal situation, vowing that

\textsuperscript{117} Telecon Nixon-Kissinger, 17 September 1970, 9 am, Kissinger Telephone Conversations (henceforth HAK Telecons), Box 30, Chronological Files. FRUS XXIV Doc. 256.


\textsuperscript{119} TeleCon Kissinger - Director of the United States Information Agency (Shakespeare) NPLM, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Box 30, Chronological Files. FRUS XXIV, Doc. 261.

\textsuperscript{120} Memcon, Nixon – Meir, Sisco, Haig, Rabin, Political Advisor Simcha Dinitz, 18 September 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134, Folder Rabin/Kissinger 1969-1970, Vol. 1 (1 of 1)
if the Egyptians and the Soviets start to move their artillery forward under the umbrella of their new missile defense Israel would move – emphasising she wanted the President to be completely appraised of Israel’s intentions in this regard.  

Privately, American officials were sceptical of the prospect ‘of Iraqi and/or Syrian military intervention, which we consider unlikely’. This assessment was shared by the ‘Israelis, who are watching this situation very closely, believe for the present there will be no Iraqi intervention nor do they think there will be intervention by Egypt and Syria’.  

Moreover, far from countering Soviet moves in the immediate crisis, Washington perceived that in terms of the struggle between Hussein and the radical fedayeen, Washington, the Israelis, the Soviets, and even Nasser all wanted the same outcome, for Hussein to emerge victorious. The NSC reasoned that, from Moscow’s perspective,  

The King appears to be a preferable alternative to a radical guerrilla regime, which the Soviets have treated with some disdain... The probable chaos resulting from the King’s overthrow and the psychological impetus that would give to the Syrian and Iraqi regimes cannot be something the Soviets would watch with much satisfaction or equanimity.  

It was judged that in the case of US intervention against the fedayeen, 

No Soviet military action would be likely, especially if the US intervention was quick and effective; a more prolonged air intervention might however produce some Soviet diplomatic actions, say in the UN, to castigate and condemn... On balance, it seems that the Soviets would probably conclude they had little choice but to let the US get away with a limited intervention, as long as Israeli forces were not involved in attacks against the forces of Arab governments.  

Soviet diplomacy confirmed this assessment on 18 September when Voronstov ‘called urgently’ on the State Department to convey that Moscow was ‘concerned... about the sharp aggravation of the situation in Jordan’. The Soviets had already urged Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria to ‘take measures dictated by the situation in order at the earliest point to put an end to the fratricidal clashes in Jordan and to prevent the outbreak of civil war’ and urged Washington to ‘use its influence with the Govt of Israel in order to preclude the possibility of Israel exploiting this situation’. The NSC reported that ‘if Voronstov’s statement can be accepted at face value, the Soviets are

121 Ibid.  
122 Telegram Department of State - Embassy in Iran, 19 September 1970, RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 23–9 JORDAN. FRUS XXIV Doc. 271.  
123 Memo Kissinger – Nixon Washington, 18 September. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 615, CF/ME, Jordan, Vol. V. FRUS XXVI Doc. 263  
125 Department of State - Embassy in the Soviet Union, 18 September, 1970. RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL 23–9 JORDAN. FRUS XXIV, Doc. 266.
using at least some of their political capital to restrain Iraq, Syria, and the UAR, and are virtually appealing to us for restraint’.  

Nasser was also reportedly ‘alarmed’, and believed to hold basically the same position as the Soviets. Helms even complained of being ‘a little disappointed that Nasser has not made any statement in support of Hussein’, but Kissinger argued that Washington should ‘go easy with Egyptians’. On 19 September he reported to Nixon that ‘Soviet and Egyptian diplomatic efforts seem directed at achieving a ceasefire in Jordan’ and that the Soviets had indicated their belief that ‘all states both within and outside the region should avoid intervention and seek to bring an end to the fighting. The USSR made this point to Baghdad, Damascus, Cairo, and the fedayeen’.  

These exchanges strongly refute later claims from Nixon and Kissinger that they had ‘stood down the Soviets’, demonstrating instead that Moscow and Washington were actually in de facto alignment on policy and preferred outcomes with regard to the Jordan crisis. To summarise the view from Washington during the Amman-fedayeen struggle during 15-18 September: Hussein was achieving the military victory deemed essential; the Soviets and Egyptians basically welcomed this; it was unlikely that Syria or Iraq would dare to intervene; but if they did they could be repelled without significant danger of Soviet or Egyptian retaliation. The main disagreement was actually not between Washington and Moscow or Washington and Cairo, but between Nixon, who preferred to use American airpower if intervention was necessary, and his staff who counselled relying on Israeli airpower. But for their part, while glad of American military aid denied when confronting the Soviets but now provided while attention was elsewhere, the Israelis were not at this stage interested in getting involved in Jordan, but were monitoring the situation along the Suez Canal very carefully and ready to strike there in the case of Egyptian movement.

**Syrian Intervention**

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Syrian invasion of northern Jordan on 20 September brought the crisis to climax. That afternoon, Washington received word that Jordanian forces had clashed with at least three Syrian tank brigades advancing on Irbid, Jordan’s second largest city to the north of the country. The Egyptian foreign ministry had hastened to inform the US that did Cairo ‘not agree with’ Syrian intervention, and King Hussein’s own air force had attacked the tank columns while daylight permitted, but he now requested that the US ‘take action’, although there was uncertainty as to what precisely the king had in mind. While Hussein had requested air strikes from ‘any quarter’, ground intervention was another matter. Ashton shows that Hussein drew a ‘red line’ under Israeli ground intervention in Jordan, for fear that, once they arrived, Israeli forces might not readily leave, could clash with his own troops, or potentially de-legitimise the Jordanian King as an Arab ruler.

Hussein’s plea opened a new phase of feverish American diplomatic activity. Officials in Washington were initially unclear as to whether Syrian forces had actually entered Jordan and as to what exactly was requested of the US. They set about trying to clarify matters and to develop policy options, focusing on whether intervention by Israel was appropriate, and in what form. While Israeli intervention was considered more logistically and militarily feasible, Brown warned that this risked rallying the Arabs against a common enemy, transforming the situation from Amman confronting the fedayeen and Damascus to an Arabs versus Israelis scenario, and could also provoke a Soviet reaction.

While Kissinger and Rabin later painted a picture of close collaboration, what actually emerged between the two powers at the climax of the Jordan crisis was a cautious and cagey dialogue of seeking assurances and testing intentions. On the evening of 20 September, Sisco counselled that the WSAG ‘should look at the assumption we have been making that the Israeli may jump into this fast. They don’t seem at all anxious...

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129 Memo Kissinger - Nixon, 20 September 1970, 6:30 pm. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–077, WSAG, WSAG Meeting Middle East 9/20/70. FRUS XXIV Doc. 280.

130 Ashton, ‘Cold War, Hot War and Civil War’.

The Israelis want us to intervene’. Kissinger concurred, believing that the Israelis might not ‘mind if Hussein should topple. They would have no more West Bank problem’.\textsuperscript{132}

Perceived American and Israeli interests at this juncture were by no means identical, or even necessarily compatible. Kissinger warned that ‘that it is damned hard to get them out once they are in’, while Nixon feared that ‘[t]hey would just occupy some more territory’.\textsuperscript{133} These were shrewed assessments. Ashton shows that, apparently unbeknownst to Washington, debate among Israeli policy-makers and military commanders focused on whether Israel should simply repel the Syrians from Jordan, or whether they might take and hold the town of Irbid. The British remained sceptical of the Israeli commitment to preserving the Hashemite dynasty, suspecting that instead Jerusalem might move ‘to ensure that if Jordan is carved up, Israel gets a slice’ a view supported by Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Dayan’s remark that ‘if we go into Irbid, it will be difficult for us to just return it’.\textsuperscript{134}

While sceptical of Israeli intentions, Kissinger passed Hussein’s plea for assistance on to Rabin, requesting Israeli reconnaissance for verification of the Syrian move. If Israel found that Syria had indeed invaded Jordan, Washington ‘would look favourably’ on Israeli intervention, and would ‘make good any material problems’ incurred. The White House was also ‘cognizant of the fact that we would have to hold the situation under control vis-a-vis the Soviets’.\textsuperscript{135} These assurances did not satisfy Jerusalem, which, on 21 September, transmitted a series of seven ‘considerations’, or questions on US and Jordanian policy in the case Israeli intervention to which Israel sought answers before acting. These questions were largely focused on US policy, requesting to know whether the US would publicly and formally request Israeli intervention, how the US would guarantee against Soviet intervention, whether the US would vote in support of Israeli action at the UN Security Council, and if the US and Israel would


\textsuperscript{133} Telecon Nixon – Kissinger, undated. Kissinger Telephone Conversations (henceforth HAK Telecons), Box 30, Chronological Files. FRUS XXIV, Doc. 286.

\textsuperscript{134} Quotation Ashton, ‘Pulling the Strings’, p. 114.

\textsuperscript{135} TeleCon Kissinger – Rabin, 20 September 1970, 10:35 pm. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 30, Chronological Files. FRUS XXIV Doc. 287.
exchange memoranda of understanding on bilateral undertakings. Israel also presented a ‘requirement that the King know what they were doing and be in full agreement with it’, insisting ‘on establishing liaison with the Jordanian government before taking any military action’. Although the Israelis had attempted to make ‘it clear... that they have no territorial designs in Jordan’, Washington retained a strong degree of scepticism about this, as Israel insisted on striking in Jordan rather than Syria, and refused to rule out ground action.136 Rabin conveyed the official position that the ‘Government of Israel is prepared, in principle, to carry out military operations against Syrian forces in Jordan’, but warning that ‘operations would consist initially of air strikes, but if the situation requires it ground operations will also be conducted... military operations must be decisive’.137

The State Department replied coolly to Israel’s seven questions on 22 September. Washington refused to approach Israel formally, preferring to keep contacts secret. On the question of coordination and communication with Jordan, Washington did ‘not know how to answer’, emphasising that Hussein had made clear ground operations in Jordan were out, but that he had requested air strikes. Washington was non-committal on Israel’s enquiry into how the US would act to prevent Soviet involvement, drawing attention to previous moves of the sixth fleet and non-specified ‘other readiness measures’ and stressing that the US would ‘continue to make clear to the Soviets our support for Israel’s security and integrity and its right to live within defensive borders’, arguing that these measures ‘clearly imply a decision not permit Soviet intervention against Israel in the conditions under discussion’. However, this was immediately followed with the disclaimer that ‘specific measures the US may take to prevent Soviet intervention... would depend on the circumstances and the situation that exists at the time’. The State Department was similarly non-committal on how the US might vote on any UN resolutions on Israel’s action, and rejected Israel’s request for written commitments, arguing ‘that the oral answers to the above

questions are clear and should not be in the form of secret memorandum of understanding’. Israel was not satisfied with these replies, responding on 23 September with ‘a request for more assurance and clarification’. Indeed, American response to Israel’s questions were so weak and evasive that Kissinger later recommended issuing an apology, for fear of otherwise further souring relations.

This was as far American-Israeli cooperation progressed during the Jordan crisis. Reports that Syrian forces were routed, having suffered heavy damage from Jordanian airstrikes, and that the fedayeen had accepted a ceasefire agreement on Hussein’s terms arrived on 22 September. Helms reported to WSAG that this meant ‘victory for the King’ on the morning of 23 September. From this point on, the main American preoccupation was on restraining Israel, particularly with Israel attempting to manipulate recent exchanges to claim American endorsement for their own agenda, which might include efforts to annex Jordanian territory. Nixon warned that ‘the situation had changed and that the US does not want the Israelis to move unilaterally’, noting that Israeli interests differed from US interests and the US ‘did not want to be drawn into conflict as a result of Israeli initiatives’.

CONCLUSION

Dominant interpretations of Nixon administration involvement with the War of Attrition and the Jordan Crisis in 1970 tend to present neat cause and effect accounts, or a set of ‘learning’ outcomes. These accounts hold that, before the Jordan crisis, Kissinger and Rogers each had the ear of President Nixon, who vacillated between

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139 Memo Kissinger – Nixon, 23 September 1970. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–076, WSAG Meetings, WSAG Meeting Middle East 9/23/70. FRUS XXIV Doc. 316.
140 NSC Files, Box 336, Subject Files, Items to Discuss with the President, 9 September – December 1970. FRUS XXIV Doc. 327.
141 WSAG Minutes, SUBJECT Middle East, Washington, 23 September 1970, 8:10-8:40 am. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box H–114, WSAG, WSAG Minutes (Originals) 1969 and 1970. FRUS XXIV Doc. 317.
their recommended approaches to the Arab-Israel conflict, but during the crisis, Israeli assistance in thwarting real or imagined Soviet efforts to exacerbate and exploit the situation finally made up Nixon’s mind. The President stuck to a pro-Israel policy thereafter, ensuring that Middle East diplomacy remained stalled for another three years, until the next round of open Arab-Israeli warfare broke the deadlock once again. This appears as a historical tragedy, as the crisis proved to be one too many for Nasser, who suffered a fatal heart attack days later. His successor, Anwar Sadat proved to be a conciliatory leader, keen to repair relations with the US and to make peace with Israel. But just as a new day might have dawned, America lost faith in moderation, and took another three years and terrible war to regain it.

This chapter and the previous chapter have shown that such accounts are largely mythical. The spectacular events of the Jordan crisis, and perhaps a predilection for crisis-oriented narratives in international history as a discipline, seem to have overshadowed much of the diplomacy which preceded these events. While Rogers did make a genuine effort to promote his understanding of an ‘evenhanded’ solution in 1969, this was actively undermined by the White House. This first section of this chapter shows how Moscow’s formal protest against IAF deep penetration bombing in the Nile Delta was summarily dismissed by the White House, before due consideration by the NSC. When it transpired that their complacency had been misplaced, and the Soviets were ready to act, Nixon reacted with impulsively, baulking at confrontation, but lashing out with covert action and rejecting the ceasefire offered in March. Whatever opportunity to end the War of Attrition existed in early 1970 was eclipsed by Cold War considerations.

The second section shows how, with all sides deeply apprehensive about the course of the Egypt-Israel War of Attrition, and Nixon also beleaguered and exhausted by the controversy surrounding the US incursion into Cambodia, Rogers saw his opportunity to promote a ceasefire. But the ‘Rogers Initiative’ was authorised by Nixon and accepted by signatories precisely on the grounds that it did not refer to or require parties to agree on any framework for overall settlement. The ceasefire agreement, representing the zenith of Rogers’ achievement in the Middle East, and arguably the extremity of Nixon’s indulgence of ‘evenhandedness’, was almost apolitical, merely
calling for a military standstill and unspecified ‘talks’ under Jarring, with neither condition actually adhered to in the event.

The third section shows that the consensus on the impact of the Jordan Crisis on subsequent Nixon administration Middle East policy is based on a series of factual errors about the events of the crisis itself and the view from Washington at the time. The White House never seriously suspected that the Soviets either fomented the crisis or instigated Syrian intervention into Jordan. Indeed, in supporting the UN vote condemning the hostage taking, calling for restored order, and discouraging outside intervention, the superpowers achieved *de facto* collaboration in their responses.

Further, evidence now available shows that Garfinkle, writing over thirty years ago, while mistaken in claiming that Hussein made no plea for outside intervention, was correct to suspect the supposed American-Israeli plan for coordinated action was ‘apocryphal’. Washington and Jerusalem never agreed on a coordinated response, and, in any case, their involvement was ultimately peripheral. The defeat of their adversaries, the fedayeen and Syrians, simply landed as a windfall, rather than as a result of their policies.

During a celebratory NSC meeting in the immediate aftermath of the crisis, senior Administration members, including Rogers and Nixon himself, revelled in the domestic political capital they had managed to fabricate from the situation. Events in Jordan and a ‘war scare’ in the United States had provided the ‘ideal time’ to expand US military aid programmes not just in the Middle East, but around the world, as Secretary Rogers stated that announcing the resumption of military aid to Greece, the Spanish base agreement, and our South African aircraft sales were all moved gracefully under the mantle of the Middle Eastern crisis. The President agreed that this was an excellent tactic and suggested that in the future it might be well to hold controversial decisions of this type and to announce them during similar periods of crisis.143

The total military aid provided to Israel in 1970, some $545m, was a twenty fold increase on the previous year, and more than double what Israel had received from the United States since its founding in 1948.144 But insofar as it represented a direct

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response to events, Nixon’s decision on increasing military aid to Israel was prompted by Soviet intervention in the War of Attrition in spring 1970 and Egyptian ceasefire violations in August, rather outside intervention in the Jordan crisis in September, which had not yet occurred and was considered unlikely at the time the decision was taken. Rather than any sort of turning point, the Jordan crisis simply provided the Nixon administration with an opportunity to retaliate after being caught flat-footed earlier in the year, and as such represented a return to and escalation of his established policy line of Cold War jockeying and arms racing.

http://www.hcs.harvard.edu/~hireview/content.php?type=article&issue=spring04/&name=feith
accessed 22 August, 2014.
CHAPTER 3.
CHASING PHANTOMS? THE FAILED INTERIM AGREEMENT, 1971

INTRODUCTION

Anwar Sadat, the incoming Egyptian president in late September 1970, adopted a very different approach to his country’s dispute with Israel, and to relations both with other Arab powers and with the superpowers than that of his predecessor, Gamal Abdul Nasser. In February 1971 he surprised the world by publicly announcing a ‘peace initiative’ proposing an ‘interim settlement’ with Israel premised on withdrawal of Israeli forces from the vicinity of the Suez Canal in exchange for reopening of the Canal to international shipping, including Israeli ships. Sadat also sought to cultivate better relations with Washington from the beginning of his tenure. Receiving US Secretary of State William Rogers and his assistant Joseph Sisco in May 1971, he surprised the Americans by expressing a strong ‘Egypt first’ approach in his negotiating approach, focused on recovering Egyptian territory rather than resolving the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, and demonstrating little sense of responsibility towards the Palestinians or other Arabs. Sadat was also keen to rid Egypt of the Soviet presence and to move from Soviet to American orbit, hoping to restore US-Egypt diplomatic relations once an interim agreement with Israel was reached.

Although Sadat’s overtures failed to produce diplomatic movement in 1971, the historiography of the period is unusual in that it is permeated with counterfactual questions of whether opportunities for a partial settlement and ‘peace agreement’ between Egypt and Israel were lost in the spring and summer of 1971, and, if these opportunities had been realised, could the October War of 1973 been averted? Largely out of favour with more recent scholarship, Anglophone and Israeli so-called ‘orthodox’ accounts dismiss the argument that had Israel responded more positively to Sadat’s overtures, war could have been averted, emphasising Sadat’s bellicose rhetoric in late 1971, and meticulous preparations for war during 1972-1973. By contrast, ‘revisionist’ historians emphasise that the two key elements which Cairo brought to the post-war peace process – willingness to sign a peace agreement with
Israel and to align Egypt with the United States, effectively defecting from east to west Cold War camps – were evident from the earliest days of Sadat’s presidency, but that Israel and the United States failed to effectively engage. In this view, it was not Sadat’s bent towards war or his failure to recognise situational realities that stalled progress, but rather status quo Israeli and American policymakers who perpetuated diplomatic deadlock. The literature is politicised to a considerable extent, with debate tending to take on the form of a triangular blame game identifying three major culprits: Anwar Sadat’s bellicose Egypt, Golda Meir’s intransigent Israel, or Richard Nixon’s White House, with its byzantine and biased foreign policy apparatus. Contributors tend to attack the policies of one of these actors, while defending the diplomacy of one or both of the others.¹

A second major theme in the literature is the supposed closeness or ‘honeymoon’ of US-Israel relations between September 1970 and October 1973, following the two powers coming together in a strategic partnership during the Jordan crisis.² The previous chapter demonstrated that the extent of US-Israel coordination during the crisis has been exaggerated. This chapter shows that accounts of the supposed post-Jordan renaissance in US-Israel relations overlooks the intensive wrangling over two critical issues which had come to the fore during the War of Attrition, and which dominated bilateral relations throughout 1971, generating periodic and sometimes

¹ Mordechai Gazit offers a trenchant restatement of the orthodox case, arguing that ‘There was simply no chance that Golda Meir’s response of 9 February 1971 to Egypt’s ‘new initiative’ would receive a positive welcome from Sadat... There was no guarantee that it would result in an Israeli commitment to total withdrawal from all the Arab territories and recognition of the rights of the Palestinians. As long as Israel refused to accept these two pre-conditions, no negotiations were possible. Peace would have to wait. Gazit, 'Egypt and Israel-Was There a Peace Opportunity Missed in 1971?’, Journal of Contemporary History, 32/1 (1997), pp. 97-115. Daigle and Yaqub instead lay blame with Meir and Nixon respectively. Yaqub argues that 'We will never know whether... a limited agreement over the Sinai might have catalyzed a broader settlement. But we can point to the circumstances that made this question unanswerable, chief among them a president’s [Nixon’s] failure to support the policies of his own government’ (i.e. William Rogers State Department). Yaqub, ‘The Politics of Stalemate: The Nixon administration and the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1969-1973’. By contrast, Daigle sees Meir as the main culprit, asserting that ‘there can be no doubt that Prime Minister Meir’s refusal to work with Egypt during the summer of 1971 effectively quashed the idea of interim agreement’. Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p. 190. Shlaim notes that ‘Israel made greater concessions in return for a military disengagement with Egypt in 1974 than those it had refused to make in return for an interim agreement in the first half of 1971. It is reasonable to suppose, though this can never be proved, that had Israel made those concessions in 1971, the Yom Kippur War could have been averted’. Shlaim, The Iron Wall, p. 322.

intense friction. While the Nixon administration sought to prioritise establishing a framework within which Israel would pursue a peace agreement with Egypt, Israel sought, as advance prior commitments, guaranteed American backing for its negotiation position, and, above all, long term financial and military support, with central emphasis on establishing an ongoing supply of Phantom F4 fighter bombers. Until its military aid requests were satisfied, the Meir government resisted movement on a negotiated settlement.

This chapter reassesses the international context in which Sadat’s peace initiative was floated, examining the first eighteen months of his presidency, from autumn 1970 to spring 1972. Under the prevailing circumstances in which the Arab-Israel conflict intersected with the Cold War, Egypt was not seeking just to trade concessions directly with the United States \textit{per se}, but with Israel indirectly through the United States. Israel, however, was satisfied with the status quo, and more interested in seeing any concessions rewarded by America rather than Egypt, in the form of financial and military aid. This chapter therefore argues that bilateral US-Israel relations formed a prior context to Egypt-Israel diplomacy, as American-Israeli agreement on negotiating terms suitable compensation was a perquisite of any Israel negotiating with Egypt. Specifically, until the US met demands for a massive increase in Israeli airpower, including 54 F4 Phantoms and over one hundred other aircraft, and agreed to formally drop the Rogers Plan as a basis for settlement, Israel refused to consider any compromise or interim settlement with Egypt.

This chapter challenges the accepted view that the Nixon administration necessarily saw Israel as a ‘strategic asset’ after September 1970, arguing that tensions in bilateral relations, which were a source of vocal frustration for Nixon himself, prevented developing the opportunities presented by Sadat for relaxation of regional tensions and improving the US regional position. US-Israel relations between late 1970 and early 1972 can be read as a struggle to establish an order of policy priorities, and until this contestation was resolved (as it was eventually, in Israel’s favour in December 1971), movement towards a peace agreement with Egypt was effectively impossible.
A Post Nasser Middle East, Autumn 1970

The Middle East situation as viewed from Washington had improved markedly as the dust settled in the aftermath of the Jordan crisis. The initially shaky Egypt-Israel ceasefire agreement signed on 6 August 1970 had stabilised over two months, despite violations on both sides, and Israel’s withdrawal from scheduled talks under the auspices of UN Special Envoy to the Middle East, Ambassador Gunnar Jarring. King Hussein’s decisive defeat of the fedayeen had scattered the most radical anti-Israel militants and greatly strengthened a key American ally in the region, and the sudden death of Nasser, viewed by Jerusalem as incorrigible and incapable of negotiating peace, seemed to open new possibilities.

Nasser’s replacement, Vice-President Anwar Sadat, was generally viewed as a political lightweight, who had inherited the presidency more through subservience than through any other particular talents, ideas, or charisma. Donald Bergus, US Charge d’affairs in Cairo, reported that Nasser’s replacement, Vice-President Anwar Sadat, was ‘a bit of a buffoon, a bit of a clown’, and most likely a transitional figure, an assessment was widely shared. But few contemporary observers realised that while Sadat lacked Nasser’s personal standing, nor did he share all the burdens and limitations which his predecessor had accumulated. For Nasser, above any other, the defeats and humiliations of June 1967 had been personal as well as political, and the obsession with reversing the outcomes of the June War had left him open to compromises of Egyptian sovereignty before the attractions of Soviet military power. Even when Nasser belated considered more pragmatic accommodation with his enemies, he found himself a prisoner of his own anti-imperialist and radical rhetoric,

3 Ambassador Donald C. Bergus Interviewed by Lillian P. Mullin, 24 January 1991. The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Copyright 1998 ADST Available at http://www.adst.org/OH%20TOCs/Bergus%20Donald%20C_toc.pdf accessed 9 March 2013. Virtually all works on the topic repeat this assessment. Examples include Heikal, Sphinx and Commissar, p. 217; Rabin, Memoirs, p. 149; Rubinstein, Red Star on the Nile, p. 217; Shlaim, The Iron Wall, p. 299; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 87; Yaqub, ‘The Politics of Stalemate’. Introductions to Sadat’s personality and pre-presidential career are to be found in many books in this area, including these texts, and for this reason are omitted here.
unable to work with the United States or ‘reactionary’ Arab regimes, and under pressure from outflanking Arab radicals in Algeria, Libya, Syria, and Palestine.  

Relatively free of anti-American baggage, Sadat was better positioned to pursue a political solution through rapprochement with the United States. His diplomatic offensive towards Washington, distancing himself from Nasserism, began even before his predecessor’s body was interred. Sadat led Nasser’s funeral procession but excused himself from the burial service on pretext of heat stroke, instead summoning the head of the American delegation, United States Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare Elliot Richardson, to an immediate private audience in a quiet hospital room, where, in Richardson’s words, ‘he conveyed a clear feeling that he wanted to take advantage of this opportunity to turn a new page in the relationship between our countries’.

Sadat showed no inclination to comply with Israel’s demand that Egypt remove missile batteries installed around the Suez Canal zone in violation of the ceasefire agreement as a precondition of reviving the Jarring talks. But as the ceasefire expiry date drew close in early November, he did agree to a ninety-day extension, and attempted to use this time to court the Nixon administration, using Bergus and contacts between Rogers and Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad to re-iterate his message of friendship towards the United States, and to attempt to distance Cairo from Moscow in American eyes. Writing personally to Nixon on 23 November, Sadat stressed that Egypt was ‘not within the Soviet sphere of influence... If you wish to talk about anything concerning Egypt, the venue will be in Cairo and the talks will be with me, not with any other party’.

The general tone and atmosphere in US-Israel relations had also improved markedly in the wake of the Jordan crisis. Israeli outrage at the State Department’s questioning of Egyptian-Soviet ceasefire violations in August was replaced by appreciation of

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4 James, Nasser at War, p. 169.
6 Quandt, Peace Process, pp. 87-89.
7 Daigle, The Limits of Detente, p. 162.
‘firmness’ on the matter post-Jordan. Returning from a personal visit to the US, Meir announced with satisfaction not just that Rogers had ‘told [Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei] Gromyko that he does not accept Soviet-Egyptian claims that they are innocent of ceasefire violations’, but also that in addition to an immediate military aid packaged valued at some $90, the White House had sought congressional approval for supplemental appropriation of $500m covering arms expenses in the coming fiscal year.8 Two weeks later, Americans representatives demonstrated further concrete support for Israel’s position by walking out of the Four Power talks in response to UN General Assembly adoption of resolution 2628, calling for an unconditional return to the Jarring talks. In early November, the American embassy in Tel Aviv reported that news of the aid package clearing Congress ‘went the rest of the way in building Israeli confidence in the US’, and that while

Israel adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward the UAR and the Middle East conflict in general... With the Arab capitals in flux, firm American support, and casualties at their borders at the lowest point in three years, Israelis felt an unusual sense of security, and were able to turn their attention to domestic problems.9

But generally improved bilateral relations notwithstanding, Washington and Jerusalem remained at odds on how the best to pursue the elusive goal of a negotiated peace agreement with Egypt. Washington was anxious for Israel to engage in the Jarring talks, fearing that in the absence of negotiations another outbreak of conflict was likely, creating a risk of superpower confrontation. But before agreeing to talks, Jerusalem insisted that the United States provide prior guarantees both of support for its negotiating position and of an ongoing supply of Phantom F4 and Skyhawk A4 aircraft, and that Egypt rectify its ceasefire violations by removing surface to air (SAM) missile installations around the Suez Canal. The United States and the international community at large considered this latter requirement to be unrealistic.10

With the $500m in American assistance in hand by November 1970, largely earmarked for military procurement, Israel placed a purchase request for fifty-four Phantom F-4s, one hundred Skyhawk A-4Ms, and twenty Skyhawk A-4Es, all to be delivered over the

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10 Herzog, The War of Atonement, p. 10
coming year.\textsuperscript{11} This represented a massive expansion in Israeli airpower, which Washington regarded as militarily unnecessary and potentially damaging to negotiations. Approving the request was certain to provoke Arab opinion and to damage American credibility as an honest broker, and also risked encouraging Israeli inflexibility in negotiations. Citing limitations to production capacity and America’s own military needs, US officials avoided commitment to these figures, instead offering short term contracts for more limited numbers of planes, but repeatedly stressed President Nixon’s personal commitment to Israel’s security and his policy of maintaining a regional military balance favourable to Israel.\textsuperscript{12} Rogers entreated Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban that it was obvious our having embarked on a military assistance program on this scale entailed a continuous obligation for an ongoing program of replacements etc., and it was time the Israelis appreciated this situation without insisting on specifics as to the future before taking a political step.\textsuperscript{13}

November and December 1970 marked a period of intensive bilateral engagement, as the US attempted to coax Israel back to the Jarring talks during a series of high-level meetings.\textsuperscript{14} Israel continued to insist on a guaranteed ongoing supply of warplanes and full American support for its negotiating position but indicating a softening of its position on Egyptian military pullback in mid-November, for the first time invoking the American formulation of ‘creating appropriate conditions’ for the resumption of the Jarring talks. Privately, Ambassador to Washington Yitzhak Rabin offered Assistant Secretary of State for Near and Middle Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco his personal

\textsuperscript{11} The purchase request, including aircraft figures are discussed in Proposed Oral Message to Prime Minister Meir Memo Executive Secretary Theodore Eliot Jr. - Kissinger 14 December 1970. Telegram drafted by Roy Atherton, approved by Rogers, Laird, Eliot 14 December 1970. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973 Political and Defense, Box 2385 POL 7 ISR to POL 7 ISR, Folder POL 1 1 70 ISR US.


\textsuperscript{13} Telegram Rogers – Embassy Tel Aviv, Secretary – Eban Meeting, 18 November 1970, NPLM, HS/ME, Box 1159 ME Settlement Jarring Jan 20 1969 - Dec 31 1970.

prediction that ‘Israel would return to negotiations’ premised on ‘assurance of continued military and financial support and a promise not to press Israel, once negotiations are resumed, on the basis of our October and December 1969 formulations’.\footnote{Ibid.}

American representatives repeatedly offered such these assurances throughout November, which were reiterated in a letter from Nixon to Meir on 3 December. Nixon’s argued that the time was ripe to begin the Jarring talks, as there had ‘been profound changes in the Arab world since September, whose implications can be tested only through negotiations’, and ‘a move now by Israel into negotiation would be from a position of strength and would be clearly perceived as such by others’. Nixon stressed that to ‘maintain that position of strength as the negotiating process goes forward’, Washington would be ‘responsive’ to Israel’s needs and ‘continue to take into full account Soviet support – military, economic, and political – of the UAR’. He affirmed that ‘the principle of a continuing military supply relationship between our two governments has been established’ and ‘that the question is not whether we will maintain the supply, but simply how to do so most rationally and effectively’.\footnote{Letter Nixon - Meir, 3 December 1970. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970 – 1973, Box 2385, Folder POL 1/1/70 ISR-US.}

Turning to the substance of negotiations, Nixon re-invoked his 23 July letter to Meir, re-affirming that the final border between Egypt and Israel must be directly negotiated between them. Washington would not press Israel for a return to 1967 borders, or ‘to accept a refuge solution that would alter fundamentally the Jewish character of the State of Israel or jeopardise your security’. Nixon was unequivocal that the US would

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adhere strictly to and firmly to the fundamental principle that there must be a peace agreement in which each of the parties undertake reciprocal obligations to the other, and that no Israeli soldier should be withdrawn from the occupied territories until a binding contractual peace agreement satisfactory to you has been achieved.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

The Israelis remained unconvinced. Defence Minister Moshe Dayan visited Nixon personally on 11 December, wasting no time in stressing ‘that it was conceivable that in the spring the Egyptians would be reinforced by Soviet aircraft and would feel
capable of crossing the canal’, warning that he ‘wanted the President to know that Israeli forces would not turn their back but that the spirit of Israel was still strong and aggressive and [it] would fight even if the Soviets provided air superiority’, and that confronting the Soviets in air combat during the previous summer had represented ‘a calculated decision... without consultation with any other government, with the full realisation of the implications of that engagement’. Dayan claims that the Americans were as concerned as he ‘about the Sovietisation of the Egyptian war’, strongly supporting ‘reacting vigorously to Soviet aggression’ by encouraging the Israelis to ‘Shoot the hell out of them!’

This language does not appear in American records. Instead, the meeting consisted largely of a rehearsal of previous arguments. Nixon argued that the United States and Israel were at one on the Soviet issue as ‘his policy had been, from the outset, to counterbalance Soviet power in the Middle East’. As ‘the Arabs alone would be no match for Israel’s military’, Nixon’s concern was to ensure that the Soviets understood ‘that the US would guarantee Israel’s survival’. He presented his actions during the Jordan crisis as evidence of this commitment. Nixon stressed the ‘mutual trust’ between the United States and Israel, and particularly at the personal level between himself and Prime Minister Meir but warned that ‘in light of the $500 million assistance being provided by this government... it was evident to him that the American people expected Israel would move to the conference table under the auspices of Jarring’. Nixon argued that this package had indeed re-established a favourable military balance, allowing Israel to negotiate with an ‘air of confidence’, adding that ‘the overall international environment dictated such a move’. Perhaps anticipating the Israeli tactic of seeking different answers or policy lines from different branches of the government (an approach which he himself had previously done much to encourage, particularly in late 1969) Nixon emphasised that ‘all responsible US officials were of one mind on this’. Undeterred, Dayan protested that while his government favoured negotiation, ‘the standstill violations posed a most serious

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complication for Israel’, and that to ‘proceed now in the face of these violations was now almost impossible’. But he also emphasised, somewhat paradoxically, that ‘if the US could make some commitment with regard to Israel’s future military needs, he was sure talks could proceed’.20

The Americans decided on a quick follow-up to the inconclusive meeting. Rogers and Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird dispatched a telegram to Meir, once again arguing that negotiations were the surest means of preserving the ceasefire. Explaining that production lines were committed for 1971 and that the technical challenge of meeting all of Israel’s aircraft requests ‘was not a simple one’, requiring unaffordable diversions from US military inventories, but was under urgent consideration, and promised further high-level consultations in the near future, Washington offered to immediately conclude contracts for twelve F4s and twenty A-4Es to be delivered in the first half of 1971.21

In private, Meir complained that these figures fell far short of Israel’s requests and deplored that Washington had avoided committing to vetoing Security Council resolutions unacceptable to Israel as one of America’s ‘greatest blows’ against her country. But publicly she announced that Washington had re-committed to retaining the regional balance of power in Israel’s favour, and had agreed that Israel would freely negotiate its own secure borders without any prior commitment to 1967 or any other lines, would not be compelled to accept an Arab version of refugee settlement, that the conflict must be ended by a binding, contractual peace, and until then ‘not a single Israeli soldier would be removed from one inch of land’.22 Finally, after a further exchange of letters between Nixon and Meir, on 28 December, in a special session of the Knesset, Meir claimed that although Israel’s ‘struggle’ against standstill violations had not ‘lead to the fulfilment of our just demand in its entirety... without

21 Rabin and Sisco again discussed procurement in detail on 15 January 1971. Rabin complained that ‘certain political reluctance on the part of the USG to enter into long-term commitments with Israel paralleled by the difficulties the US services face in responding on short notice once decision to supply various items have been made’ as a ‘major problem Israel faces in its program to obtain arms’ and left a formal diplomatic note as a ‘reminder’ that the United States had not yet fulfilled Israel’s aircraft requests. Proposed Oral Message to Prime Minister Meir; Memcon Sisco-Rabin 15 January 1970. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Political and Defense, Box 2385, Folder POL 1 1 70 ISR US.
22 Quandt, Peace Process, p. 120.
this struggle, which is not yet over, we would have been faced with a situation far graver’, and the time had now come to engage with the Jarring talks. 

Although returning to the Jarring talks under the circumstances was ‘viewed as a major concession, made with great misgivings by the Israeli government’, by late December the Meir cabinet had likely come to realise that the tactic of prolonging deliberations had extracted ‘the maximum commitment of support’ from the Nixon administration. Patience was wearing thin not just in Washington and the wider international community, but within Israel itself. Acting NSC secretary Robert C. Brewster identified the most significant factor impinging on Meir’s decision as ‘the expectations of the Israeli people’. Noting that Israelis were ‘enjoying a tranquillity such as they have not had since the months immediately after the 1967 war’ Brewster offered the canny remark that when ‘Eban commented... that, if Israel decided not to return to talks, it would have to explain why, he most likely had his own people’s hopes and fears foremost in his mind’. But for all the effort and anxiety expended, the revival of the Jarring mission would prove fleeting, as seen in the following section.

THE JARRING INTERLUDE, JANUARY – FEBRUARY 1971

The Israeli public’s sense of relief while the ceasefire held was shared in Washington, where policymakers were keen to get negotiations underway and guard against any relapse into open conflict. The State Department encouraged Jarring to adopt a more proactive role in arranging negotiations, and in early January the UN Ambassador embarked on a minor exercise in ‘shuttle diplomacy’, ferrying proposal and counter proposal between the parties. Progress was initially slow. A late January Senior Review Group policy paper identified the central difficulty as Israel’s insistence that ‘it must retain significant portions of Arab territory it now occupies in order to enjoy the

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23 Briefing Memo Sisco - Rogers, Excerpts from Mrs Meir’s November 16 Speech, 18 November 1970; Briefing Memo Sisco - Rogers Your Meeting With the Israeli Foreign Minister, 18 November 1970 5:30 pm. NA, RG 59 SNF 1970-1973 Box 2385, Folder POL 1/1/70 ISR US.

security it considers essential to its survival’ in a situation where ‘The Arabs... have made it clear that no settlement is possible on that basis’.  

This familiar impasse would persist until the October War, but the study covered an exhaustive range of contingencies and American policy options such as a joint observer commission, UN Observer Parties, a Four-Power Peacekeeping Force, a UN Peacekeeping Force without four-power involvement, and unilateral guarantees to Israel, but noted that it was ‘unlikely that Israel... would regard either unilateral US or international guarantees as part of a satisfactory substitute for what it considers “defensible” borders’. Egypt showed more flexibility, having ‘specifically indicated its willingness to have a UN presence at Sharm el-Sheikh and has suggested the possibility of UN administration of Gaza’, a ‘Four Power peacekeeping force without specifying size or area of operation and function’, and demilitarised zones ‘astride the borders’ not necessarily ‘of equal size on both sides... with respect to both demilitarisation and emplacement of UN forces the Arabs might be persuaded to accept token action on the Israeli side’.

In January 1971, even as the resumed Jarring mission got underway, Sadat developed his own parallel initiative through contacts with the United States at first acted covertly, for fear of reaction by the potent opposition forces within Egypt, led by his pro-Soviet rival, Vice-President Ali al-Sabri. Bergus was subjected to ‘several rather devious attempts’ to contact him by Abdel Munin Amin, a retired Egyptian general claiming to act informally on Sadat’s behalf in the ‘quest for peace’. Amin complained that ‘the trouble is... that President Sadat doesn’t know what the US wants’, conveying Sadat’s ‘unhappiness’ because Nixon ad not replied to his letter sent several weeks previously. He had therefore ‘asked Amin to see Bergus in an unofficial visit to get some movement’.

25 Attachment to Briefing Memorandum Senior Review Group Meeting Wednesday 14 April on Middle East Guarantees, Study on Middle East Guarantees, 23 January 1971, Author Joseph J. Sisco. NA, RG 59, General Files on NSC Matters, Box 4 NSC SRG Memos 1971 to SRG Memos. Folder SRG Memos.

26 Ibid.

27 Bergus - Rogers, 13 January 1971. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134, Folder Rabin 1971, Vol. 3 (1 of 1).
Expressing interest in a proposal for mutual withdrawal of Egyptian and Israeli forces from the Suez Canal, recently floated by Dayan in the Israeli press, Amin admitted that ‘mutual withdrawal of an exactly equal nature on both sides is difficult, militarily and psychologically’ for Egypt, but in exchange for a forty kilometre Israeli withdrawal (to the strategic Giddi and Mitla passes), Egypt offered non-publicised ‘thinning out’ of ground troops to the west of Suez, leaving only air defence units intact. Further, Amin suggested that a ‘first move’ from Israel ‘would improve the atmosphere for the peace talks and open the way for other actions’. Egypt was prepared for ‘prompt efforts’ to clear and re-open the Suez Canal’, to accept an indefinite ceasefire and ‘drop... its threat to go to the Security Council’, allowing negotiations under Jarring to proceed ‘without pressure’, and, following withdrawal and thinning of forces, to agree to proscribe Egyptian and Israeli aircraft flying closer to the Canal than an agreed distance’. In response to American queries, Amin offered assurance that an exchange of prisoners of war (POWs) ‘could be arranged without difficulty’ after the thinning or withdrawal of troops. The Americans conveyed the Egyptian terms to Rabin in mid-January.28

Sadat did not await a response, instead surprising the world by publicly announcing a ‘peace initiative’ on 4 February, proposing a further thirty-day ceasefire extension linked to an offer to re-open the Suez Canal to international shipping, including Israeli vessels and cargoes, in exchange for a pullback of Israeli forces.29 This unexpected move was an early example of Sadat’s signature technique of proposing sometimes surprising diplomatic initiatives through private channels, and following through by creating pressure for action by announcing the initiative publicly.

On this occasion however, the attention generated by Sadat’s initiative was temporarily diverted by an unprecedented intervention from Jarring. On 8 February, the Ambassador presented Egypt and Israel with an aide memoire in the form of a series of questions on their willingness to accept ‘parallel and simultaneous commitments’. The questionnaire asked whether Israel would withdraw to the former international boundary provisional on establishing demilitarised zones, satisfactory

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28 Ibid.
security arrangements at Sharm el-Sheikh guaranteeing free navigation through the Straits of Tiran, and free navigation through Suez. Both sides were asked to agree to terminate belligerency and to mutually respect sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right to live in peace within secure boundaries, accepting non-interference in one other’s affairs and responsibility to do all in their power to ensure that act of belligerency or hostility do not originate from or are not committed from within their respective territories against the population, citizens or property of the other party.\(^{30}\)

The US State Department and Israeli Foreign Ministry urged a positive response, but on 9 February Meir addressed the Knesset with hostile remarks focused on Sadat’s proposal rather than Jarring’s’ questions, which in the view of the Director of Israel’s Foreign Ministry at the time, Gideon Rafael, indicated that Meir had ‘extended a finger’ to Sadat, ‘not a hand’.\(^{31}\) Undeterred, and with both his own proposals and the Jarring questionnaire simultaneously on the agenda in early February, Sadat proceeded by responding affirmatively to all of Jarring’s questions on 15 February, explicitly stating that Egypt would ‘be ready to enter into a peace agreement with Israel containing all the aforementioned obligations provided for in Security Council Resolution 242’. This statement of willingness to sign a peace agreement with Israel was unprecedented for any Arab leader, and both the US and UN received his response as a positive breakthrough. Combining his response to Jarring with his own proposals, Sadat expanded further on what he termed his ‘peace initiative’ and ideas for an ‘interim agreement’ in a *Newsweek* interview a week later. Egypt offered to reopen the Suez Canal and to accept international forces at Sharm al-Sheikh in return for Israeli withdrawal to a line running from the southern tip of the Sinai (Ras Mohammed) due northward, leaving Israeli forces in possession of the eastern third of the peninsula.\(^{32}\)

Israel responded to the Jarring questionnaire and ‘Peace Initiative’ on 26 February, welcoming Sadat’s stated readiness for peace, but bluntly stating that Israel would not withdraw to the pre-5 June 1967 lines. This statement came as a disappointment to

\(^{30}\) A copy of the Jarring Aide Memoire can be found at [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/jarring2.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/jarring2.html). Accessed 13 September 2013.

\(^{31}\) Bregman and Al-Tahri, *The Fifty Years War*, p. 108.

the Nixon administration, which had strongly urged Israel not to issue a ‘categorical negative’ response, as not just as unhelpful but also disingenuous and unnecessary. As Joseph Sisco reported to the NSC,

The Israelis are “throwing up a smoke screen” by claiming Jarring has proposed that Israel commit itself to total withdrawal. Jarring has not asked that of Israel. He has asked that the Israelis agree to withdraw to the international border with Egypt provided there is a satisfactory arrangement of demilitarized zones and on security arrangements at Sharm el-Sheikh. Gaza is not mentioned at all.33

Though ‘rambling’, Israel’s response to Jarring did not set out negotiating terms, instead stating only what was unacceptable to Israel, thus fuelling widespread perception of a positive response from Egypt, but negativity and evasiveness from Israel. Israel’s response to Jarring’s questionnaire effectively ended his mission, and even Nadav Safran, a trenchant critic of Sadat and staunch defender of Meir (and occasional Middle consultant to the Nixon administration and later director of Harvard’s Centre for Middle East Studies) has questioned the wisdom of Israel’s ‘categorical negative’. So too have key members of Meir’s government, such as Rafael, Foreign Minister Abba Eban, and Rabin, who recount a growing American frustration with Israeli negativity with regard to proposals from Jarring, Sadat, and Rogers, and evasiveness with regard to stating its own settlement terms.34

Having invested considerably in resumed negotiation, it is unsurprising that the Nixon administration demonstrated concern at the Jarring debacle. In his second annual foreign policy report to Congress on 25 February, President Nixon identified Vietnam as America’s ‘most anguishing problem’ but not ‘the most dangerous’, warning that

These are not idle judgements reached with the comfort and wisdom of hindsight. At a private dinner with Eban, General Chaim Herzog (later president of Israel) in early March 1971, the powerful American oil magnate David Rockefeller, a major American supporter of Israel ‘pointed out that it was understood that the Israelis would not retreat that far, but the fact that they chose to say it so clearly put the Arabs, especially Sadat, in a very humiliating position; although the Arabs demand for withdrawal appeared categorical, it was a venture towards peace – and virtually the first that had been made’. Notes of a conversation between Foreign Minister Abba Eban, David Rockefeller and others, Tuesday 9 March 1971. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2385 POL 7 ISR to POL 7 ISR, Folder POL 15-1 ISR 1/1/71.
this ‘grim distinction must go to the situation in the Middle East, with its vastly greater potential for drawing Soviet policy and our own into a collision that could prove uncontrollable’. 35

Clearly concerned about the dangers of renewed conflict, Nixon expressed frustration with Israel’s refusal to present negotiating terms during a 26 February NSC on meeting on Middle East. He wondered aloud: ‘What do they want? We have provided the arms. We have provided the aircraft and financial assistance. What more are they asking for?’ Unimpressed to learn (from Rogers) that ‘The [Meir] Cabinet has discussed this and been unable to decide exactly what borders Israel should ask for in a peace agreement’, Nixon asserted that he had ‘taken as strong a position in support of Israel - - perhaps as strong as any President’, but voiced suspicion that Israel sought to exploit his position as an elected representative. Nixon recognised that there could be ‘no denying that there is a political campaign coming in this country in 1972’, but warned that

if any Israeli leader feels that Israel, by taking advantage of internal US politics, can have both arms and that kind of support from the US and then refuse to act -- even to discuss -- then he is mistaken.36

Nixon had accurately identified the dynamic which, by the end of 1971, would decide the US-Israel struggle to decide policy priorities, but, as seen in the following sections, it was he who was mistaken in his predicted outcome.

REACHING OUT TO THE WHITE HOUSE: SADAT’S PEACE INITIATIVE

Also evidently disappointed and concerned for the future, Sadat made a secret trip to Moscow on 1 March. Sadat hoped to procure a deterrent against Israel’s air superiority, particularly in the eventuality of resumed deep penetration bombing, but recalls ‘sharp exchanges’ with Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin and Defence Minister Andrei Grechko as he attempted to reassure his hosts that he did not expect the USSR to fight Egypt’s battles, and had no intention of causing a superpower confrontation.

36 NSC Meeting: The Middle East Friday, 26 February 1971, 11:45 am.
The Soviet leaders seemed as wary of renewed fighting as Nixon. Kosygin and CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev insisted that they did not want foreknowledge of any war plans in the offing, and were reluctant to expand Egypt’s airpower capability, offering a token four Soviet manned MiG-25s, to be used only with Moscow’s specific permission. This did not represent a credible counter to the Israeli Air Force, but Sadat, who rejected Brezhnev’s offer, claims he did so not because of military shortcomings, but because of impingement on Egyptian sovereignty, as he ‘refused to accept a situation whereby there exists on Egyptian soil a will other than that of myself and the political leadership of Egypt’.\(^{37}\)

Sadat wrote to Nixon immediately upon returning to Cairo, explaining that Egypt would not again extend the ceasefire with Israel due to expire in two days, but calling on Washington to act on his ‘peace initiative’. Nixon made no immediate public or private reply, but quietly instructed the State Department to get to work on developing an interim settlement proposal built around reopening the Suez Canal. Foggy Bottom wasted little time in producing an elaborate ‘Scenario for seeking to break the impasse in the Middle East’, which envisaged an interim agreement premised on reopening the Suez Canal as a first step towards a final solution along the lines of the Rogers Plan of 1969. According to the strategy, a ‘major financial contribution’ towards refugee resettlement and establishing a peacetime economy, stronger security guarantees in Sinai, and the long-sought US commitment to an ongoing arms supply would mollify Israeli resistance. Despite opposition from Kissinger, who argued that Israel ‘had almost no choice but to reject’ the plan, Nixon authorized Rogers to go ahead.\(^{38}\) Sadat’s appeal to Nixon thus catalysed another round of intensive American-led diplomacy, this time directly engaging Egypt as well as Israel at the highest levels.

\(^{37}\) Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 220. Herzog, *The War of Atonement*, p. 19. Israeli President, general, and military historian Chaim Herzog argues that it was during this first presidential visit to Moscow that Sadat began to realise the ‘true implications of Soviet military involvement’ in Egypt. and it was at this point that ‘a completely new thought process began in his mind, which would lead him to request the withdrawal of Soviet advisors and forces from Egypt in July 1972’.

Sadat delivered an address to the nation on 7 March 1971, the day on which the Egypt-Israel ceasefire expired, revealing his recent trip to Moscow and asserting that because of Israel’s refusal to cooperate with the Jarring initiative, the Egyptian government did not ‘consider ourselves committed to a ceasefire’. The speech, however, was replete with ambiguities, tracing a careful path between the alternatives of an American-brokered political solution and a Soviet supported military solution. Sadat’s assertion that ‘The enemy will not withdraw his hand unless we are in a position where we could cut off this hand wherever it is extended’, although graphic in its rhetoric, hinted that a rebalancing of military power, if not necessarily military action, might be the key to a solution. Rather than dwelling on military threats, Sadat instead called upon the Nixon administration to facilitate a diplomatic solution, and thereby ‘fulfil the obligations which it has taken upon itself’ as, he claimed, ‘The United States has pledged to us directly – especially in the last month – that it opposes and continues to oppose the principle of seizing land by force’. Having already written to Nixon, the Statement to the Nation thus represented another early example of Sadat’s signature technique of creating public pressure for action on initiatives already forwarded in private.

Although Israel had to date avoided stating its own negotiating terms, Meir gave a controversial interview of her own to The Times of London on 12 March, outlining her vision of border adjustments required to prevent another Middle East war. Meir insisted that Israel ‘must have Sharm El-Sheikh’ including land access from Israel, and that remainder of the Sinai must be demilitarised, as ‘Egypt must never be allowed to deploy troops, tanks, artillery and missiles in the peninsula’. Instead, an international force guaranteeing demilitarisation would include Israeli troops – Egypt could not return to Gaza, which Meir suggested could be ‘a port for Jordan’. Israel would retain the Golan Heights to the north, and to the south the border around Eilat would be negotiated, as would the West Bank border, ensuring that Arab troops could not cross the Jordan River. Israel would ‘take care of refugees’. Meir acknowledged that ‘it

39 Ibid.
would be a painful solution for President Sadat’ but asserted that ‘people had to pay for their deeds’.\(^\text{40}\)

The interview caused ‘uproar’ in Israel, where Meir was castigated for unilaterally ‘drawing a map’ of Israel’s territorial claims. Coalition partners the National Religious Party expressed serious concern at the prospect of negotiating away Judea and Samaria (the West Bank), while the opposition Gahal party termed Meir’s action as ‘very grave’ and tabled a motion of no confidence in the Prime Minister.\(^\text{41}\) Launched against this inauspicious background, the State Department drive for an interim agreement soon descended into a public spat between Meir and Rogers.\(^\text{42}\)

Eban and Rabin visited Kissinger on 19 March, and again stressed that there was ‘one specific sticking point- Sharm el Sheikh, from which Israel cannot withdraw’. They refused to be drawn on Israel’s specific territorial demands otherwise, however, as Rabin insisted that ‘Israel cannot say that Sharm el-Sheikh alone solves all of Israel’s border problems’.\(^\text{43}\) By mid-April, two and a half months had passed since the dispatch of the Jarring questionnaire and Sadat’s proposals, Meir’s *Times* interview appeared to be the closest Israel had come to stating its own terms for settlement.\(^\text{44}\) A mid-April a Senior Review Group report complained that the US ‘holding operation’ in international forums ‘was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain with any degree of credibility’ due to

\(^{40}\) *Times* Interview with Mrs. Meir Department of State Telegram, NARA RG 59 SNF 1970-1973, Box 2384 Pol Isr to Pol Isr, Folder Pol 15 1 Isr 1/1/71. Go to original article here?


\(^{42}\) In a press conference on 16 March, Rogers stated that Israel should rely on political arrangements, guarantees, and international peacekeeping forces rather than territorial acquisition to achieve security. Meir responded swiftly by recalling Nixon’s previous assurances on security and asserting Israel’s need for defensible borders. Pre-empting congressional pressure on the White House and attempting to avoid polarisation of American policymakers, on 26 March Rogers took his case before the Senate. The Secretary of State was reportedly ‘smiling broadly when he left the Senate chamber’ having delivered an effective speech and skilfully fielding questions, and, in the words of Israel’s Ambassador to Washington at the time, Yitzhak Rabin, ‘succeeded in depicting Israel as inflexible.’ To Rabin’s dismay, ‘many of the senators were inclined to accept the justice of this depiction’. ‘Rogers Appears to Rally Senators Behind His Views on Israel, Mideast Situation’, 26 March 1971. JTA The Global Jewish News Source, [http://www.jta.org/1971/03/26/archive/rogers-appears-to-rally-senators-behind-his-views-on-israel-mideast-situation#ixzz2ai4idRyS](http://www.jta.org/1971/03/26/archive/rogers-appears-to-rally-senators-behind-his-views-on-israel-mideast-situation#ixzz2ai4idRyS) accessed 1 August 2013. See also Rabin, *Memoirs*, p. 215; Safran, *Israel*, pp. 457-458.


Israel’s refusal so far to put forward any substantive position in the negotiations or to consider any form of international peacekeeping, while insisting that the UAR agree to negotiate about border changes and the transfer of territory in the Sinai, especially at Sharm el-Sheikh, to Israeli control. As inducement to put forward its position, Washington announced another twelve Phantom F4s would be delivered to Israel, and on 19 April Israel finally presented an eleven-point proposal. The proposal Israel called for a reopening of the Suez Canal to ‘ships and cargoes of all nations, including Israel, within six months of the effective date of the agreement’, and an indefinite ceasefire. The IDF would withdraw to a negotiated line, with the area vacated demilitarised. Egypt would thin its forces west of Suez to agreed levels and no bridges would be constructed over the Canal. Israeli civilian personnel would remain to maintain the Bar-Lev line of fortifications on the Suez Canal, while Egyptian civilian personnel necessary for reopening of the Canal would be permitted to cross to the east bank. All Egyptian and Israeli POWs would be released within twenty-five days. The proposal was not for an interim step towards implementing UNSCR 242, which was not mentioned in the document, but for a stand-alone ‘special agreement’ which would ‘not effect in any way the commitment of the parties to pursue negotiations between them under the auspices of Ambassador Jarring for the achievement of a just and lasting peace’.

Kissinger reacted furiously to the Israeli document, claiming it did not represent a new position and refusing to discuss it further, but the State Department persevered in attempting to reconcile the two sides. Sadat met with Bergus and State Department Egypt desk officer Michael Sterner on 23 April, outlining his response to press reports of the Meir’s position. Sadat insisted that Egyptian forces must cross Suez and control the strategic Giddi and Mitla passes, implying Israeli withdrawal of some thirty kilometres at minimum. Demilitarised zones could be established, but Israel could retain Sharm el-Sheikh for only six months after signing the agreement. Meir gave a

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45 Briefing Memorandum Senior Review Group Wednesday, 14 April on Middle Guarantees, DOS TG Sisco Ambassador Johnson. NA, General Files on NSC Matters, Box 4, SRG Memos 1971 to SRG Memos, Folder SRG Memos.
48 Quandt, Peace Process, p. 91.
truculent radio interview the next day, warning that if Sadat insisted imposing deadlines on ‘dictated’ terms, then another war was likely. 49

Despite aggressive rhetoric on both sides and wide gaps on the key issues of force redeployments and linkage to final settlement, Israel’s proposal maintained ambiguity on territorial claims. Nixon accepted Rogers’ argument that agreement was still possible, authorising a trip to the Middle East to meet personally with the principals. 50

**ROGERS’ MIDDLE EAST TOUR AND THE EGYPTIAN-SOVIET TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP AND COOPERATION, MAY – JUNE 1971**

May 1971 proved to be an unusual month in Egyptian politics. An (ultimately failed) proposal for a Federation of Arab Republics comprising Egypt, Libya, and Syria brought tensions between Sadat and Vice-president Ali-Sabri, Egypt’s most powerful pro-Soviet voice, to a head before the Congress of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), Egypt’s ruling party at the beginning of the month. Sabri was dismissed from his post on May 2, removing Sadat’s most prominent rival and Moscow’s favoured choice for the Egyptian presidency. Just three days later, Sadat hosted Rogers, the first by an American Secretary of State since 1953, and used the meeting to promote his ‘peace initiative’ and to promise the removal of Soviet combat troops from Egypt and to restore diplomatic relations with Washington once an interim agreement with Israel had been reached. Over the following weeks he completed the purge begun by firing Al-Sabri, acting pre-emptively against a suspected coup with the firing and arrest of dozens of Nasserists retaining government positions from the ministerial level downwards. 51 Sadat thus consolidated his presidential authority while removing major internal obstacles to his favoured policy direction, and in the process struck a third blow against the Soviet investment in Egypt in as many weeks.

49 Barbour-Rogers, Primin Meir and Chief of Staff Bar-Lev Interviews, 26 April 1971. NA, RG 59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 2385, Folder POL 7 ISR to POL 7 ISR.


51 ‘The list was a “Who’s who” of the Nasir era: Lt. General Muhammed Fawzi, War Minister; Sami Sharif, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and long responsible for Nasir’s personal intelligence and security organisation; Muhammed Fa’iq, Minister of Information; ‘Abd al-Muhsin Abu al-Nur, head of the ASU; Ahmed Kamal, Chief of Intelligence; Labib Shuqar, Speaker of the National Assembly’ and ‘Sha’rawi Gum’ah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior, long regarded as one of the most powerful in government’. Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, pp. 144-145.
Yet soon afterwards, Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny paid what Radio Cairo announced was ‘an unofficial and friendly visit to Sadat’, which produced, on 27 May, the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation, formalising relations previously maintained on an ad-hoc basis by enshrining regular consultation ‘on all important matters affecting the interests of the two states’ and ‘cooperation in the military field on the basis of pertinent arrangement between them’. Apparently contradictory developments fuelled debate in Washington and Jerusalem as to whether the treaty represented the institutionalisation of Soviet power in Egypt, or merely a face saving measure for Moscow, papering over deteriorating relations with and declining influence over Egypt.52

Meeting with Rogers and Sisco earlier in the month, Sadat had surprised the Americans by coming immediately came to the topic of the Soviet military presence in Egypt, which he believed to be ‘uppermost’ in American minds. Apparently subscribing to the ‘controlled tension’ thesis of Soviet involvement in the Middle East favoured by Nixon and Kissinger, Sadat argued that the Soviets had little interest in securing the return of the occupied territories, as ‘[s]o long as Israel controlled these areas... the Soviets would continue to justify the expansion of the military presence in the region’. Sadat complained that the Russians were a ‘drain’ on Egypt which had to be paid for in ‘dollars and sterling’ he rather spend elsewhere, promising that as soon as an interim agreement was remove the Soviet combat troops from Egypt, asking Soviet ‘Military officers and soldiers, but not the Soviet military advisors’ to leave. Hinting at further imminent changes in his own government, Sadat requested that Washington take a more balanced approach to negotiations, repeated his willingness to sign a peace agreement with Israel, and expressed readiness to formalise a new relationship with the United States.53

As a first step interim agreement, Sadat proposed that Egypt and Israel sign a renewable six-month ceasefire, and that Israel some 30km to the strategic Gidi and

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Mitla Sinai mountain passes. Soviet troops would depart from Egypt, and Egyptian troops would occupy the Suez east bank. A UN buffer would separate the two sides and Egypt would reopen the Suez Canal to shipping of all nations, including Israel. Egypt would sign a peace agreement with Israel, at a later, final stage, when Israel fully withdrew from the Sinai. As an incentive to the Americans to facilitate this process, he promised that ‘If we can work out some interim settlements on Suez, we’ll renew diplomatic relations with you, and I think others will too’.54

Impressed and eager to convey these unexpectedly positive messages, Rogers proceeded directly to Jerusalem from Cairo, presenting a picture of Sadat as a man who ‘wanted to do business on a peace agreement’. Sadat’s presentation had surprised and excited the Americans not because he had personally re-presented the terms of his ‘peace initiative’ as the basis for an interim settlement, but because in so doing he had expressed interest in collaboration with the US and Israel, distancing Egypt not just from the Soviets and but also from the Palestinians. Although insistent on the eventual return of the Sinai to Egypt as part of a final Egypt-Israel settlement, Sadat showed little interest in extra-Egyptian issues such as control over Jerusalem, Gaza, or the fate of the Palestinians in general. Sadat did not ‘really talk about the Palestinians at all’ and said that Gaza ‘was not a very important part of his thinking’, beyond expressing the opinion that a decision about whether they wanted to be a part of Jordan or a separate entity had to be made by the people there. Sisco stressed that in its entirety, Sadat’s presentation was just so Egypt oriented. I never heard anything so exclusively Egypt oriented in terms of details they raise as related to an overall settlement and any concrete points that we discussed in relationship to an interim settlement.55

Meir remained deeply sceptical however, viewing the offer to reopen the Suez Canal and deploy a UN peacekeeping force as of far less value to Israel than retaining the Bar Lev line, and the interim agreement concept as little more than a Trojan horse for an


55 Talks between The Prime Minister Golda Meir and Secretary of State, Mr. William Rogers, 6 May, 1971, Jerusalem 5:15 pm. Present: for Israel: Mrs. Golda Meir, Mr. Y Allon, Mr. M. Dayan, Mr. A. Eban, Dr. Y. Herzog, Mr. A. Lourie, My. Y. Rabin., Mr. M. Gazit, For United States Mr. William Rogers, Mr. A. Atherton, Mr. Barbour, Mr. McCloskey, Mr. Pedersen, Mr. Sisco, Mr. Korn, Mr. Zurhellen. NA, RG 59, SNF 19701-973, Box 2385 Folder POL 15-1 – ISR 1/1/71.
overall settlement on Egyptian terms. Meir rejected the idea of any Sadat’s personnel crossing the Canal, believed that ‘peace in his book means no more Israel’ warning that Egypt offered peace only on a return to 1967 lines, which Israel did not accept. Responding to Rogers’ queries on what territorial settlement she would accept, Meir stated that ‘it is not all the Sinai; it is not even half of the Sinai’, but as to ‘[h]ow wide the strip that will connect Sharm el-Sheikh across the international border, that’s a question of negotiation. That’s a line we haven’t drawn’.56

Rogers and Sisco were disappointed with Meir’s attitude and conduct, contacting both Nixon and Dayan later that evening to directly criticise the Prime Minister. Dayan agreed to meet with Sisco in an effort to resolve differences before the next Meir-Rogers encounter, and, speaking in a ‘personal capacity’, conveyed considerably greater flexibility than Meir, revealing that the cabinet had discussed two withdrawal concepts over the previous weeks. The first plan envisaging a military pullback of approximately ten kilometres, with civilian staff maintaining the Bar-Lev line, and the IDF poised to ‘shoot its way back’ to the canal in the event of renewed hostilities. The second plan, which Dayan did not disguise that he personally favoured, involved demolishing the Bar-Lev line and a more extensive withdrawal of approximately thirty kilometres to the Giddi and Mitla passes. Control of the Suez Canal would be returned to Egypt on the understanding that it would be reopened to international shipping, and that cities in the vicinity would be rebuilt and normal civilian life would resume, thereby normalising the situation and creating disincentives for renewed fighting.57

Reporting to the cabinet on his discussion with Sisco, Dayan demurred on Eban’s suggestion of putting his proposal to a vote, but the meeting seemed to convince Meir that withdrawal was worth considering.58 Demonstrating more flexibility in her second session with Rogers, Meir for the first time indicated willingness to withdraw forces in the context of a peace agreement, so long as no Egyptian troops crossed to the east bank, the canal would be open to Israeli shipping, and the ceasefire would be

56 Ibid.
58 Eban recalls that ‘I sent [Dayan] a note saying I think I can get you some support. I mentioned other ministers. He sent back a very abrupt sarcastic reply, saying, “Thank you very much but if Golda is not for this I am not for it either”’. Bregman and El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years War*, p. 109.
extended indefinitely. Rogers, although recognising that completely prohibiting forces crossing the Canal would be difficult for Egypt to accept, dispatched Sisco to Cairo to update Sadat on Israel’s position.59

In a later meeting with Meir, Sisco stressed that had been very firm about what Egypt could expect from an interim agreement during his follow-up session with Sadat. Indefinite Israeli usage of the Suez Canal must be tightly specified as part of an agreement, and Egypt could not expect further concessions for renewing the ceasefire and permitting continued passage six months hence. Sisco had enjoyed ‘particularly good guidance’ from Israel on the extent of withdrawal and thus made clear that while no formal decisions had been taken, Sadat’s proposed line ‘was completely out of the question’. On Egyptian force deployments east of Suez, Sadat had rowed back in the face of Meir’s reservations, proposing a ‘limited force’ defined as ‘limited in zone, limited in number, and limited in the kinds of weapons they would carry’ but Sisco had made clear that the Israeli ‘position is no presence of a military character whatsoever’. On supervisory arrangements, Sadat was amenable to Sisco’s suggestion of participation of Egyptian and Israeli troops in an international force providing a ‘practical test for peace’, once these were ‘under a UN umbrella’.60

Although he had been careful not to raise excessive expectations, Sisco’s return to Cairo inadvertently set in train a series of events leading to a minor fiasco, sometimes referred to as the ‘Bergus Affair’, which ultimately proved damaging both to his and Rogers’ stature as negotiators, and, as will be seen, returned to haunt him in his next encounter with Golda Meir. After discussing the Israeli position with Sisco, Sadat had apparently formed the impression that Dayan’s ideas (as outlined by Sisco) represented the official Israeli position, even though Meir publicly she took ‘strong objection’ to Dayan’s ‘unauthorised statement’ about readiness to withdraw 30 kilometres in exchange for an unlimited ceasefire, and Dayan himself soon issued a public denial of this line.61 Eager to seize the apparent opportunity for an interim settlement, Sadat met repeatedly with Bergus and Sterner over the following weeks,

60 Memcon Meir - Sisco, 30 July 1971, NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134.
61 Telegram Barbour-Rogers, Dayan-Sisco Meeting: Criticism of Meir. NA, RG 59, SNF 19701-973, Box 2385, Folder POL 7 Isr to POL 7 Isr.
seeking assistance in drafting a response acceptable to the United States and Israel. Unbeknownst to, and, in the words of Foreign Ministry Director Gideon Rafael, ‘not exactly by courtesy of the authors’, Israel’s intelligence services procured a copy of an Egyptian proposal reportedly redrafted by Bergus, whose provisions included Israeli withdrawal beyond the Sinai passes. The ‘phantom memo’ or ‘Bergus Paper’, was leaked to the press in late June, sparking outrage in Israel at perceived collusion with Cairo, and causing the State Department to issue a public disavowal of Bergus’ ‘personal’ views. The result was a loss of credibility for Rogers and Sisco in the eyes of both the Egyptians and Israelis.

CHASING PHANTOMS: THE FAILURE OF INTERIM DIPLOMACY, JULY – AUGUST 1971

By the time of the Bergus affair in late June, renewed US-Israel tensions over the issue of supply of aircraft had already been building for weeks. The previous December’s pledge to supply planes for the first half of 1971 would soon expire, with no new agreement in place despite considerable Israeli attention to the matter. Meeting with Rabin in mid-May, Sisco replied tersely to queries about the status of Israel’s arms requests, conveying only that the ‘matter was under review’. Eban was not satisfied, confronting Barbour soon afterwards, to insist that Jerusalem ‘would like to know the nature of review and how long it is expected before the results are known’, and that ‘it was important to maintain military procurement as a separate matter not subject to

62 Rafael, Destination Peace, p. 267.
63 Kissinger, ever eager to denounce Rogers’ State Department, entitles his sub-section on the failure to reach interim agreement ‘The Phantom Memoranda’, and, in a dig at Rogers claims that ‘it was an extraordinary procedure, which I remain no professional diplomat of Bergus’s experience would have undertaken without authorisation from higher-ups’. This is considerably more attention and attribution of significance than found in other works, most of which omit any mention of the ‘Bergus Affair’. Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1283-1284.
65 Barbour-Rogers, Aircraft for Israel, 1 April 1971; Barbour-Rogers, Aircraft for Israel, 1 November, (recorded 24 May 1971) 1971. NA, RG59, SNF 1970-1973, Box 1750, Def 12-S Isr to Def 12/5 to Def 12-S, Folder Def Isr 12-S 9/1/71.
the vicissitudes of other problems... Particularly regarding Phantoms’, where ‘there was a long lead time’.66 Word of the Nixon administration’s cool attitude had already been leaked to the Israeli press, sparking extensive public speculation on the status of the ongoing arms supply relationship, and the Director General of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, Mordechai Gazit, hinted at another public pressure campaign within the US, warning Barbour that his government might ‘have to take some action’.67

The Israelis were correct to suspect that delays were not simply bureaucratic, but reflected a calculated White House decision. Reporting on his Middle East excursion, Rogers had convinced Nixon that the time had come to pressure Israel for greater flexibility, standing firm on the aircraft issue until it agreed to negotiate. Nixon instructed Rogers that ‘no more aid programs for Israel be approved until they agree to some kind of interim action on Suez or some other issue’ insisting the Israelis ‘must bite the bullet on whether they want more US aid at the price of being reasonable on an interim agreement or whether they want to go it alone’.68

Nixon retained interested in the opportunity for interim settlement, but was given pause by the Egypt-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which ‘raised some questions,’ about Sadat’s intentions, and ‘delayed the process of deciding how we proceed’. Sadat met twice with Bergus and again with Sterner over the following weeks, offering reassurances that the ‘treaty changed nothing – absolutely nothing – it merely provided a framework for a relationship which already existed and we all knew about’. Sadat was visibly irritated at requests for reaffirmation of his intentions, wondering aloud why he had ‘to say everything twice, three times’, and instructing Sterner to ‘Tell Secretary Rogers, tell President Nixon, that everything I said when Secretary Rogers was here in May and when I saw Sisco later still stands’. He repeatedly emphasised his interest in an interim agreement and his hope that the US help achieve this, pledging that as soon as an interim settlement was reached, he would restore diplomatic relations with the US and remove Soviet troops from Egypt, ‘regardless’ of the opinion of other Arabs or the Soviets. In early July, Sadat

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67 Barbour-Rogers, Aircraft for Israel Department of State Telegram, 1 April 1971.
challenged the Americans to ‘Bring me an agreement tomorrow and if I like the looks of it I will sign it regardless of what the Soviets think about it’. He ‘wanted to make it absolutely clear that while the Soviets were playing an important role in supporting his country’ they had ‘no guardianship over’ Egypt, which was ‘still a non-aligned country’.  

Sisco reported personally to Nixon on the state of play in Middle East negotiations in San Clemente, California in mid-July. Recent American assessments concluded that the military balance of power continued to decisively favour Israel, and as Sadat continued to express interest in an interim agreement, Nixon decided Sisco should visit Israel to discuss matters with Meir directly. Nixon worried that ‘Mrs. Meir would talk about arms and Mr. Sisco would talk about a settlement’, fearing that the arms supply issue would ‘blow up into strong Israel pressure’ during the coming election season. He appeared to believe a window of opportunity to pressurise Israel might be open in the summer of 1971, however, ordering ‘a very low profile’ consultation during which the United States would not ‘promise a damned thing. This is not going to be a free ride this time. From now on it quid pro quo’. To his Chief of Staff and confidante Robert Haldemann, Nixon expressed determination not ‘to play the Jewish game’ of ‘string[ing] us along until the next elections... when they hope to replace us’. But despite his stern words and frustration with Israel Nixon remained wary of public confrontation, instructing Sisco to ‘press Golda... hard’ but not to the point of ‘a confrontation’ or ‘major donnybrook between Israel and the United States’.  

Meeting with Meir in Jerusalem, Sisco opened by stating that he had come with three objectives. Firstly, given developments since Rogers’ visit in May, to ascertain how Israel felt ‘about these matters and what the significance may be in terms of our common aims’, secondly, ‘to explore... very much in depth, very much in detail, very

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69 Telegram Sterner-Rogers, 6 July 1971. NPLM, HAK/ME Box 134, Folder Sadat Meeting.  
70 Memo for the Record NSC Meeting on the Middle East and South Asia, Friday July 1971, Conference Room San Clemente. Participants The President, Rogers, Deputy Secretary of Defense, David Packard, Moorer, Helms, Johnson, Kissinger, Saunders. NPLM, H-Files, Box 110. Original emphasis, underlined in original. Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p.188.  
71 Kochavi, Nixon and Israel, p. 18.  
72 Bregman and El-Tahari, The Fifty Years War, p. 108.
candidly, very fully, where matters stand on the question of interim settlement’, and thirdly, ‘to talk about arms’.  

Addressing the military situation first, Sisco repeated the long-established Nixon administration line of maintaining the military balance in Israel’s favour, stressing that this meant ‘a sufficient, safe margin for Israel to protect its security’, and that ‘a very intensive and very recent… technical review’ indicated that was still the case. Acknowledging discrepancies between American and Israeli technical analysis on the Suez Canal situation in August 1970, Sisco suggesting establishing a system of ‘common mutual intelligence evaluation’ before any interim agreement went into effect, to ensure American-Israeli agreement on any violations. But to the dismay of his hosts, Sisco brought no word on aircraft supply, merely authorisation for Israel to Washington produce US-designed defence equipment.

Coming to the purpose of his visit, Sisco presented a powerful and elegant case for pursuing an interim settlement, avoiding ultimatums but not shirking from aspects Meir found less appealing. While the lengthy discussion tracked back and forth between the various issues and elements in play, in essence Sisco’s presentation focused on the themes of likely superpower responses to future Middle East conflict, mutual American-Israeli interests in promoting moderate forces in the Arab world, and Sadat’s promise as a negotiating partner.

On superpower politics, Sisco warned that responses would be difficult to predict in the event of renewed Arab-Israel conflict, making negotiations imperative. The Soviet presence in Egypt, which had come as an unpleasant surprise, posed a ‘new factor which the provision of arms to Israel can deal with only up to a point’ and the very fact that the Soviets had done the unexpected raised the possibility of their doing so again. Nothing could be taken for granted in this dangerous scenario, as the ‘Vietnam climate’ had made Americans wary of risking military involvement elsewhere. Sisco cautioned that

> The US may be confronted with that awful decision: does it intervene or not intervene in order to protect the situation? Nobody can predict what that decision will be... But... the judgement of the American people as to how much effort you have made to achieve a settlement will be a

73 Memcon Meir - Sisco, 30 July 1971, NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134.
74 Ibid.
very critical factor in any decision that any President, whether he be a democrat or republican would have to make.\textsuperscript{75}

Stressing that the US and Israel had a mutual interest in encouraging Arab forces striving for a political solution with Israel, Sisco argued that Sadat was the most promising negotiating partner to date. Any ‘contradictions in Sadat’s policies and his actions’ likely reflected ‘conflicting forces at work’, according to Sisco, and ‘the course of negotiations on an interim settlement can have an influence on how they are resolved’. Having ‘partially destroyed the communist apparatus’, Sadat was ‘operating somewhat in a state of siege’, but the ‘political impact of that first picture in the newspaper, of that first Israeli soldier withdrawing a foot or an inch’ would strengthen his hand. Sisco suggested that the habit of referring to 1971 as ‘the year of decision’ which Sadat seemed to have acquired signalled that there was still several months left to make a deal. By offering a renewable six month deal, Sadat was basically offering an indefinite ceasefire. Addressing substantive negotiating issues in turn, Sisco conveyed that when he had discussed these with Sadat after his previous visit to Meir, the Egyptian president had indicated flexibility in each case, essentially allowing Israel to negotiate an agreement on its own terms.\textsuperscript{76}

Having made his case, Sisco offered reassurances that Washington was ‘fully sympathetic’ to Israel’s position that any interim agreement should not involve short ceasefire deadlines carrying threats of renewed hostilities, any military disadvantage, or any ‘additional commitments in so far as withdrawal and borders’. He had ‘very categorically’ forewarned Sadat with the ‘exact words’ that ‘you will not achieve in the context of an interim settlement what you not been able to achieve in the context of an overall settlement’.\textsuperscript{77}

Meir’s responses are striking self-conscious emotionalism and even professed irrationality. Acknowledging that although Israel felt surrounded, qualitatively ‘thank God, we are superior’ and that the American ‘people, with all your real and sincere concern for our security – and that we don’t doubt – should have a more objective view’, Meir stressed that

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. Sisco’s recreation of Sadat’s terms is discussed above, pp. 134-13.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.
It is also just as natural that we cannot be objective... I understand maybe you people sometimes think, these Israelis, you can’t talk reason to them. We can prove to them the balance hasn’t been upset and they are still superior and so on. But we don’t want to understand; why? Because we understand something that matters so much to our very existence that maybe you can’t understand it... I think we should be permitted, even if you think we are exaggerating; a certain degree of exaggeration should be permitted.

Meir argued that delays in providing aircraft and surrounding media speculation, however inaccurate, incentivised Sadat to prolong negotiations while preparing for war as he was likely to believe ‘that while negotiations are going on no planes will be delivered’. But Sadat would not wait forever, reasoned Meir, as if Sadat’s position, she would say to herself ‘I am now in a position where Israel is not getting planes. What am I waiting for? Until the US will begin to deliver planes? This is the time [to attack]’. 78

Finding her stride, Meir inveighed energetically against the Nixon administration’s approach in a passage worth quoting at length. Meir complained that:

We are extremely concerned, worried and hurt by the fact that the question of delivery of planes for weeks it is under consideration... What is there to consider? ... And I am tell you now: what is this balance of powers? What is this a drug scale, where you weight grams and if you put one gram more into a medicine it may kill somebody? What is this? Supposing the worst comes to the worst and we have a few more Phantoms than is absolutely essential for us? So what? ... And this we cannot accept. Cannot accept? We cannot take your Phantoms by force... But we can’t agree. We don’t accept it.

Meir claimed that in Israel everybody ‘above the age of twelve’ was aware, with ‘no doubt whatsoever’ that Washington had linked Phantom agreements to the interim settlement, but warned that Israel would not ‘under any circumstances agree’ to ‘this procedure’. She insisted that

unless you suspect us that what we want planes for is to go out to conquer the area – If you don’t suspect us of that, then even if you don’t agree with our people, I think the benefit of the doubt should be on our side. Because there is no danger in planes when we have them and we feel there is danger when don’t have them. 79

Meir’s tirade demonstrated little concern for American regional interests beyond commitment to Israeli military superiority, prioritising her government’s self-professed exaggerated and unreasonable demands for an ostentatious superabundance of airpower, beyond any recognised military need. For Meir, warnings on the dangers of an escalating superpower arms race in the Middle East, or on the importance of US relations with major Arab powers (the factor which would

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
eventually provide the key to Israel’s peace with Egypt) were to be considered after only after aircraft deliveries were assured.

Meir reminded Sisco that ‘Sadat says he is prepared to sacrifice a million Egyptians. I don’t want to sacrifice one boy, not one’. Recalling her recent experiences visiting her troops, Meir acknowledged that

I know it isn’t logical and it isn’t reasonable, that it’s sentimental and emotional... if something will happen... I feel absolutely responsible for it. I can’t look at it from just a rational point of view. I admit this is sentimental. Okay. Maybe if Sadat would have a little of that he wouldn’t talk so loosely of a million Egyptians.

Despite the sharp decrease in Israeli casualties in the year since the ceasefire with Egypt, Meir’s rigid commitment to militarism and to visions of security through territorial expansion seemed to preclude recognition of the tension between her refusal to remove ‘one soldier from one inch of land’ and her reluctance to ‘sacrifice one boy’ to her cause.

Sisco agreed to ‘put forward some ideas on some of those key issues’ on which difference remained, for the second scheduled meeting, though stressing that he was ‘not putting forward any kind of American proposal’. He made clear that in discussing an interim settlement and ‘the precedent we want to create in so far as the overall settlement is concerned’ the United States had ‘a binding contractual agreement’ in mind, not ‘a piece of paper of indirect character... [but] a signed agreement between Egypt and Israel’. Soviet and UN endorsement could be achieved post-hoc.80

Sisco’s ideas focused on five areas. Firstly, the interim settlement could be linked to final settlement by stipulating direct negotiations under Jarring to implement Resolution 242 in the interim agreement. Secondly, Egypt would reopen the Suez Canal within six months of the interim agreement, with a range of options for Israeli usage to be considered, such as Israeli voluntarily renouncing usage until final agreement or immediate Israeli civilian usage, with military usage to follow upon final agreement. Thirdly the ceasefire would be reviewed after eighteen months, with negotiations under Jarring ongoing during this time, and both sides reserving the right to restore the status quo ante in the case of the other side failing to meet its

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80Second Session, Meeting between Mrs. Golda Meir and Mr. Joseph Sisco, 2 August 1971. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134.
undertakings. Fourthly, Israeli would forces withdraw some 10km and a token Egyptian force of riflemen, with no supporting vehicle, artillery, heavy equipment, or construction of military installations permitted, and an intervening UN peacekeeping and supervisory force. Fifthly POWs exchange would take place within fifteen days of agreement, which would come into force immediately when signed.\(^81\)

On US-Israel relations, he suggested ‘the closest possible intelligence exchange’ to ensure agreement on due observance of the agreement and consultations on any suspected violations, with the US supporting Israel in international forums ‘if in our judgement a violation has taken place’. Accepting that withdrawal in the context of an interim agreement posed risks for Israel, Sisco was ‘prepared to suggest to my government that... we also talk about in that context what would be important in terms of further long-term financial and military commitments’.\(^82\)

Sisco was obliged to ‘categorically’ to record that Washington could and would not ‘in the foreseeable future’ accept Israeli urgings to drop the Rogers Plan, but could and would ‘try to be helpful with Jarring in terms of looking at the new situation and probably approaching it from the point of view of a new fact’.\(^83\) Acknowledging that Sadat’s formulation on the Suez Canal was ‘very one-sided’, Sisco argued that in his reluctance ‘to allow, or be seen to allow’ Israeli passage while the IDF was in occupation of Egyptian territory, Sadat ‘had got a point... in the sense that he has got a genuine political problem and this is very difficult for us to cope with’. But, beyond his suggestions as to how this might be overcome, Sisco stressed that Israel retained ‘the real leverage’ as it would be ‘continuing in occupation of the remainder of the territory and in particular Sharm el-Sheikh remains in your hands’. Away from the glare of publicity, the Israel and US, ‘in the quietude of our discussions, would openly admit that whatever on-going efforts there may be in a post-interim settlement period, that the new status quo was likely to be a status quo that was going to last for

\(^{81}\) Minutes of Oral Discussion Relating to Ideas on Interim Suez Canal Agreement, Discussed By Mr. Sisco with Prime Minister Meir, 3 August, 1971. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134, Folder Rabin/Kissinger 1971, Vol. 2 [1 of 1].

\(^{82}\) Second Session, Meeting between Mrs. Golda Meir and Mr. Joseph Sisco, 2 August 1971.

\(^{83}\) Ibid.
some time. Sisco posited this as the centrepiece of his case. Whatever the details on paper, an ‘interim’ agreement would enshrine a new de facto status quo, and that

The reality as far as you are concerned, and are concerned is that the new status quo is likely to last for a long time. You are creating a new situation. And in that situation, Sham el-Sheikh remains in the hands of Israel. 64

Addressing potential Israeli misgivings, Sisco argued ‘that an interim agreement can be based on the assumption that a return to the status quo ante is unlikely’ and that Sadat himself had welcomed a new situation as creating a ‘favourable atmosphere’. This meant, according to Sisco, not just a better atmosphere in Egypt-Israel relations, ‘it would give him time to concentrate in a serious way on what [he] really wants to concentrate on, namely the internal situation in Egypt’. The Americans accepted Israel’s ‘sensible principle’ that security should not be jeopardised, that there was a ‘practical link, between the type of ceasefire achievable and the question of how much Israel withdraws and the whole question of an Egyptian presence east of the Suez Canal’ and that, as ‘a practical test on the ground’ the ceasefire should not be on ‘a short time fuse’. 65

In contrast with the previous session, Meir and Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon (the entire Meir cabinet was present, but forbidden to speak) largely confined their responses to identifying ‘two sticky points... very difficult to even try to swallow, let alone swallow; that’s the question of ceasefire. That’s the question of Egyptian military presence’. Further discussion was restricted to technical questions about the nature and feasibility of the Sisco-Sadat proposals and workings of the intelligence mutual review mechanism. 66

Allon concluded his interrogation of Sisco’s suggested terms by insisting that, despite American protestations that negotiations and aircraft deliveries were not and should not be linked, ‘the Israelis feel there is a linkage on our part’, and as such ‘it would be advisable before we give any reply to your questions... We get something on the airplane problem’. Meir added that she had ‘looked again at the President’s letter, and when he said, an on-going military supply relationship, he didn’t connect it with

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64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
66 Second Session, Meeting between Mrs. Golda Meir and Mr. Joseph Sisco, 2 August 1971.
the balance of power’. For Meir, the American approach was ‘not in accord with this letter’, and ‘some change’ was essential.87

For the Meir government, the course from this point was clear. Until the Nixon administration resumed deliveries of aircraft, making good on the promises of December 1970, no further proposals, compromises, or concessions would be considered. Rabin made this clear to Kissinger a week later, complaining that:

The timing of the visit could not have been worse... just one month after the cut off of the supply of planes to Israel. Sisco brought nothing, not even a hint of the resumption of aircraft deliveries... The fact that Sisco came with no assurances on supplies could not but be counter-productive... Thus, at the outset, atmosphere was poisoned. To complicate this problem with a request for Israeli concessions was all the more ridiculous... when Mr. Sisco presented the Prime Minister with his minute, the Israeli government decided not to discuss the interim solution further.88

American priorities of advancing negotiations had again collided with Israeli priorities of securing guarantees of ongoing supplies of aircraft, this time with terminal results for hopes of interim settlement.

The State Department-led drive for a partial settlement between Egypt and Israel lost momentum with the failure of Sisco’s mission, and State Department - Jerusalem relations continued to deteriorate in the autumn of 1971. Rogers delivered a speech on State Department ideas for an interim settlement at the UN on 4 October and suggesting that Egypt and Israel engage in proximity talks facilitated by Sisco, prompting a sharp response from Jerusalem and American Zionist Foundation community, who claimed that public disclosure of interim settlement ideas had compromised Israel’s negotiating position.89

Eban and Rogers shard a tense lunch ten days later, during which Eban denied any ‘personal attack’ against Rogers, but voiced a ‘serious concern’ in Israel ‘about the tone and content of our relations’. As Rogers ‘might not be aware’ of Israeli ‘sensitivities’ and if Israel did not make its position clear Rogers ‘might go further away from us’ when stating views in public. Far from celebrating a ‘honeymoon’ or

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87 Ibid.
'partnership', after a tense year in bilateral relations since the Jordan crisis, the Israeli leadership was dismayed that, as they saw the situation, ‘Moscow and Cairo are getting closer. Jerusalem and Washington are not getting closer’. 90


Sadat was also frustrated with working through the State Department, and after the collapse of interim settlement negotiations shifted his focus to cultivating backchannels with the White House. He wrote personally to Nixon after meeting with his subordinates in summer 1971, insisting that it was possible only ‘to talk about our initiative for a complete withdrawal and not a partial solution’. Egypt was willing to accept a staged withdrawal, during which Sharm el-Sheikh would ‘remain in Israeli hands’, and would ‘agree to international forces or to the forces of the big four at Sharm el-Sheikh’ while Jarring worked for ‘a final solution’ involving Israeli ‘return to the June 4 borders or the international borders’. 91

Heikal dates the termination of Rogers’ involvement to a specific date with the Egyptian Foreign Minister in late September, when ‘after this lunch meeting Rogers and Mahmoud Riad ceased to have any active part in negotiations over a Middle East settlement, which were conducted thenceforward between Kissinger and Hafez Ismail’. 92 In public, Sadat’s rhetoric was increasingly dominated by ominous statements on 1971 being the ‘Year of Decision’ in his dispute with Israel, but these warnings, if nothing else, tended to unite Egyptians and Israelis, though in derision rather than awe. Sadat’s bellicose formulation seemed to provoke the strongest reaction, one of irritation, from the Soviets, who disassociated themselves from it. 93

Having been excluded from the summer’s proceedings, the Soviets attempted a secret Middle East initiative of their own during the autumn of 1971. During his annual meeting with Nixon on 29 September, which was friendlier than previous encounters, Gromyko requested an additional one-to-one audience with the President, with no

90 Memcon, Eban – Rogers, 14 October 1971, NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 134, Folder Rabin/Kissinger Vol 2. 1971 (1 of 1).
others present. Once alone with Nixon, Gromyko unveiled a Middle East ‘peace plan’
direct from Brezhnev himself, which the Kremlin ‘hoped would provide the basis for
the US-Soviet dialogue’ in the lead-up to a superpower summit scheduled in Moscow
in 1972 (but not yet publicly announced). Declaring that ‘superpower disagreement
of one thing shouldn’t block agreement on another’ and suggesting that Middle East
negotiations be moved into the Dobrynin-Kissinger ‘Channel’, thus reducing the State
Department role, Gromyko presented what Nixon described immediately afterwards
as ‘a hell of a deal’. In exchange for a two-staged Israeli withdrawal from all occupied
territories, the Soviets offered complete withdrawal of their own combat troops from
Egypt, a complete arms embargo until final settlement was reached, and Soviet
participation in political and security guarantees. Although he retained a studied
distance in his discussion with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Nixon was so surprised at
the generosity of the offer that he had Kissinger double check the terms with Gromyko
soon afterwards, only to receive not just confirmation of the previous concessions, but
a suggestion for an additional ‘fixed obligation’ that Israeli shipping would enjoy
passage through the Suez Canal.94

The opportunity to remove the Soviet military presence from Egypt, while
simultaneously recasting the Middle East conflict from a détente obstacle to success
story was tempting, but the political climate in US-Israel relations and within the
United States was not judged to be conducive. Those congressmen, editorialists and
other American elites who continued to concern themselves with Middle East affairs
in late 1971 tended to focus on aircraft supply to Israel rather than diplomacy,
subjecting the White House to another campaign of media and congressional
pressure, and Kissinger refrained from mentioning the Soviet offer to the Israelis
during October 1971. The White House was busy elsewhere for the time being in any
case. Nixon stunned the diplomatic world on 12 October by announcing his
acceptance of an invitation to a top-level superpower summit in Moscow the
following May. Just six days later, Kissinger announced a major breakthrough in his

negotiations with North Vietnamese negotiator Lê Đức Tho, (prematurely) proclaiming that ‘peace is at hand’.\(^9^5\)

Even as the White House focused on Vietnam, Sadat travelled to Moscow to personally discuss ‘clouded’ bilateral relations with Brezhnev and other Soviet leaders on 12-13 October. Outlining his political-military strategy for recovering Egypt’s occupied territories and explaining his approach towards Israel and the US, Sadat attempted to win renewed Soviet support for his cause over three meetings. Acknowledging that there had been a ‘lack of understanding’ between Cairo and Moscow since al-Sabri’s removal in May and Rogers’ shortly thereafter, Sadat claimed that western propaganda was responsible for reports of ‘eliminating socialism and changing the Nasserist line’, stressing that he had informed Moscow of the necessary move against Sabri a month in advance. Explaining what he had in mind with the ‘year of decision’ Sadat stressed that he was ‘for a solution of peace even with a \(\frac{1}{2}\)% chance’, but if there was no movement in 1971, as 1972 was a US Election year, nothing could be expected until mid-1973. The Egyptian people and armed forces would not tolerate so long a wait, but while Sadat did not ‘expect to reach the June 4 borders and solve the whole problem’ in a matter of months, once some movement was underway it would permit participants to ‘allocate any time as is convenient... so that the world will not lose its feeling for this problem’. Sadat thus presented the ‘year of decision’ not as indicating that decisive action would be taken within the year, but that a course would be decided by the end of 1971, either to pursue an exclusively diplomatic solution, or to also resort to military means in furtherance of a political solution.\(^9^6\)

Attempting to explain his flirtations with the Nixon administration in terms of exhausting every opportunity for a peaceful solution, Sadat claimed that this engagement had revealed three main American aims: to eliminate the ‘Soviet presence in the area and plant misunderstanding between the Arabs and the Soviets’;\(^9^5\) Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 459.
the ‘isolation of Egypt, as the main base of the Arab world in liberation and the owner of the means for building the state which will defend the Arabs’; and the ‘elimination of the regimes of progress’ which would be ‘easy... the Arab world over’ once Egypt was isolated. Sadat claimed that King Hussein would ‘one day put his signature on the liquidation of everything’, as Israel-Jordan agreement was ‘already on the maps’ and that

the new American initiative is a partial solution for Egypt in order to isolate Egypt and to give Hussein an opportunity to eliminate the problem and we shall be the reason for that, without mentioning Syria or the final solution – and after that we shall fulfil all of America’s objectives in the area.97

Sadat presented this as an American agenda, but as has been seen, when discussing the situation with Rogers five months previously, it was Sadat who presented an unashamedly ‘Egypt first’ approach, suggesting that Egypt would prefer to rid itself both of the Soviet presence and of responsibility for other Arabs, moving closer to the west. Sadat’s characterisation of Hussein’s approach in fact much more closely fit his own conduct throughout the 1970s. Although he did not emphasise this during discussion with the Soviets, the important difference between Sadat and the Americans was not on separating Egypt from the Soviets, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians, which Sadat was readily willing to do, but on whether agreement on a partial Israeli withdrawal in the Sinai should be linked an interim step linked to further steps, completely withdrawing the IDF from Egyptian territory, which was his strategic objective.

With regards to his own strategy for achieving complete Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory, Sadat had two alternative courses in mind. The first, preferred, course was a peacefully negotiated political solution. The second alternative, was ‘to set the problem in motion and to arouse the world’s interest in it – for the sake of a peaceful solution – by limited military operations’. Given that fourteen months of ceasefire had passed and the world was losing interest, seemed an increasingly likely resort.98 Like the Soviet Union, Sadat would recognise Israel within the 1967 border. He stressed that ‘the aim of the military action is to serve the solution of peace and

97 Protocol of First Meeting Between Sadat and the Soviet Leaders, Tuesday, 12 October, 1971.
98 This is an important theme of Yigal Kipnis’ recent volume on the run up to the October War, spelled out on page 38. However, Kipnis’ analysis focuses on 1973, with 1971 and 1972 discussed only briefly. Kipnis, The Road to War, esp. p. 38.
not destroy it’, and that ‘on the day on which I begin military operations I shall declare
that I am willing to discuss a solution of peace’. 99

Brezhnev was sceptical of Sadat’s plan to combine military and diplomatic solutions,
as he feared that ‘military action may cancel all this talking’. Sadat insisted that ‘if we
begin with our limited operations and everyone says to return to the June 4 borders’,
he ‘would agree and cancel the military action’ as he did ‘not want to throw Israel into
the sea’, but Brezhnev queried the feasibility of this plan, predicting that once ‘military
actions begin they will not finish… and will leave no other opening but that of the
military solution’. Attempting to allay Soviet fears of being drawn into a wider
confrontation, Sadat repeatedly emphasised that Egypt did not expect Soviet soldiers
to fight its battles, but beseeched Brezhnev to provide the ‘strength’ to fight Israel,
particularly a means for ‘eye for an eye’ retaliation against renewed ‘in depth’ attacks
by Israel on population centres. 100

Sadat’s presentation of his strategy of limited military action in October 1971 and his
idea of offering peace terms almost immediately after attacking Israel directly
prefigured his actions two years later. The Soviets were wary however in late 1971,
and would remain so throughout the next two years. Military technicalities and were
discussed in the final session on 13 October. Soviet Head of State Nikolai Podgorny
argued that Arab armies were superior in some areas, such as artillery, and that while
like-for-like retaliation would not curb ‘in depth’ bombing, the Phantom F4s could be
countered. The Soviets rejected Arab complaints that Israel received ‘everything’
while they were left behind, requesting that Sadat control the Cairo press to ensure a
message of friendship was emphasised. The meetings nonetheless concluded
cordially, with Brezhnev promising that combat aircraft would arrive soon, to be
followed promptly by training pilots, and that further weapons would follow later. 101

An Egypt-Soviet joint communique issued on 13 October noted that the discussions
had been held ‘in a spirit of frankness’, and called for peaceful settlement of Egypt’s

100 Ibid.
101 Ibid; Protocol of Third Brezhnev – Sadat Meeting, Moscow, 13 October 1971. NPLM, NSC Files,
HAK/ME Box 134, Folder Rabin/Kissinger Vol. 2, 1971 (1 of 1).
dispute with Israel in accordance with Resolution 242. Egyptian efforts to achieve ‘a socialist reconstruction of society’ were affirmed while ‘attempts to spread anti-communism and anti-Sovietism’ were condemned. Egypt appreciated the ‘great assistance’ provided by the Soviet Union, and the two sides ‘agreed specifically on measures aimed at further strengthening the military might of Egypt’.  

Brezhnev did not make good on his promises. When burgeoning tensions between India and Pakistan over the Bangladesh Liberation War escalated into open conflict in November, the Kremlin redirected militarily supplies from Egypt to India, pointedly recalling air and air defence units from the Aswan Dam area. This move made clear that Moscow was not prepared to cope with a Middle East crisis at that time, but at least provided Sadat with a fig leaf for quiet inaction as the ‘Year of Decision’ drew to a close.

Kissinger finally briefed Rabin on the Soviet offer of late September under conditions of strictest secrecy on 5 November, generating suspicion, if not outright hostility, both to the terms of the deal and proposed mode of negotiation. Rabin made a short trip to Jerusalem to convey the news to Meir, where, following deliberations, ‘all agreed it was vital to reject the Soviet initiative’. Commitment to full withdrawal, on any terms, was a non-starter for the Meir government, which was in any case adamantly opposed to superpower bargaining on Israel’s future over Israeli heads, Kissinger’s assurances that he ‘did not intend to negotiate with the Soviet Union, not even at the top level, without close coordination with Israel’ notwithstanding. From Jerusalem’s perspective, the Soviets seemed to offer little more a return to Two-Power talks, to which Israel had been opposed from the outset, and horrified at the outcome – the Rogers Plan, and a reintroduction of the prospect of an imposed solution. While sharing Washington’s concern with removing the Soviet presence from Egypt, in all other major aspects the Soviet proposal ran directly against Israel’s priorities of scrapping the Rogers Plan for good, directly negotiating peace treaties and border

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103 For a detailed, archive account based analysis of the Nixon administration response to the India-Pakistan War see Siniver, *The Machinery of Crisis*, pp. 148-184.
changes with its Arab neighbours, and securing ongoing supplies of American military aid. Jerusalem refrained from any immediate formal response to Kissinger’s presentation, instead suggesting that the matter should be discussed at the highest levels, and that Nixon should invite Meir to Washington for this purpose.\textsuperscript{105}

With her meeting with Nixon scheduled for 2 December, Meir spent the preceding week on a promotional tour of the United States, emphasising a message of warning against beguilement by Soviet political deals while the Arabs prepared for war. Meeting with Nixon, Meir reemphasised this message along with usual theme of securing military supplies for Israel. In Rabin’s account of the meeting, Meir responded with a demonstration of mettle unusual in a foreign representative addressing the President of the United States, advising Nixon that

\begin{quote}
I’ll tell you how I see the situation. There will be no American-Soviet deal contrary to Israel’s wishes, and the United States will not exert pressure on Israel to concede to positions reached in any such discussion. The United States understands that, from Israel’s point of view, the Rogers Plan is a dead letter as an operative US position. Israel will convey to the United States her views regarding both a partial agreement and an overall settlement; and delivery of arms – including planes – will continue unimpeded.\textsuperscript{106}
\end{quote}

The White House was ready to accede to this forceful line. In advance of the meeting with Meir, Nixon had already decided to conclude ‘an agreement under which Israel will receive from future production the 42 F-4 and 82 A-4 Skyhawk aircraft it seeks’. Sisco and Rabin would work out the finer details of delivery schedule by the end of the month, including considering ‘contingencies under which earlier deliveries would occur, and (b) [sic] the question of developing a joint U.S. and Israeli public posture on aircraft designed to remove this issue from public debate’.\textsuperscript{107}

Meir’s Labour government had preserved and finally achieved the assurances and deferences which it had sought from the Nixon administration since 1969, and restated upon receipt of the $500m aid package in November 1970. Nixon had finally agreed to permit Israel to use the money to satisfy all of its arms requests, and actually increased the number of Phantoms provided from fifty-four to sixty-six (twelve were pledged in December 1970 and provided over the following six months,

\textsuperscript{105} Rabin \textit{Memoirs}, pp. 159-160; Rafael, \textit{Destination Peace}, p. 271.

\textsuperscript{106} Rabin, \textit{Memoirs}, pp. 163-164.

\textsuperscript{107} Memo Kissinger – Rogers, Undated; Memo Kissinger – Rogers, Provision of Aircraft to the Government of Israel, 28 December 1971. NPLM, NSC, HAK/ME, Box 134, Folder Rabin Kissinger, Vol. 2 [1 of 1].
another twelve were pledged in May 1971, and a further forty-eight were pledged in December).

With regard to negotiations, in a secret agreement known within the Meir government as ‘The Understandings of December 1971’ Nixon also delivered the diplomatic pledges Meir had been waiting for. The US and Israel agreed that Nixon administration Middle East policy during 1972-1973 would be based on the following understandings:

1. The Rogers Plan, which Meir felt was ‘like a sword over our heads’ would not be the basis of discussion between the US and Israel.
2. The US would act to prevent an American-Soviet agreement on the Middle East.
3. Israel would be ready to secretly and fundamentally discuss a partial settlement to enable opening the Suez Canal.
4. The supply of planes from the US to Israel would continue on the basis of the quantity and rate of supply requested by Israel (forty-two Phantoms and eighty-two Skyhawks).108

Kissinger, who Nixon now assigned ‘operational control’ of Middle East policy by transferring the ‘real negotiations’ to Kissinger-Dobrynin and Kissinger-Rabin backchannels,109 ensured that Rogers received a copy of a presidential directive ‘about the planes to Israel and the Israel-Egypt negotiations’. This, according to White House Chief of Staff Robert Haldeman, stated that Nixon wanted

Rogers to know that he expects him to play it politically, that we can’t have American Jews bitching about planes deliveries. We can’t push Israel too hard and have a confrontation, so he’s to keep Sisco slowed down... We must not let this issue hurt us politically.

Sisco reaffirmed the understandings of December 1971 in early February 1972, delivering White House assurances that the US would ‘not put forward with Egypt, nor will it support any suggestions or proposal without making every effort to seek and to achieve full prior understanding with the government of Israel’. Proximity talks, with Sisco conferring alternately with Egyptian and Israeli representative in New York City during February 1972 were merely a holding exercise, and Egypt soon withdrew in frustration.110

In August 1971 Sisco had been obliged to record ‘categorically’ with Meir that the Nixon administration could not drop Rogers Plan in the ‘foreseeable future’, but just

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108 Kipnis, *The Road to War*, pp. 79-80.
four months later, Nixon agreed not only to do just that, but granted Israel a veto over pursuit of any Middle East negotiations for the next two years. A long bilateral struggle to establish policy priorities had been concluded. The indomitable Golda Meir had prevailed.

CONCLUSION

The historiography of the Arab-Israel conflict has tended to treat the three year period between September 1970 and October 1973 as an inter-war period defined by two major themes: the consolidation of a de facto alliance between Golda Meir’s Israel and Richard Nixon’s United States, and the ‘lost opportunities’ of 1971. Indeed, many works on the period take their titles from one or other of those themes. This chapter has explored the interaction between these two critical dynamics from October 1970 to February 1972, arguing that that the former has been misrepresented, but nonetheless must be regarded as prior context to the latter.

To consider first the established orthodox-revisionist debate on the opportunities presented by Sadat’s overtures in spring-summer 1971, during his first meeting with Rogers Sadat demonstrated keenness to rid Egypt of its Soviet military presence and restore diplomatic relations with the United States, and willingness to negotiate away claims on behalf of other Arabs, whether in Palestine or elsewhere. Both Rogers and Sisco were surprised by the strong sense of a post-Nasserist (or even anti-Nasserist) ‘Egypt first’ approach, showing little interest in the fate of Gaza or Jerusalem, and focusing exclusively on recovering the Sinai for Egypt. As is well known, such an approach was a fundamental basis of the post-October War peace process, which eventually led to Egypt’s isolation and loss of leadership in the Arab world.

The protocols of the Brezhnev-Sadat meeting show not just that Sadat conceived his limited war with the intention of reviving diplomacy by October 1971 at the latest, but that the Soviets, and six weeks later, both the Israelis and Americans, who procured copies of the protocols, were fully aware of this. Placed in longer context, it is now clear that throughout his presidential carer, Sadat remained true to his initial pledge to Rogers, that Egypt must recover the Sinai, but all other issues were open for
negotiation and compromise. Sadat would resort to force in the absence of political process, but only to revive rather than replace diplomacy. This evidence contradicts the ‘orthodox’ case that the post-October peace process was premised on radical departures in Egyptian policies.

But while engaging with debates on the opportunities presented by diplomatic proposals, this chapter has also offered a critical assessment of the international context in which those proposals were mooted, arguing that US-Israel relations must be seen as prior context to Egypt-Israel diplomacy. Richard Nixon and Golda Meir took office within a few weeks of one another in early 1969, and, as seen in chapter one, initially eyed one another warily as potential sources of problems. But once the pair met in August 1969 a famous political romance was born, which Meir was careful to cultivate (her occasional disagreements with the President’s subordinates notwithstanding). In a relatively short span of time Nixon’s willingness to provide state of the art warplanes to Israel had developed into something akin to a facilitator/dependent relationship, where Israel consistently demanded a further deposit as a prior condition of any political movement.

The famous Nixon-Meir romance may have again blossomed later, but had descended into a dysfunctional enabler/dependent relationship in the period under discussion here, degenerating into Meir-Rogers and Meir-Sisco confrontations in the summer of 1971. But although the Nixon administration withheld aircraft and categorically insisted the ‘Rogers Plan’ must be preserved in the summer of 1971, by the turn of 1972 Nixon had committed to meeting Israel’s arms requests in full, dropped the ‘Rogers Plan’, and granted Israeli a veto over any further initiatives for two years. The long struggle to establish priorities was resolved fully in Meir’s favour with a Nixon U-Turn in December 1971, but the idea of Israel’s proven value as a ‘strategic asset’ September 1970 was seldom, if ever, mentioned during the course of this lengthy and acrimonious dialogue. The evidence now available clearly shows that rather than appreciative of a strategic asset, Nixon was more concerned with a potential electoral liability at the turn of 1972.
Meeting with Meir in late July, Sisco waxed lyrical on the ‘wonderful’ warplanes, remarking, ‘Phantoms – I hope we can change the name. That name itself is a psychological symbol in the area. It is a symbol that has positive and negative effects of the Arabs’, acting as both a signifier of American-Israeli ‘strength’ to be reckoned with, but also detracting from the US efforts ‘to play the role that is meeting the legitimate interests of both sides’. But as this chapter has shown, nowhere were the Phantoms more totemic than within Israel. It is difficult to exaggerate the importance with which Meir’s government regarded the warplanes. As discussed in the next chapter, it is widely accepted that the Israeli military’s doctrinal obsession with air power, known as ‘the Conception’, the idea which held that the Egypt would not dare attack Israel without a deterrent against aerial bombing of population centres, was a major factor allowing Egypt and Syria to achieve strategic surprise against Israel on 6 October 1973. Less appreciated is how its political parent, the Meir Cabinet’s airpower mentality, stifled efforts for a political settlement with Egypt in preceding years.

111 Meeting Between Mrs. Golda Meir and Mr. Joseph Sisco, July 30, 1971
CHAPTER 4.
MISCONCEIVED DIPLOMACY FEBRUARY 1972 – OCTOBER 1973: BOUND TO BE STILLBORN?

INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses Egyptian strategic planning, decision-making, and diplomacy from early 1972 to October 1973. The Egypt-Israel diplomatic process was moribund entering 1972, and the joint communiqué issued from first US-Soviet summit held in Moscow that May, calling for ‘military relaxation’ and ‘normalisation of the Middle East situation’ seemed to indicate mutual superpower satisfaction with this situation. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was outraged, and Soviet military personnel exited Egypt en masse at his request in July.

Sadat’s quest to recover Sinai territories seized by Israel in 1967 entered a new phase with the Soviet exodus. He immediately contacted Washington, hoping with that the removal of the Soviet presence, a major obstacle to US-Egypt cooperation, the stalled diplomatic process could be restarted. Washington was in no hurry however, with National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, preferring to wait until after the US presidential elections scheduled for November 1972 before considering any new initiative. Kissinger did not meet with Sadat’s representative, National Security Advisor Hafiz Ismail, until February and May 1973.

This chapter offers a reassessment of bilateral Egypt-US diplomacy during the spring and summer of 1973, arguing that the Ismail-Kissinger meetings talks anticipated cooperation during and after the October War, and as such cannot be overlooked. While the talks did not produce an immediate breakthrough, and as such have not generated major historiographical attention, they were nonetheless highly significant, as all of the major elements underpinning post-October War US-Egypt strategic collaboration were discussed. Specifically, Ismail distanced Cairo not just from Moscow, but also from the Palestinians, Syria, and other Arab powers, proposing a

separate Egypt-Israel peace process sponsored exclusively by the United States, and loosely sited in a nominal framework of overall Arab-Israeli settlement. Ismail and Kissinger agreed that this vision could be achieved only through a more ‘balanced’ American approach and US-Egypt bilateral cooperation facilitated by top-level backchannels, which should be ‘insulated’ in the event of war. As seen in later chapters, each of these elements proved critical to bilateral Egypt-US cooperation during and after the October War.

The chapter also explores Sadat’s preparations for war in October 1973. The removal of the Soviet presence from Egypt freed up relations with oil-producing conservative-monarchical Arab powers, particularly anti-communist Saudi Arabia. From late 1972 Sadat was able to build a remarkable coalition, combining a military alliance with Syria with economic and diplomatic support from the Arab oil producers, funding Egypt’s military campaign and wielding the ‘oil weapon’ against the US by imposing harsh sanctions against its Middle East policies. The final section of the chapter examines Egyptian’s war plans, arguing that while Sadat planned to achieve only limited territorial gains from his assault on Israel, widely held ideas that his war aim was the premeditated provocation of a superpower confrontation or crisis are unfounded.

The chapter demonstrates how, from mid-1972 - October 1973, Sadat developed the concepts which would underpin US-Egyptian cooperation during and after the October War into an ambitious diplomatic strategy designed to unite the Arab world, isolate Israel internationally, and, most importantly, incentivise the United States to rebalance its Middle East priorities towards cooperation with both Egypt and Israel. The implementation of this strategy during the October War and the post-war American-brokered post-war peace process is considered in later chapters.

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A YEAR OF DECISIONS: 1972

Three looming events dominated US President Richard Nixon’s agenda as 1971 turned to 1972: his scheduled visit to the People’s Republic of China in late February, the Moscow superpower summit to be held in May, and the US presidential elections scheduled for November. More than ever, what Nixon wanted from the Middle East and the State Department was quiet. Another Middle East crisis could potentially draw the spotlight away from his visit to China or could upset the Moscow summit, both of which were unprecedented by any American president and intended to achieve public relations as well as diplomatic coups, while perceived pressure on Israel or inattention to its needs could expose his re-election campaign to criticism from the US pro-Israel lobby.

In Egypt, Sadat’s ‘year of decision’ had ended with a whimper rather than a bang. On 28 December 1971 the central committee of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), Egypt’s only political party, headed by Sadat, conveyed the news that war was not imminent after all. In a mealy-mouthed address on 13 January, 1972, which became known as his ‘fog speech’, Sadat himself cited the ‘fog of war’ generated by an unfortunate conflict between two friendly countries, India and Pakistan, as the reason why Egypt had not waged war against Israel in late 1971.

At home, student protests against a harsh conscription regime, a moribund economy and lack of employment prospects, restrictions on free press and free expression, and unfulfilled promises and threats for action on the occupied territories and the Palestinian problem, spilled over into rioting in the streets of Cairo in mid-January,

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3 Neither event is discussed in detail in this thesis, but many authoritative works are available on both topics e.g. Garthoff on the Moscow Summit and Ambrose on Nixon’s re-election. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, pp. 325-359; Ambrose, *Nixon: Ruin and Recovery* (Simon & Schuster, London, 1991), pp. 11-58.

4 As seen in the previous chapter, Nixon had demonstrated concern with regard Israeli efforts to influence the presidential elections as early as spring 1971, and as 1971 turned to 1972 he discontinued State Department efforts to reach a negotiated settlement, for fear of provoking Israel and its supporters. After considerable turbulence throughout 1971, US-Israel relations had stabilised towards the end of the year, when Nixon himself agreed to scrap the ‘Rogers Plan’ and meet Israel’s aircraft requests in full, prioritising good relations with Israel during an election year over perceived US interests in the Arab world.

with clashes between protesters and police, and mass arrests. Sadat himself was the subject of widespread personal criticism and ridicule, openly mocked by the chant *Rah al-Wahsh, Gaa al-Gahsh* (“Gone is the giant, the donkey has taken his place”). Despite consolidation of power through ‘corrective action’ in May 1971, in early 1972 Sadat’s presidency again seemed to face an uncertain future.\(^6\)

At the superpower level, Nixon’s enthusiasm for détente and for the forthcoming Moscow Summit was shared by CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, which in turn made avoiding Middle East crises a shared superpower concern. This was emphasised by the Soviets during a series of high-level meetings with Egyptian officials in the spring of 1972, including two Brezhnev-Sadat meetings held in Moscow in February and April, during which Sadat failed to secure a Soviet commitment to expanding Egypt’s military power. Instead, an arms deal including provision of new model T22 warplanes and T62 tanks collapsed in mid-March when the Soviets demanded upfront payment in hard currency for future arms deliveries. Already struggling economically and militarily in a worse position relative to Israel than ever, this was a setback for Sadat. Since its first purchase of Soviet weapons in 1955, Egypt had enjoyed a 50% price reduction, with the balance payable over ten to fifteen years at a very favourable interest rate of 2%. The Egyptian Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Saad el-Shazly, estimated that the new terms effectively quadrupled the price of military equipment.\(^7\)

TASS (the official Soviet news agency) Director Leonid Zamaytin later revealed that the credit withdrawal was intended to ‘make Sadat more pro-Soviet’ and ‘pliant’ and to signal ‘displeasure’ at Egypt cutting back on the supply of goods, especially cotton, to the Soviet Union. Further, military relations were strained, with ‘nasty disagreements about the quality of the Soviet military equipment’, as the Egyptians blamed poor aircraft for plane crashes, while the Soviets blamed Egyptian incompetence.\(^8\) The Egyptian military resented not just professional condescension from Soviet ‘advisors’,


\(^8\) Lebow And Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, pp. 168-169.
but also perceived debauchery in the personal conduct of the Soviet troops as guests in a Muslim country. Minister of War General Muhammad Sadeq became known as a vocal critic of the Soviets, refusing to accompany Sadat on his next visit to Moscow. Although in April 1972 Moscow made an unprecedented public statement endorsing Egypt’s right to use force to regain its territories if peaceful means failed, Sadat and his generals doubted that the Soviets would provide the military means, suspecting that they preferred instead to leave Egypt and Syria in a position of ongoing dependency.\(^9\)

Following his unsuccessful trip to Moscow in February, Sadat sought alternative sources of funds and arms, hoping to access to cash from wealthy oil-producer Arab states to arrange large-scale arms procurement from China, France, West Germany, and the United Kingdom (though ultimately achieved little success). In late 1971 Egypt had ostensibly began to consider a merger proposed by Libya’s ruler, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, who professed a revolutionary but staunchly anti-communist ideology. In addition to combining military forces, unification would provide Egypt with access to Libya’s considerable oil revenues, estimated at an annual $2.5 billion, and hard currency reserves, estimated at some $3 billion. Sadat’s flirtation with Gaddafi attracted the nervous attention of the conservative Arab monarchies, and in March 1972 Sadat attempted to capitalise on this discomfiture by personally leading fundraising delegations to Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. In private sessions, Sadat criticised the Saudi King Faisal and the Gulf Sheikhs for their demands that Egypt go to war against Israel as a condition of economic aid, arguing that they should pay for the weapons in advance in order to facilitate Egypt’s military option.\(^10\)

The superpower order of priorities with regard to the Middle East was further underlined by the joint communiqué issued from the Moscow summit on 29 May 1972. Although the Soviets had again raised their proposals for Middle East settlement during high-level summit preparation meetings, with Brezhnev himself warning of an inevitable ‘explosion’ in the absence of agreement, the Americans,

satisfied with the status quo, remained aloof and demurred on detailed discussions.\textsuperscript{11}

The summit communiqué touched on many strategic issues and locations worldwide, but included only two terse paragraphs on the Middle East, reaffirming support for the Jarring Mission and a peaceful settlement in accordance with UNSCR 242, which,

In the view of the US and the USSR... would open prospects for the normalization of the Middle East situation and would permit, in particular, consideration of further steps to bring about a military relaxation in that area.\textsuperscript{12}

Cairo received this statement with horror. Sadat himself recounts that the communiqué came as ‘a violent shock to us because... we lagged at least twenty steps behind Israel and so “military relaxation” in this context could mean nothing other than giving in to Israel’. After a further unsatisfactory visit to Moscow, during which he again failed to convince Brezhnev to modernise Egypt’s army, on 18 July Sadat publicly announced that the Soviet ‘military mission to Egypt’ had been terminated.\textsuperscript{13}

Although it is sometimes misleading stated that Soviet ‘advisors’ left Egypt, it was in fact some 15,000-20,000 Soviet combat troops, including those who had taken responsibility for Egypt’s air defences and engaged Israel during the War of Attrition, which evacuated over the following weeks. A relatively small number of Soviet technicians and instructors, estimated at less than one thousand, remained.\textsuperscript{14}

Nonetheless, the move proved wildly popular in Egypt, particularly among the military.\textsuperscript{15} The news was also welcomed in the United States and Israel, where it was seen as heralding the end of Egypt’s military ambitions for the foreseeable future, and thus lessening pressure to re-engage with negotiations. Israel’s famously eloquent Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, captured the mood with his confident assertion that ‘Sadat has achieved an emotional satisfaction at [the] expense of his strategic and political power.’\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{11} Daigle,\textit{ The Limits of Détente}, pp. 210-212.
\textsuperscript{13} Sadat,\textit{ In Search of Identity}, pp. 229-230.
\textsuperscript{15} Kenneth Stein,\textit{ Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace} (Routledge, 1999), p. 64.
\textsuperscript{16} Cited in Shlaim,\textit{ The Iron Wall}, p. 314. Eban’s subordinate, Foreign Ministry Director Gideon Rafael, claims that among his colleagues in Israeli foreign policy making circles he remained in a ‘minority of one’ in his view that by reducing Soviet influence Sadat had removed an inhibitor to war. Rafael
Eban was mistaken. The exit of Soviet military personnel freed Egypt on several fronts. Firstly, Sadat was no longer responsible for Soviet troops, removing an inhibitor to his military decision making. Although it took some time for relations to recover sufficiently, restrictions on the types and quantities of equipment Egypt could purchase were eventually lifted, allowing a massive purchase of Soviet armaments in early 1973. Monies for these purchases were also more readily available from the coffers of wealthy oil-producing Arab states after the removal of Soviet troops. A staunch anti-communist as well as anti-Semite, the Saudi monarch King Faisal was reluctant to provide financial or diplomatic support for Egypt while it maintained a strong Soviet presence. Although Libyan President Colonel Gadhafi was a professed revolutionary, he was united with Faisal and other Arab monarchs in their staunch anti-communism. An Egypt-Libya merger, to come into effect in September 1973, was announced in August 1972, and although this never came to pass, Sadat skilfully used the prospect of the radicalisation of Egypt to garner greater support from the Saudis and Emirates. President Assad of Syria, who had sealed a $700 million arms deal with Moscow in July (accepting a major influx of Soviet advisors even as their colleagues departed from Egypt) visited Moscow in October in the role of Egypt-Soviet mediator, paving the way for Egyptian Premier Aziz Sidqi (chief rival of the anti-Soviet War Minister Sadeq) to visit soon afterwards. Gamasy’s description of Sidqi’s visit as a ‘complete success’ may be exaggerated, but both sides agreed that their military relationship should not be allowed to collapse completely, and exchanged promises that the Soviet navy would continue to enjoy access to Egyptian ports, while arms deliveries to Egypt would resume in 1973.

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17 This aspect is given particular emphasis by Sadat’s entourage. Mohammed Heikal, editor of the quasi-official Cairo mouthpiece Al-Ahram Heikal’s claims that the expulsion forced the Soviets to ‘double your stakes or quit’, commit to the Arab cause or risk losing prestige in the Arab world. Heikal, *Sphinx & Commissar*, pp. 242-255. Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy boasts that ‘Clearly, the Soviets had got the message they could not take Egypt for granted and had to take positive measures to maintain good relations’. Fahmy, *Negotiating for Peace*, p. 9.
20 Gamasy *The October War*, p. 147; Rubinstein *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 214.
Critically for Sadat’s strategy, the Soviet exodus also removed an inhibitor to improved relations with the United States. Kissinger, who first called for the ‘expulsion’ of Soviet troops in June 1970, has attempted to take credit, claiming that his policy of ‘complete frustration of the Arabs’ had at last driven a wedge between Egypt and their Soviet patrons, although he expresses ‘complete surprise’ at the sudden announcement of the Soviet withdrawal. 21 In his 1994 study Diplomacy, Kissinger presents the ‘expulsion’ as a vindication of his ‘stonewalling’ policy, claiming that it was the ‘first sign the Nixon strategy was having an impact’. 22 According to Kissinger’s personal chronology, in early 1972,

Above all, I calculated the longer the process went on, the more likely Sadat would seek to deal with us directly. My strategy had not changed. Until some Arab state showed a willingness to separate from the Soviets, or the Soviets were prepared to disassociate from the maximum Arab program, we had no reason to modify our policy.

He claims that he ‘began to sense that our strategy was starting to work, at least with respect to Egypt... On April 8, I felt confident enough to advise Nixon that the Soviet Egyptian relationship was clearly more reserved than in Nasser’s time’. 23

If taken at face value, this statement indicates that Kissinger was extraordinarily slow to comprehend Sadat’s disposition towards the US, and reinforces the frequently-voiced criticism that Kissinger seemed incapable of considering the situation outside his own reductive Cold War mentality. 24 As shown in the previous chapter, it is now clear that the removal of Soviet troops was raised by when meeting Sadat with Secretary of State William Rogers in May 1971 and by Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko with Nixon himself in September. Rogers and his assistant Joseph Sisco had impressed upon Nixon that Sadat seemed genuinely interested in peace with Israel and good relations with the US, distancing himself from the Soviets and Palestinians. During the summer of 1971, the pair had made a major effort to develop the seemingly promising new possibilities of a negotiated settlement presented by Sadat, but their diplomacy was harshly criticised by Kissinger. His own account of Middle East diplomacy in 1971, while including a brief, dismissive, reference to Sadat’s ‘peace initiative’, makes no mention of the Rogers-Sadat meeting in May, or indeed of any

21 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1295.
23 Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1291-1292.
important State Department contributions that year, such as Assistant Secretary of State for Near and Middle Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco’s follow up meetings with Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. Instead, even his account of his first direct contact with senior Egyptian figures in early 1973, Kissinger continues to present Sadat as an unknown quantity:

When Hafiz Ismail arrived in Washington for his visit on February 23, 1973, we knew astonishingly little of Egypt’s real thinking... For all we knew, Sadat was pursuing a slightly more benign version of the Nasser strategy: to get us to deliver the maximum Arab programme for concessions that could later be vetoed by the Palestinians, who were in turn heavily influenced by the Soviets.25

It is in this artificial and misleading context that Kissinger’s professed confusion at the time about why Sadat did not demand reciprocating concessions from him in advance of removing the Soviet presence is presented,26 as though in the summer of 1971 Sadat had not forwarded the best terms and maximum measure of flexibility he felt he could afford. Sadat had offered to sign a peace agreement with Israel and to restore diplomatic relations with the US, and very explicitly expressed his enthusiasm for moving Egypt from the Soviet to the American orbit. Offering to remove the Soviet presence formed a centrepiece concession, intended to be attractive to both Israel and the United States, but Sadat had been disappointed with both the process and the outcomes of his engagement with the Nixon administration. Kissinger’s bemusement as to why Sadat did not reopen negotiations on the same terms in 1972, framed as though none of this had occurred, is therefore itself perplexing.

Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammed Ghaleb approached the US charge d’affaires in Cairo, Joseph Green, on 19 July, the after the Soviet exit was announced, conveying that ‘Sadat’s announcement represented [a] decision... taken in the national interest of Egypt’, and that the situation had ‘acquired a new momentum’. Egypt was keen to restart negotiations on an interim agreement, inquiring into Washington’s interest in a range of formats, including renewed superpower negotiations, a reactivation of the Four-Power talks forum, or a revival of the Jarring mission.27

26 Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1292-1294.
Cairo was clearly keen to reopen dialogue with Washington and explore all available options to get diplomacy moving again. But while the State Department was amenable, Kissinger insisted that any new initiative should be delayed until after the presidential elections scheduled for November. The cool American response conveyed that Washington was not ‘keen to rush in with a new diplomatic initiative’, seeing ‘no evidence’ that revival of failed negotiating approaches would fare any better than before, and therefore, did ‘not favour any such moves’. With regard to negotiations under US auspices, Washington admonished that Egypt could ‘offer Israel what it most wants: long-term security and acceptance as a Middle Eastern state’. Washington did not see ‘entering negotiations as a “concession” on the part of Egypt’, and warned that negotiations would not be ‘painless’ as both sides would face ‘difficult decisions’. 28

Although Kissinger regarded the Egyptian overtures in the wake of the Soviet exodus as ‘[t]he seminal opportunity to bring about a reversal of alliances in the Arab world’, this, he later claimed, ‘would have to wait until we finally put the war in Vietnam behind us’. 29 But during discussion with Israeli Ambassador to Washington Yitzhak Rabin in October 1972 he seemed as concerned with his own personal role, wondering aloud, ‘Why don’t they wait until I am the new Secretary of State? Why do they have to deal with the issue now?’ 30

Just two days before his re-election in November 1972, Nixon promised that the Middle East would be ‘a very high priority’ for his second administration, but still embroiled in negotiating an exit from the Vietnam War and preoccupied with the upcoming presidential elections, he retained his policy of staunch support for Israel. Rabin was happy to reciprocate, stating publicly that from the Israeli perspective ‘While we appreciate support we are getting from one camp, we must prefer support in the form of deeds we are getting from the other camp’. This was no unguarded slip, but a calculated intervention from Jerusalem, which viewed a victory for the Democratic candidate George McGovern as heralding a likely American retreat into

28 Ibid.
29 Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1300. Nixon and Kissinger planned to have a Vietnam peace plan in place and all American combat troops out before the presidential elections in November.
30 Yigal Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, p. 39, Note 5.
isolationism, and hence imimical to Israeli interests.\textsuperscript{31} Nixon, who soundly defeated Senator George McGovern of South Dakota with the largest ever margin of almost eighteen million popular votes, and all but seventeen Electoral College votes, would have prevailed without Israeli assistance, but nonetheless was pleased to see his share of the American Jewish vote double from seventeen percent in 1968 to thirty-four percent in 1972.\textsuperscript{32}

Sadat, while keen to engage the second Nixon administration as a negotiating partner, did not simply await developments in the US. He convened his Armed Forces Supreme Council in late October 1972 to announce that

\begin{quote}
The time for words is over... We have to manage our affairs with whatever we have to hand; we have to follow this plan to change the situation and set fire to the region. Then words will have meaning and value.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Sadat’s apparent determination to prepare for war, without waiting for further arms shipments from the Soviet Union, seemed to represent a bold departure in Egyptian strategy. Many of the senior military figures present, led by Minister of War Mohammed Ahmed Sadiq, expressed scepticism about the feasibility of an attack, citing vulnerability to Israeli airpower and the daunting challenge of staging a large-scale crossing of the fortified Suez Canal. Sadat fired the ‘defeatist’ Sadiq two days later, replacing him with General Ahmed Ali Ismail.\textsuperscript{34}

The new War Minister, in partnership with Chief of Staff Saad el-Shazly, set about preparing Egypt’s armed forces for an assault across the Suez Canal in 1973. Over the following year, Egyptian war plans were reformulated, force structures rebuilt, and troops retrained to overcome the substantial military challenges of crossing the canal and establishing bridgeheads on the fortified east bank, despite Egyptian inferiority in airpower and armour.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{31} Kochavi, \textit{Nixon and Israel}, p. 23.
\textsuperscript{33} el-Gamasy \textit{The October War}, 150 cited in Uri Bar-Joseph, \textit{The Watchmen Fell Asleep}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{35} Detailed accounts of this process are offered in Bar-Joseph, \textit{The Watchmen Fell Asleep}, pp. 25-32; Gamasy, \textit{The October War}, pp. 128-193; Shazly, \textit{The Crossing of The Suez}, pp. 17-90.
Support both from fellow Arab powers and the Soviets were vital to Egypt’s strategy. The decision to remove Sadiq, one of Egypt’s most prominent anti-Soviet voices, was partially informed by the need for rapprochement with Moscow, and in late December Egypt offered a further gesture of goodwill by unilaterally extending its treaty ports with Moscow, allowing continued access without requiring further negotiations or concessions.\(^\text{36}\) In a special session of the Arab Defence Council hosted in Cairo 27-30 January 1973, the Saudi Monarch, King Faisal, and the Gulf Emirate Sheikhs agreed to provide Egypt with the hard currency necessary for arms purchases from the Soviet Union. In addition to providing some $300-$700 million for weapon purchases, the oil producing Arab states also offered $400-$500 million in balance of payments support, over and above the annual $250 million subsidies already in place.\(^\text{37}\)

Although negotiations had not advanced during 1972, Sadat had not been idle, but had developed both tracks of his two-track political-military strategy for recovering Sinai territories from Israel. The removal of Soviet advisors facilitated both attempting another diplomatic initiative with the United States in the hope of attaining a political solution and planning in earnest for a military effort to buttress and advance his political strategy if necessary. Sadat’s warning that the ‘time for words’ was ‘over’ was not quite in earnest however. Serious talks with his fellow Arab leaders, the Kremlin, and the Nixon administration in advance of any military action were still very much on the Egyptian agenda for 1973. As seen in the next section, even as Sadat’s War Minister Ahmed Ismail was in Moscow securing Soviet weapons necessary to prosecute war against Israel, his National Security Advisor Hafiz Ismail was in Washington for talks with the White House, bearing a proposal for an ambitious new diplomatic design for an American-brokered separate Egypt-Israel peace, distancing Egypt from Moscow, radical Arabism, and the Palestinians.

**THE NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISORS: ISMAIL MEETS KISSINGER**

\(^\text{36}\) Yoram Meital, ‘The October War and Egypt’s Multiple Crossings’ p. 51, in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War, p. 49-68.
Egypt’s National Security Advisor, Hafiz Ismail, paid an official visit to Washington in late February 1973. Ismail met with Nixon and Rogers for non-substantive meetings confined to ‘generalities’, but the real purpose of his visit was to discuss settlement terms with Kissinger. Ismail’s post was a new one, created specifically as direct counterpart to Kissinger’s, and he had come to propose an ambitious new two-tier plan for settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute. The Egyptian plan proposed two settlement processes, a separate Egypt-Israel peace process sponsored exclusively by the United States, which would be loosely sited in a nominal framework of overall Arab-Israeli settlement, providing political cover for the separate Egypt-Israel peace.

Two Ismail-Kissinger meetings were held in secrecy the New York City suburb of Armonk on 25-26 February 1973. Rogers was not informed, and recreating Nixon’s favoured dualistic system of State Department public façade masking substantive White House diplomacy, Kissinger impressed on Ismail that the ‘only presidential messages that have any real weight are those I confirm in our channel’.38

In his account of the talks, Kissinger claims that Ismail ‘had come less to discuss mediation – and therefore compromise – than to put forward ultimatums beyond our capacity to fulfil’ as part of a deliberate deception, employing maximal positioning to smother negotiations as Egypt prepared for war. According to Kissinger, Ismail ‘did not achieve a breakthrough, which we thought was his purpose, but he skilfully served Sadat’s aim of maintaining a deadlock without creating the warning of a crisis’.39 Historians have largely accepted this assertion, and until quite recently the talks have received little historiographical attention, beyond summary dismissal as non-productive.40

The release of the meeting transcripts has cast doubt on these assessments. Revisionist work from the Israeli scholars Bar-Joseph, Kipnis, and Shalom and Vanetik

39 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 215.
40 Avi Shlaim’s influential revisionist history The Iron Wall, for example, simply notes that the talks ‘failed to produce any results’, Shlaim, The Iron Wall, p. 325. Similarly, Jussi Hanhimaki’s widely-read Kissinger biography The Flawed Architect simply omits mention of Ismail-Kissinger meetings, despite considerable attention to Middle East diplomacy during and after the October War. Hanhimaki, The Flawed Architect. Bar-Joseph provides contains a useful synopsis of (the lack of) historiography on the talks, noting that in terms of the question of ‘lost opportunities’ the spring and summer of 1971 have received almost exclusive attention. Bar-Joseph, ‘Last Chance to Avoid War’, pp. 545-546, notes 2, 4.
shows that Ismail presented a far-reaching proposal based on a number of important elements. Egypt envisaged two settlement processes, a general regional settlement, and a separate Egypt-Israel settlement. As part of the regional settlement, Egypt would agree to any settlement on Palestinian agreeable to Palestinian leadership, which would be negotiated between Israel and Palestinian representatives, without Egyptian involvement. Egypt would accept arrangements for Israeli security in the Sinai, in a context of Israeli recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over the entire Sinai, and would consider demilitarisation of the peninsula. A de facto state of Egypt-Israel peace would exist from the beginning of the negotiating process, with full peace and eventual normalisation following regional settlement. Egypt required relatively prompt movement on bilateral settlement with Israel, with first steps to begin by September. The Israeli scholars criticise Kissinger for his ‘frigid’ and ‘tough’ reception, and macho assertion that only if Egypt could ‘change the facts’ through military prowess could it expect the US to accept its proposals.\footnote{Bar-Joseph, 'Last Chance to Avoid War'; Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, pp pp. 64-72; Shalom and Vanetik, The Nixon Administration and the Middle East Peace Process, pp. 206-213.}

While Kissinger acknowledges that Ismail’s proposal was ‘far-reaching’, he also claims that it was also ‘one-sided and not essentially different from what had produced the deadlock’. But his argument that as ‘Formal peace would come only after the Syrians and Palestinians had settled in an extremely clouded procedure’, this gave ‘the most intractable parties a veto, in effect over the process’ overlooks a critical aspect of Ismail’s presentation, and largely misses the point of his journey to Washington, and the novelty of his offer to the United States and Israel. Ismail emphasised repeatedly that while the UN resolutions provided a ‘general framework’ for negotiation, each specific aspect should be worked out in separate, specifically dedicated phases; in other words, step by step, and separately on each front (Egypt, Palestine, Syria) without progress on one front relying on another. As Ismail presented the challenge to Kissinger,
The problem goes back 25 years, not 5. It goes back to 1948. Although I speak in the main of Egypt, I must say frankly that we cannot think in terms of a separate Egyptian settlement unless it is in the context of a very general framework of Middle East settlement.  

Ismail envisaged reaching a final, general regional settlement, involving peace treaties between Israel and all its neighbours, when all outstanding issues on borders, security arrangements, refugees and so on, were resolved. But crucially, agreements would be negotiated with each of Israel’s neighbours, including Palestine, separately, without progress on one front or issue depending on another. While the elusive overall settlement might be years away, Egypt was willing to begin negotiating a separate peace with Israel immediately, without the involvement or endorsement of the Soviets, Syrians, Palestinians, or other Arab powers. As Ismail assured Kissinger, ‘We start these negotiations from a purely nationalistic stand... Egypt is not a satellite. Egypt is not doing this in the interest of this or that power. We have demonstrated that back in July’.  

With regard to Palestine, to be sure, Ismail stated that the ‘major question we have to deal with in the Middle East is the question of the Palestinian problem. This is really the origin of the conflict’. But Egypt had come prepared with a solution, arguing that ‘the most logical approach to reduce the problem to its exact size’ by recognising that

There is, or has been a conflict between the two communities living with in Palestine. At some point, it has overflowed outside its borders. We should reduce it to its original size, and find a way how Israelis and Palestinians should live together in Palestine -- or live apart, whichever they chose.  

Content to leave Palestine to its own devices, Ismail stressed that Sadat ‘didn’t want to get into how the Palestinian problem should be solved... I am not speaking for the Palestinians. I am just telling you how Cairo sees the problem’.  

Probing the Egyptian position, Kissinger saw ‘two basic settlements. The first settlement envisaged was ‘between all the countries in the area, including Israel, with respect to the military issues produced by the 1967’, and involved Israeli withdrawal and security guarantees, with ‘the essential element as a return to the mandated

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43 Ibid.  
44 Ibid.
borders of Palestine’. Ismail rejoined succinctly: ‘On the Egyptian front’.\textsuperscript{45} This point is critically important. Ismail had made clear that while Cairo’s ‘general framework’ was for a ‘final settlement’ on all fronts, Egypt saw its interest and negotiating role as limited to negotiating the Egypt-Israel border and Sinai security arrangements.

Drawing differentiation between ‘legitimate and illegitimate concerns on the part of Israel regarding security’, Ismail argued that a State Department ‘statement about Sharm al-Shaikh being psychologically and politically important’ indicated that it was ‘not a matter of security. If they want an Israeli presence in the Sinai, again it is not a question of security but a political and psychological question’. Beyond the Sinai, Cairo was not particularly interested. Gaza and the West Bank could ‘settle their differences with Israel’ about ‘the way they want to live together, or apart from each other’. As Sadat and King Hussein were ‘not on speaking terms’, Ismail professed ignorance as to the King’s views. But as to Hussein’s public statements on Palestinian self-determination, and the question of ‘who speaks for the Palestinians’, Egypt would ‘accept what he settles’ and ‘not put obstacles to an agreement’. For Cairo, the question of sovereignty over the West Bank was ‘an internal problem’ for Jordan to resolve, but Ismail envisaged completion of Egypt-Israel settlement while other negotiations were at their earliest stage.\textsuperscript{46}

Kissinger took a tough line with the Egyptians, questioning what, other than Israeli withdrawal, were Egypt’s envisaged outcomes from negotiations, and ‘what would be the state of Egyptian-Israeli relations?’ In response to this critical question, Ismail offered ‘certain peace commitments’ and ‘a state of peace’ a short of ‘full peace’ which would await final settlement. This was defined as the ‘end of the state of war, non-intervention for any motives, free passage in international waterways’, which included passage in the Suez Canal, ‘non-intervention, which means the end of the

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid. Egypt had broken diplomatic relations with Jordan in early 1972 in response to Hussein’s unveiling of a federal plan for a United Arab Kingdom encompassing the region of Jordan on the East Bank and the region of Palestine comprising the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Shlaim, \textit{The Iron Wall}, p. 313.
boycott on third party goods’ and an Egyptian commitment to control the fedayeen. Security measures in the Sinai would be of ‘an international character’.  

Pressed on whether Egypt was willing to recognise Israel’s right to exist, Ismail and his colleague Muhammad Hafiz Ghamin of the ASU Central Committee argued that ‘Acknowledgement of the existence of Israel in already there, in [UN Security Council Resolution] 242’ and ‘this we have already accepted’. The Egyptians unequivocally acknowledged Israel’s ‘existence, independence and sovereignty, and recognition’ but argued that ‘normalisation is something quite different from recognition of acknowledgement’. While Cairo did not envisage immediate normalisation of bilateral relations as part of the limited Egypt-Israel negotiations, Ismail stressed ‘that if there is a general understanding of principles that will be a settlement for Syria and Jordan, that opens the way for a much clearer commitment of the part of Egypt’.

Kissinger did not seem overly impressed, failing to see what ‘the quid pro quo for Israel’ was, and recreating (the later discredited) view that ‘[f]rom the Israeli point of view no situation is as good as the present situation’ as ‘[f]rom the purely physical military point of view, there is no line better than the Suez Canal’. The essence of Ismail’s presentation, that Egypt was offering a de facto separate peace, including a commitment to end economic warfare and suppress irregular warfare emanating from Egyptian territory (thereby removing Egypt from the Arab military coalition and effectively abolishing state-level military options for all other Arab powers) and also to remove Egypt from the details of Israel’s settlement with Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians, seemed to be lost.

Ismail tried to convey his message again during his second meeting with Kissinger the next day. He stressed that, from the Egyptian perspective, the main purpose of a framework of negotiations on a general regional settlement was merely to provide political cover from negative radical Arab and Soviet propaganda while Egypt was settling separately with Israel, as Egypt and other Arab powers were ‘moving at different speeds’. Ismail stressed that Cairo did not

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
want to give other Arab countries any reason for harassing the whole operation. If they feel there is general movement, we can deal with whatever propaganda and obstruction there will be against you and us and the whole process. It is a very essential point.  

Ismail also stressed that Egypt, by working with the US, was ‘seeking a settlement in the Middle East and we believe that the US can play a dominant role in that respect’. He emphasised that Cairo ‘very much appreciated the interest the President of the US’ in working together to achieve a Middle East settlement, and that ‘[o]n that basis we conduct our policy’.

Kissinger has complained that Ismail showed little interest in his suggested formula for accommodating both Egyptian and Israeli demands in the Sinai by ‘separating sovereignty and security’, and was ‘clearly not overwhelmed by an idea of which I had prematurely been proud’. But in fact Ismail immediately saw the value of the approach, suggesting situating the idea within his two-tier settlement plan. Ismail envisaged that

> Within that general context there is going to be an Egyptian solution... Egyptian sovereignty and Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory - - reconciled with the legitimate and reasonable concerns of Israel with regard to security.

Kissinger claims that Ismail brought little more than a programme of maximal demands to Washington, and in his account of Middle East diplomacy has frequently taken pains to present his own process-orientated negotiating style in contrast with ‘futile’ previous efforts by the State Department based on pre-determined plans. But on this occasion it was Ismail who suggested that ‘As we go along, if we feel the agreement is moving... we might start to think what the next stage might be - - what procedure, what objective’, foreshadowing Kissinger’s own post-war ‘step by step’ post-war diplomacy.

Ismail outlined a three-step timetable, of deciding on ‘heads of agreement’, agreeing on ‘final provisions’ before moving on to ‘implementation of the provisions’ for the separate Egypt-Israel agreement. Early rounds of negotiations should ‘leave aside’ questions about Jordan and Syrian’, focusing on developing the Egyptian front, as Egypt wanted to move ‘very quickly’ on settlement, completing the entire process.

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51 Ibid.  
52 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p.216.  
before 1 September. Ismail hoped ‘to see things to a great extent settled’ by the summer of 1973, and invited American suggestions on whether to begin disengagement while still discussing provisions, though he emphasising that this was ‘not an interim agreement, but a kind of preliminary to peace’.54

Before departing, Ismail spoke passionately for his country’s cause, emphasising that Egyptians were ‘interested in one thing in life, and that is to get a settlement that will provide an Egyptian re-birth... It is a nightmare that is affecting everything in Egyptian life’. The National Security Advisors parted amicably for the time being, agreeing to meet again in April.55

Although no concrete agreements emerged from the Ismail-Kissinger meetings in February 1973, Ismail had introduced the basic framework of US-Egypt strategic cooperation during and after the October War: a separate Egypt-Israel peace process under exclusively American mediation sited in a nominal framework of wider regional settlement. The pair also discussed implementation tactics, and again rehearsed previously touted concepts. Ismail’s differentiation between a ‘state of peace’ of and ‘full peace’ bore close resemblance to the Soviet idea of separating de facto and de jure peace floated during the Two-Power talks in 1969. And if Kissinger’s pride in ‘separating sovereignty and security was misplaced’, this ought not to be because Ismail was un receptive (he was not), but because the idea was nothing new. It was in effect and intention identical to Rogers ‘fallback position’ of 1969, upon which it was very likely based, allowing for reconciling Egyptian sovereignty over the entire Sinai with a continued military presence at key security locations, particularly Sharm el-Sheikh. Although these ideas again failed to manifest in a concrete political process in the spring of 1973, within a year they would prove foundational both an unprecedented Egypt-Israel peace process and to radically reformed Egypt-US relations.

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54 Ibid.
55 Ibid. The
President Nixon once again hosted Golda Meir at the White House on 1 March 1973, just days after Ismail’s consultations with Kissinger. In preparation for the meeting, on 23 February Kissinger had forwarded Nixon a briefing memorandum outlining three basic options: either to ‘stand back and let the two sides reflect further on their position’, an option that ‘might be especially attractive in this Israeli election year’; to ‘renew the efforts to achieve an interim settlement that lost momentum in 1971’; or to ‘try to work privately toward an understanding on the framework for an overall settlement’. Nixon reacted strongly against the first option, insisting that he had ‘delayed through two elections and this year I am determined to move off dead center… This thing is getting ready to blow’. He instead favoured working privately for an agreed settlement framework with the modification of concurrently keeping ‘the public track going for external appearances—but keep[ing] it from interfering with the private track’.  

Kissinger held preparatory meetings with Meir and Rabin on 28 February, presenting his separating sovereignty and security formula and Ismail’s concept of a separate Egypt-Israel ‘state of peace’ to be followed later by ‘full peace’ in a general regional settlement as a basis for opening negotiations. Meir resisted, but in a follow up one-on-one meeting with Rabin, Kissinger secured agreement that Israel would not oppose Kissinger conducting private exploratory talks with Egypt. In exchange, Washington pledged not to pursue a ‘comprehensive’ settlement calling for full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, and to stall interim settlement negotiations until after Israeli general elections in November.

With these understandings in place, the Nixon-Meir went smoothly. Nixon politely neglected to mention the controversy surrounding Israel’s downing of a misrouted Libyan civilian airliner over the Sinai on 21 February, instead stressing that he had stood by Israel for four years, keeping to American commitments. Claiming that arms provision was his established policy because it was in the American interest ‘that Israel

57 Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, pp. 80-85.
be able to defend itself’, Nixon stressed that neither side should ‘link giving arms to negotiations’, but suggested that the time had come to establish the preferred Nixon method with Middle East negotiations. Kissinger would privately explore ‘what might be possible’ with Egypt and the Soviet Union, while the State Department pursued a separate, ineffective, public track.\textsuperscript{58}

Meir expressed gratitude at the Nixon administration’s generosity on arms, repeatedly stressing that Nixon’s commitments had ‘been meticulously kept. We never had it so good. There is mutual confidence’.\textsuperscript{59} But she remained sceptical of Kissinger-led secret negotiations, positing that the Soviets encouraged Sadat to be inflexible, as they wanted ‘a repeat of the ’57 performance’. (Kissinger partially agreed, but attributed Moscow’s encouraging inflexibility to its dislike of Sadat, arguing that ‘They keep him inflexible so as to undermine him’) Meir wondered what Egypt really wanted, worrying that the Egyptians were was wont to ‘tell their friends Israel must go back to the ’67 borders and deal with the Palestinians’.\textsuperscript{60}

As an alternative to Kissinger engaging in secret negotiations, during which she feared Washington might ‘come to a separate position’ from Israel without Jerusalem’s knowledge, Meir suggested instead an interim step unlinked to an overall settlement. Israel would withdrawal to a temporary line, as far as the strategic Gidi and Mitla mountain passes, in exchange for reopening of the Suez Canal, and Egyptian ‘people moving to their cities along the canal, because that increases the chances of no fighting’.\textsuperscript{61} This appeared to be a generous offer relative to Meir’s previous stances, but was actually a premeditated stall. Since the failed 1971 negotiations Meir was aware that Sadat would not accept an interim settlement unlinked to an overall settlement, and Meir and her Defence Minister Moshe Dayan had agreed in advance that such an offer carried no real ‘danger’ of lubricating the political process.\textsuperscript{62} The tactic was effective. Nixon accepted Meir’s proposition, and further, instructed


\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, p. 89.
Kissinger to withhold Israel’s position from the State Department, in order to provide something for State to work towards publicly. As always, Meir expected a down payment in aircraft in return for considering negotiation, and Nixon readily agreed to deliver at least one hundred warplanes in 1974 and 1975, in addition to the full delivery schedule already agreed for 1973.63

After meeting with Ismail and Meir, Kissinger drew up a three stage plan drawing on his own formula of separating sovereignty from security, Ismail’s framework of principles (heads of agreement), and concepts from previous settlement proposals. The first stage would be launched at Kissinger’s second schedule meeting with Ismail in May, during which the pair would privately establish principles (or ‘heads of agreement’), including the principle of Egyptian sovereignty in the Sinai, excluding Gaza. The second stage would commence at the superpower summit in San Clemente scheduled for late June, when the American and Soviet leaders would jointly approve and publicise the agreement, and Egypt-Israel negotiations on a partial Israeli withdrawal and reopening of the Suez Canal would begin. The third stage, Egypt-Israel negotiations for a final settlement, including negotiating the line of the final international border, would take place after Israeli general elections scheduled for November. Israel would recognise Egyptian sovereignty over the Sinai while retaining a security presence in key areas for an extended period. In practice this would mean three zones of control, a western Egyptian zone, an intervening demilitarised buffer zone, and an eastern Israeli zone including Sharm el-Sheikh and the Sinai east coast. The Egypt-Israel negotiations could be kept separate from Syria and Jordan.64

This plan represented an amalgamation of previously aired concepts, and perhaps unsurprisingly, Meir, who had already baulked at similar ideas, rejected Kissinger’s Plan outright on 10 March. Kissinger, though disappointed, rapidly reoriented his Middle East diplomacy, postponing his scheduled meeting with Ismail and stalling any discussion of the Middle East with the Soviet until the summit in June. On 30 March, Kissinger reassured the new Israeli Ambassador and Meir’s former aide and close confidante, Simcha Dinitz, that

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64 Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, pp. 92-98.
Returning to Israel the day after scotching Kissinger’s plan, Meir again announced that Israel had a ‘great friend in the White House’. The news that Israel was slated to receive another forty-eight Phantom F4s and thirty-six Skyhawk A4s, leaked to the New York Post in mid-March, soon became public knowledge.

In Cairo, the news of yet another major US-Israel arms deal within days of Ismail’s departure was received, in Ghorbal’s words, as ‘a slap in Egypt’s face’, and seen as further indication that the Nixon administration continued to refuse to take Sadat seriously. Sadat had prepared for this scenario, as access to oil-producer funds and partial rapprochement with Moscow allowed him to develop the military as well as political track of his strategy. Although concerns about Sadat’s loyalty persisted within the Brezhnev politburo, and ‘Soviet intelligence demonstrated that the “game” Mr. Sadat was playing with the United States was very serious’, Kremlin insider Evgeny Prylin reports that by finally meeting his persistent demands for armaments (which thanks to the oil producers, Egypt was now able to pay for in hard currency) ‘the Soviet leadership was convinced that Egypt could be brought back into the orbit of Soviet policy’. An arms deal of unprecedented scale, largely paid for by funds from Libya, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf Emirates was sealed in March, which included, among other sophisticated weaponry, Scud Battlefield Support Surface to Surface Missiles, which Sadat regarded as a deterrent against attacks on Egyptian population centres and hence a facilitator for military action.

Sadat formed a war cabinet on 5 April, with himself at its head as prime minister as well as president. In a famous interview given to Newsweek editor Arnaud de
Borchgrave four days later, Sadat warned that the world had ‘fallen asleep’ over the occupied territories, but the ‘time has come for a shock. Diplomacy will continue before, during and after the battle... this country is now being mobilised in earnest... the battle... is now inevitable’. This did not mean abandoning negotiations however, as Sadat boldly stated that ‘Diplomacy will continue before, during and after the battle’.

Drawing on declassified Israeli sources, Bar-Joseph, Kipnis, and Shalom and Vanetik show that during an informal ‘kitchen cabinet’ meeting at Meir’s home on 18 April Meir and her closest advisors, Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Minister without portfolio Israel Galili, the select few Israeli policy makers aware of the content of the Kissinger-Ismail talks, discussed recent developments and the prospects of war with Egypt. Mossad reports indicated that, disappointed with the results of the Washington talks, Sadat had decided on war, with the aim of recapturing the Sinai passes. Crucially Egypt had acquired ‘attack planes from Libya and Iraq that were capable of reaching targets within Israel’, meaning that ‘the Conception’, the Israeli theory of necessary preconditions for an Arab attack on Israel, which held that Egypt would not initiate war without a deterrent against the Israeli Air Force (IAF) bombing of Egyptian population centres, was no longer valid. The three Israeli policy makers concluded that Egypt would ‘go to war’, but in so doing would be resoundingly defeated by Israel. Rather than considering diplomatic moves to avert war, the three instead decided to withhold this information from the wider cabinet, and instead discussed ‘how to minimise the domestic damage should their preference become known’ as well as ‘Israel’s strategic goals in the coming war’.

Sadat and Syrian President Hafiz Al-Assad met near Alexandria on 23 April, just five days after the ‘kitchen cabinet’ and did indeed agree to launch a joint attack on Israel. Although Arab war preparations were advancing, they were not yet ready.

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69 Herzog, The War of Atonement, pp. 25-26; Sadat In Search of Identity, p. 242; Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 156.
70 Bar Joseph, Last Chance to Avoid War; Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, pp. 120-121; Shalom and Vanetik, The Nixon Administration and the Middle East Peace Process, pp. 220-223.
Assad and Sadat agreed that a two-front war was necessary to dislodge Israel from the occupied territories, but failed to agree at this stage whether, as Assad believed this could be achieved by military means alone, or whether, as Sadat argued, the Arabs should fight to make limited territorial gains and trust to post-war diplomacy to secure the return of all territories.  

Although the Arabs were not yet ready to fight, Egyptian army manoeuvres along the Suez Canal in late April prompted a partial IDF and mobilisation reservist call-up in anticipation of imminent war. As the attack failed to materialise and Israeli intelligence reassessments indicated that the Egyptian army was merely conducting war games, the war scare passed after mid-May, although Sadat and his generals later claimed that creating this ‘false alarm’, which cost Israel some $45m, was part of a deliberate deception strategy. Dayan remained wary, expecting that Egypt and Syria would attack Israel ‘during the second half of this summer’, and ordered the IDF to ‘prepare for war’, readying a new battle plan under the codename ‘Blue-White’.

**The Wolf at the Door: Summer 1973**

Anti-American sentiment over perceived underwriting of Israel’s continued occupation of Arab territories was resurgent in the already restive Arab world by the spring of 1973. Calls to restrict Arab oil supplies to the United States as means of exerting leverage for change in policies towards Israel and the occupied territories amplified throughout the year, placing increasing pressure on America’s most important Arab ally and oil supplier, King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. In a prophetic article published in the influential quarterly *Foreign Affairs* in February 1973, State Department Director of

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Fuels and Energy, James E. Atkins, warned that previous projections of oil demand and prices from such august bodies as President Nixon’s Task Force on Oil Imports and the National Petroleum Council had been ‘spectacularly wrong’, grossly underestimating US consumption of foreign oil. Defying the expert consensus that the US would remain largely self-sufficient in oil during the early 1970s, growth in demand had absorbed American surplus oil production capacity, and by 1970 the US had joined world energy markets as a ‘full-fledged and thirsty member’. Texas had ceded its position as the world’s ‘swing producer’ of last resort to Saudi Arabia, identified by Atkins as by far the most important locus of the non-communist world’s proven oil reserves. Acknowledging that ‘King Faisal has also said repeatedly that the Arabs should not, and that he himself would not, allow oil to be used as a political weapon’ Atkins warned that ‘on this issue it seems all too likely that his is an isolated voice’, as ‘In 1972, other Arabs in responsible or influential positions made no less than 15 different threats to use oil as a weapon against their "enemies." Almost all of them singled out the United States as the prime enemy’.  

Faisal had always hitherto rejected attempts to link oil economics with geopolitics, but in 1973 he warned the Americans that his position was growing increasingly untenable. In May he cautioned Arabian-American Oil Company (Aramco) executives that

> Time is running out with respect to US interests in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia is in danger of being isolated among its Arab friends, because of failure to the US government to give Saudi Arabia positive support. You will lose everything. 

The White House responded dismissively, remarking that ‘His majesty is calling wolf where no wolf exists except in his imagination’. Atkins remained in a minority position against the dominant view, supported by the White House, that as oil producers and consumers were in a co-dependent relationship, Americans had little to fear from threatened supply restrictions.

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78 Little, American Orientalism, p. 68
The second round of Kissinger-Ismail negotiations in late May reiterated the themes of the February meetings, but failed to make progress towards US-Egypt agreement. Ismail complained that the massive US-Israel arms deal in March was a ‘big disappointment’, remarking that the decision to guarantee aircraft deliveries until 1975 was ‘very revealing’, and warning that US funding of illegal Israeli settlements in Arab territory, including the Sinai, was a ‘very dangerous policy’. Although he had come away from the last meeting with the impression that Egypt should forward a new position, the White House seemed unsure on even partial Israeli withdrawal, offering only ‘two alternatives leading to the same result -- either to accept an interim agreement which will most certainly become a final one’ or a ‘final solution but with enormous concessions on the part of Egypt’. Kissinger acknowledged that Egypt navigated between the Scylla and Charybdis of an interim settlement ‘becoming a de facto permanent settlement’ or a ‘general approach... so protracted and lead[ing] to so many deadlocks that it could be used to sanctify the present status quo’, but refused to accept what he saw as Egyptian demands ‘to commit ourselves to your total program, publicly, immediately, in a short period of time’. 79

While Kissinger claims the second round of talks with Ismail was ‘bound to be stillborn’ as Egypt had already decided on war, in fact Ismail made a last effort to persuade the Nixon administration to press Israel for political movement. 80 Complaining that Israel was not interested in peace but in territorial conquest and US policies underwrote Israel’s territorial occupation, Ismail emphasised the importance both of a more positive Israeli attitude and a more balanced American approach. Questioning whether the ‘Israeli attitude is positive or negative’, Ismail stressed that ‘if it is negative, then our course will be different’ but ‘If it is positive then we can start talking’. Yet as long as the US remained ‘committed to defending Israeli conquests’, there was ‘nothing to force the Israelis to take any step towards... a peaceful solution, a reasonable and balanced solution that takes care of the interests of everybody’. 81

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80 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 226.
81 Memcon Ismail - Kissinger, 20 May 1973, 10:15 am.
Ismail hinted that, in the absence of a change in American and Israel policies, Egypt would resort to military action, but stressed that ‘we would like to keep this line of contact in any circumstances, not only through messages exchanged but even through personal contacts’. Kissinger was receptive, responding that ‘if a military action should take place... I want to say if we can insulate this channel from whatever other measure you plan to take’. \(^{82}\)

Ismail and Kissinger had not just agreed to establish a backchannel similar to those employed by the Nixon administration in communicating with other key powers such as Israel and the Soviet Union, they had also specifically and explicitly agreed that it should be utilised to communicate and coordinate bilaterally in the case of Egyptian military action against Israel. This was a critical development. As seen in the next chapter, this private Ismail-Kissinger channel would prove vital to bilateral relations during and after the October War. Sadat used it to keep in touch with Washington even as he waged war against Israel, explaining his actions and coordinating policy with the White House at critical junctures, a diplomatic innovation which would entail profound implications for the war’s outcomes.

The May 1973 Ismail-Kissinger meeting was Egypt’s last attempt at real diplomatic engagement with the Nixon administration before the October War. Writing to Kissinger shortly after this meeting, Ismail insisted that Egypt required a statement of principles rather than a non-binding declaration of intent from Washington, and that Egypt had requested the Soviets raise the matter at the upcoming summit. Kissinger once again conferred with Meir and agreed to stall, avoiding discussion of the Middle East at San Clemente insofar as possible. \(^{83}\)

This approach seemed to work well, as the Middle East received only cursory mention until the last day of scheduled meetings. As the summit unwound, Brezhnev had uncharacteristically decided to withdraw from a poolside party attended by famous Hollywood actors and other celebrities, allowing the fatigued president to retire for the evening himself. But in what Kissinger’s confidant Alistair Horne calls a ‘gross breach of protocol’, Nixon was disturbed from his slumber not long after 10 pm with

\(^{82}\) Ibid.  
\(^{83}\) Kipnis, 1973: The Road to War, pp. 157-165.
the news that Brezhnev demanded an immediate meeting.84 Brezhnev opened by requesting Nixon’s ‘views on the Middle East problem’, to which Nixon replied that ‘the main problem in our view is to get the talks started’, as once talks were underway ‘we would use out influence with the Israelis and you with the Arabs. But if we just talk about principles, we will never get them’.85

Nixon had cut immediately to the basic disagreement between the American and Soviet positions. While the Soviets wanted to establish a framework of ‘principles’ for negotiation, the Americans sought to simply get direct negotiations underway, (‘without preconditions’ in the Israeli formulation) allowing talks to take their own course. Brezhnev insisted that the ‘substance of principles is essential, at least in confidential form’ on grounds that ‘[t]he Arabs cannot hold direct talks with Israel without knowing the principles on which to proceed’. He stressed that principles could be agreed in ‘strict confidence’ between those currently present in the room, accepting that ‘we cannot write down everything’. The principles forwarded by Brezhnev were straightforward: ‘withdrawal of Israeli troops, recognition of boundaries, free passage of ships, and [security] guarantees’. The General Secretary warned that ‘we must put this warlike situation to an end’, and attempted to present superpower agreement on principles as the key, arguing that without ‘clarity about principles... difficulty keeping the military situation from flaring up’ were likely. Nixon, however, insisted that agreement on principles was of little value in itself, as it was ‘easy to put down principles in such a way that parties will not agree to talk’. The president rejected ‘abstractly beat[ing] the issue to death’, insisting that the best approach was to simply get talks underway.86

Kissinger claims that that Brezhnev expected ‘the United States and Soviet Union to agree then and there on a settlement based on total Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders’, but this language not appears in records of the late night Brezhnev-Nixon

84 Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p. 277; Horne, Kissinger’s Year, p. 163.
85 Memo for the President’s Files, "President’s Meeting with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev on Saturday, June 23, 1973 at 10:30 pm at the Western White House, San Clemente, California. Burr, ed., The October War and US Policy, Doc. 3. Available at http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/octwar-03.pdf. Accessed 9 June 2014.
86 Ibid.
meeting. Instead, the formulations employed by Brezhnev are those cited above: ‘Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories’ and ‘withdrawal of Israeli troops’ subject to suitable security arrangements, as Brezhnev was in fact making a last-ditch effort to find an agreed superpower position on the basis of the separating sovereignty from security formula. But Nixon, despite offering mollifications that he considered ‘the Arab-Israeli dispute a matter of highest urgency’, had failed to take the General Secretary seriously. As he later lamented to Kissinger, ‘we were screwing them around at San Clemente and they knew it’.88

By mid-1973, with Nixon’s presidency increasingly consumed by the Watergate scandal, Kissinger had achieved near-complete dominance of US Mideast policy.89 Rogers made his final effort to revive ailing diplomacy days later, on 28 June. Writing to Nixon, he proposed Egypt–Israel ‘private talks under the auspices of the United States... without prejudice to the positions of either party’, to find ‘an agreed basis for negotiations’. He was curtly turned aside with the instruction told that ‘the President does not wish the Secretary to proceed with the initiative outlined’.90 This was Rogers final contribution to Middle East diplomacy. He tendered his resignation on 16 August, and was replaced by Kissinger, who simultaneously retained his position as National Security Advisor.91

If the mood in the US with regard to the occupied territories was relaxed in the summer of 1973, in Israel it approached intoxication. Meir’s government had hitherto avoided overtly annexationist language, sticking to the ambiguous formulation of ‘defensible boundaries’, but with general elections scheduled for October, a bidding war on Egyptian territories erupted among Israeli politicians. In April 1973, Dayan had

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87 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 297. This claim is repeated verbatim in Daigle, The Limits of Detente, 278 and Horne, Kissinger’s Year, pp. 163-164.
88 Henry Kissinger, Memo for the President’s Files, President’s Meeting with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev on Saturday, 23 June 1973 at 10:30 pm at the Western White House, San Clemente, California. Burr Ed., The October War and US Policy, Doc. 3. Available at http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/octwar-03.pdf accessed 10 September 2014.
mounted the peak of Masada to proclaim his vision of ‘a new State of Israel with broad frontiers, strong and solid, with the authority of the Israel Government extending from the Jordan to the Suez Canal’. Dayan, who had long espoused the slogan that ‘Sharm el-Sheikh without peace is better than peace without Sharm el-Sheikh’, enforced his expansionist agenda on the incumbent Labour party’s election platform during the summer of 1973, under threats of defection to the hardline Gahal party led by Menachem Begin. The so-called ‘Galilee document’, a statement on cabinet policies towards the occupied territories published in August, bore Dayan’s fingerprints despite bearing Galilee’s name. It called for expansion of Israeli residential and industrial settlements and the construction of a deep water port, Yamit, at the southern tip of the Gaza strip, severing the land connection with Egypt.92 Sadat warned darkly that ‘every word spoken about Yamit is a knife pointed at me personally, at my self-respect’, but while supporters of the Galilee Document acknowledged that it was incompatible with peace with Israel’s neighbours, they argued that peace was unattainable in any case. Critics would later argue, to the contrary, that it was the final straw which sent Sadat to war.93 Dayan’s colleague, Foreign Minister Abba Eban recalls that, during the 1973 election campaign, ‘a climate of exuberant self confidence that began to border on fantasy’, as ‘Opinion passed from sobriety to self-confidence and from self-confidence to fantasy, reaching a somewhat absurd level’.94 (Nixon himself enjoyed celebrity status in this heady atmosphere, ranking third in an early September poll on popular figures in Israeli public life)95 Chaim Herzog, President of Israel from 1983 to 1993, concurs with Eban in recalling a pre-election atmosphere of considerable conceit, demonstrating a

92 Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining in the Middle East, p. 167.
94 Quotation Shlaim, The Iron Wall P. 318. See also Heikal, The Road to Ramadan, 205; Herzog, The War of Atonement, pp 1-12; Claudia De Martino, ‘Clashing Narratives of the October War: Collective Memory and Group Perspective’, in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War, pp. 231-248. De Martino cites the Israeli author Avraham Hartman’s lament that on the eve of the October War Israel thought of itself as a ‘normal society’ concerned with such issues as ‘housing, wages, and inflation. The assumption was that our external political situation was normal and we could afford to occupy ourselves exclusively with the questions of a normal society which takes its existence and security for granted’. This recollection, while indicative of post-war trauma and dismay in Israel, cannot be said to be entirely accurate, as during the 1973 election season Israel political discourse was not occupied ‘exclusively’ with internal socio-economic debates, but also with the future of the occupied territories, including planned annexations.
95 Kochavi, Nixon and Israel, p. 25.
profound disrespect for Arab, especially Egyptian, leadership.\textsuperscript{96} These attitudes were shared in military circles, were a glorification of Israeli and disparagement of Arab fighting abilities was commonplace.\textsuperscript{97} Complacency was further entrenched by censorship, as Dayan, the incumbent Defence Minister, sought to foster an atmosphere of security in the weeks leading to a general election, and thus downplayed the risks of war in statements to the press.\textsuperscript{98}

Overconfident in Israel’s military strength, both the Americans and Israelis failed to take Arab leaders, especially Sadat, seriously, underestimating the intense pressure to break the negotiating deadlock and produce some movement towards recovering the occupied territories.\textsuperscript{99} Much the same seems to be true of Soviet policy makers. Citing interviews with senior Soviet officials, Lebow and Stein make the parallel argument that ‘Soviet leaders seriously underestimated the desperation of President Sadat, his inability to tolerate the status quo, and his pessimism about the possible benefits of diplomacy.\textsuperscript{100}

Mohamed Heikal gives an insider perspective on Sadat’s situation, noting that by ‘1973 the economy of Egypt was under an almost intolerable strain’ because between 1968 and 1973, Egypt had spent over $8 billion on the war effort.\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, although Rubinstein estimates the military budget consumed approximately $1 billion annually, he suggests that this left the remainder of the Egyptian economy ‘squeezed to the utmost’ by harsh austerity measures.\textsuperscript{102} Israeli politicians’ dismissive attitude towards Egypt as they engaged in ‘outbidding each other in their plans for what to do with conquered Arab territory’ poured more pressure on Sadat to act, as did the fear that, at the superpower level, détente would ‘become a reality and impose itself on’ Egypt. But despite these severe pressures to take action, Sadat’s credibility deficit affected relations with both adversaries and allies, who both continued to doubt he was in a position to move against Israel. Regime credibility, in question since 1967,

\textsuperscript{96} Herzog, \textit{The War of Atonement}, p. 23-26.
\textsuperscript{97} Bar Joseph, \textit{The Watchmen Fell Asleep}, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{98} Kipnis, \textit{The Road to War}, p. 226.
\textsuperscript{99} Hanhimaki, \textit{The Flawed Architect}, p. 304
\textsuperscript{100} Lebow & Stein, \textit{We All Lost the Cold War}, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{101} Heikal, \textit{The Road to Ramadan}, pp. 204-206.
\textsuperscript{102} Rubinstein \textit{Red Star on the Nile}, pp. 222-223.
had been further undermined by the humiliation of an inactive ‘year of decision’ in 1971, to the extent that both at home and abroad, ‘Egypt had become almost the laughing stock of the Arab world’.  Sadat adhered to a strict policy of non-response, avoiding muzayada, inter-Arab quarrelling, and Herzog identifies his maintenance of good relations with all fellow Arab powers as he prepared to fight as ‘[p]erhaps Sadat’s greatest success... in the Arab world’.  

The Egyptian and Syrian military high commands conferred on 21-23 August, and Sadat and Assad met shortly thereafter near Damascus, agreeing to initiate war in early October. ‘D-Day’ for the surprise joint assault was set for 6 October, the first day of the Jewish annual holiday of Yom Kippur, when Israel’s preparedness would be at its lowest. A compromise between the Egyptian preference for a night-time canal crossing and the Syrian preference for a dawn attack with the sun to their rear was agreed with a ‘Zero hour’ of 2pm.

By the summer of 1973, Sadat was receiving Soviet arms in greater quantities than his military could assimilate, and Egypt had, in his eyes at least, for the time being exhausted its diplomatic options vis-à-vis the US. Having achieved little appreciable progress through the Ismail-Kissinger backchannel in February and May, in June 1973 Sadat seemed to shift diplomatic gears. He spent the last months before what he called ‘zero hour’ (in other words, war with Israel) pursuing an ambitious diplomatic strategy designed to isolate Israel and the US internationally, and to unite the Arab and non-aligned worlds behind his cause.

Ismail was reposted as ambassador to Moscow, while Egypt submitted a motion for debate at the UN Security Council, forcing a vote on a resolution strongly condemning Israel for its continued occupation of Arab territories. The debate dragged on several weeks, but on 26 July the motion was defeated by a US veto, with all fourteen other Security Council members casting in favour of the resolution. While the Israeli Ambassador to the UN, Joseph Tekoah, who had played an important role in securing

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103 Heikal, _The Road to Ramadan_, pp. 204-206.
the American veto, revelled in what he regarded as ‘the greatest Egyptian defeat since 1967’, this was at odds with a near-global consensus sympathetic to the Arab cause of restoring the seized territories and to Sadat’s depiction of the US as ‘the world’s biggest bully’. Sisco warned Dinitz, that, in the wake of the UN veto, the US ‘stood naked before its Arab friends, and especially before Saudi Arabia’, the Middle East’s largest oil producer.106

A televised remark from Faisal in early September, to the effect that the Saudis and other Arab monarchies had ‘no wish to restrict our oil exports to the United States in any way but... America’s complete support for Zionism and against the Arabs makes it extremely difficult for us to support the United States with oil’ prompted another dismissive White House response. Nixon was confident that ‘if they continue to up the price, if they continue to expropriate... without fair compensation, the inevitable result is they will lose their markets and other sources will be developed’, reminding the world that ‘Oil without a market, as Mr. Mossadeg learned many, many, years ago, does not do a country much good’.107

This sanguine attitude failed to appreciate a changing economic and political climate, which not only rendered the US economy vulnerable to oil restrictions, but also actually incentivised oil producers to decrease supply. The US had developed an unprecedented dependence on Persian Gulf crude, at a time when the balance of power between concession-holding petroleum companies and host oil-producing countries had tilted towards the later facilitating the ‘creeping nationalisation’ of Middle East reserves. Though this was not well understood at the time by many policy-makers in Washington, including, by their own admission, Nixon and Kissinger, production cuts were potentially (and in time actually) more damaging to the US than a direct embargo, which could be relatively easily bypassed by re-exports from countries not embargoed. This also meant that the production cuts enacted as an anti-US measure would affect all countries importing Middle Eastern or OPEC oil,

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106 Rafael, Destination Peace, pp. 281-282, 287.
107 Horne, Kissinger’s Year, p. 132; Little, American Orientalism, p. 69. Jerusalem was similarly dismissive. On 21 September 1973 General Eli Zeira, Israel’s director of military intelligence asserted that there was ‘no real energy crisis, just an atmosphere of it’ and that while Washington might soon expect ‘an appearance of negotiations’ it would not press Israel to ‘make concessions against its will’. Rafael, Destination Peace, p. 282.
including Japan and Western European powers allied to the United States, generating further diplomatic pressure.\textsuperscript{108}

Further, two recent devaluations of the US dollar meant that production cuts were primed to place serious strain on Western economies, but actually boosted producer profits through increased prices. In July, the Kuwaiti oil minister asked, ‘What is the point of producing more oil and selling it for an unguaranteed paper currency?’\textsuperscript{109} This question had loud resonance in Saudi Arabia. Faisal had his own interest in production cuts, which in strained markets would generate massive price hikes and hence massive profits. The Egyptian and Saudi regimes had been moving closer throughout 1973, both in terms of personal relations and perceived interests, and during a secret meeting on 23 September, during which Faisal’s the Egyptian-Syrian offensive plan was revealed to the Saudi King, Sadat convinced Faisal that war was necessary to unite the Arab world which would in turn allow Saudi Arabia to reap the political and economic benefits of wielding the ‘oil weapon’. The elusive ‘tripartite alliance’, with Egypt enjoying both military support from radical Syria and economic and financial support for conservative Saudi Arabia, was finally in place, just two weeks before the planned surprise attack.\textsuperscript{110}

\textbf{Superpower Crisis by Design? Sadat’s War Plans}

A great deal has been published on the topic of how Egypt and Syria managed to achieve strategic surprise, or why Israel failed to realise an attack was imminent and fully mobilise its armed forces until too late. There is a solid consensus that this was not due to technical failings in intelligence gathering as Israel’s Military Intelligence Directorate (AMAN), the IDF, and Israel’s political leadership, including Dayan and Meir, received plenty of indicators. These included, in addition to detecting Egyptian and Syrian forces moving into position to strike, a direct warning from King Hussein to Meir herself on 25 September that Syria was preparing attack under cover of training.

\textsuperscript{108} Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{109} Kaufman, The Arab Middle East and the United States, p. 83.
exercises, and knowledge of the rapid evacuation of Soviet citizens from Egypt and Syria from 4 October.\footnote{111} 

Debate on the surprise, which has been fierce and protracted, particularly in Israel, revolves around attributing responsibility for analytical failures. The Agranat Commission, a commission of national inquiry led by the president of Israel’s Supreme Court was established to investigate failings in the aftermath of the war, placed blame squarely with the IDF and AMAN leadership, and their adherence to ‘the Concept’ or ‘the Conception’, a dogmatic refusal to believe Egypt would dare to attack Israel without a deterrent against the IAF capability to bomb Egyptian cities, or that the Syria would dare attack without Egypt. Agranat’s initial report of 1 April 1974 recommended the dismissal of IDF Chief of Staff General David Elazar, AMAN Director General Eli Zeira and his deputy Brigadier General Aryeh Shalev but largely exonerated their superiors Defence Minister Moshe Dayan and Prime Minister Golda Meir. These findings proved deeply controversial however, causing the collapse of Meir’s second government within weeks, as many Israelis believed Meir’s policies rather than her generals oversights were more responsible for the war.

The debate as to whether Meir or Dayan, who, unlike their generals, were privy to Sadat’s political overtures to the Nixon administration and in a position to engage diplomatically, and therefore should be held responsible for Israel’s nation trauma in October 1973, still rages on.\footnote{112} This debate is unlikely to be resolved soon and is not


\footnote{112} Beckerman-Boys and Jacob Eriksson provide useful up-to-date summaries of debate on the surprise attack the culpability of Israeli leaders for exposure. Beckerman-Boys ‘Assessing the Historiography of the October War’, pp. 12-16, in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War, pp. 11-28; Jacob Eriksson, ‘Israel and the October War’, pp. 36-42, Ibid. pp. 29-48. See also ‘Gone But Not Forgotten? The Occasional Lessons of the October War’, in Ibid, pp. 249-264, esp. 252. Parallel to the academic ‘blame game’ on responsibility for Israel’s trauma in the October War is what Beckerman-Boys terms ‘the hunt for historical analogies’, found in political science oriented literature concerned with theorising on surprise
a specific focus of this thesis, but it can be said here that policy or ethical failings on the part of Israel’s political leadership do not necessary exonerate their general’s analytical oversights, or vice versa.

While Israeli failings in allowing vulnerability to the Egypt-Syria surprise attack are still debated, there is a long-standing consensus on Sadat’s war aims. The dominant interpretation in western historiography holds that Egypt went to war with the deliberate intention of fostering a superpower crisis, with this scenario somehow serving as a means to his end of recovering the Sinai territories. Nixon and Kissinger themselves seem to be among the earliest proponents, and perhaps the originators, of this questionable thesis. William B. Quandt, who served on Nixon’s National Security Council (NSC) reports that when Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in October 1973, ‘Nixon and Kissinger ignored the issue of who was at fault’ once war broke out, on the grounds ‘that the status quo that prevailed before the war had, in fact, given the Arabs ample incentive to break the “no war, no peace” stalemate by engineering an international crisis’.113

This Nixon/Kissinger vision of Egyptian war aims seems to represent an article of faith for some scholars. Lebow and Stein assert that

The purpose of the attack under the cover of a dense anti-aircraft defences was the deliberate creation of an international crisis. The president of Egypt intended, through the use of conventional force against Israel for limited military objectives, to provoke a crisis between the superpowers and thereby to inflate costs to them of perpetuating a status quo that he found intolerable.114

Daigle restates this thesis in particularly strong form, arguing that

Sadat’s decision to take his country to war in October 1973, was, in fact, a direct consequence of détente... in starting the war, Sadat’s primary objective was not to defeat Israel militarily, which he knew he could not do, but rather to reignite the political crisis by creating a crisis of détente – drawing the superpowers into a regional conflict.115

This is not, however, how members of the inner circle involved in war planning define aims and strategy as they developed their plans in 1973. Instead, Commander in Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces Ghani el-Gamasy recounts that the ‘aim was to upset

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113 Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 171.
114 Lebow and Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 150.
the prevailing balance in the region and to challenge Israel’s concept of security and
the principles behind its military strategy’. In order to achieve these aims,

The strategy…was an offensive military operation to liberate the occupied land in consecutive
stages according to the capabilities of the armed forces, and to inflict on Israel the greatest possible
number of losses in men and weapons in order to convince it that an indefinite occupation of our
lands was too much to bear.  

This is corroborated by Egyptian Chief of Staff Saad el-Shazly. Egypt planned to
recapture a small amount of territory on the east bank of the Suez Canal, establishing
defensive bridgeheads and repulsing Israeli counterattacks with maximum possible
casualties, which in itself formed a second key objective. Heikal recalls that in the
first days of the October war, Sadat rejected allies’ calls for a ceasefire to be put in
place, reportedly chiding the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, Vladimir Vinogradov, that as
he had reported to Hafez Assad, ‘territory isn’t important; what is important is to
exhaust the enemy. I don’t want to make the mistake of pushing forward too fast just
for the sake of occupying more territory. We must make the enemy bleed. Sadat
himself claims that in repeatedly rejecting ceasefires urged on him by the Soviets
during the first week of fighting, he advised them he could not accept a ceasefire until
Egypt had its objective, namely to ‘shatter’ Israel’s ‘theory of security’ which held that
a cordon sanitaire of Sinai territory could protect Israeli citizens, including soldiers,
from Egyptian military power.

Egypt and Syria’s joint strategic war aims were defined in the following terms:

To inflict a comprehensive defeat to the Israel enemy’s forces in Sinai and the Golan Heights
and take-over of strategically important areas, in order to prepare the appropriate conditions
to complete the liberation of the occupied territories by the force of arms and enforce a just
political solution to the problem.

The Egyptian military’s specific objectives were defined as follows:

Egypt would plan a breakthrough of the Suez Canal, destroy the Bar-Lev line and capture
bridgeheads at a depth of 10-15 km on the east bank of the canal, amidst inflicting the heaviest
possible casualties on the enemy. In addition, [Egypt] would contain and destroy every
counter attack of the enemy and would be ready to execute any further combat mission
assigned to it later.

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117 El Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez*, pp. 31-34.
118 Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, pp. 220
119 Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 244
120 Meital, ‘The October War and Egypt’s Multiple Crossings’, p. 56; Sela, ‘1973 Arab War Coalition’, p.

48.
Egyptian leaders make no mention of engineering a superpower crisis. Instead, among Egyptians, debate revolves around the extent of military designs in the Sinai. The question of recovering the Sinai territories lost in 1967 was of the upmost sensitivity for Sadat’s political generation, stretching back to Egypt’s defeat under Sadat’s predecessor, Gamal Abdul Nasser, and creating a debate which is not yet entirely resolved. At the heart of Nasser’s legacy is the question of his intentions towards the occupied territories. Key members of Nasser’s entourage such as Heikal and Abdel Magid Farid, General Secretary of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), claim that Nasser’s acceptance of a 90-day ceasefire in the War of Attrition shortly before his death in September 1970 was merely a tactical expedient to gain time before launching ‘nearly exactly the same plan’ as that implemented by Sadat in October 1973. According to these sources, (interviewed by Laura James for her 2006 study Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy) Nasser’s master plan was entitled ‘Granite One’ or ‘Operation 200’. Die hard Nasserists such as his Minister for Presidential Affairs Sami Sharaf insist on the superiority of Nasser’s plan over Sadat’s, owing to his supposed capacity to recruit Jordan and Lebanon to ‘the battle’.121

However, Nasser’s successors claim that he left behind only ‘Defence Plan 200’, a plan which had ‘completely collapsed’ by late 1972 because Israeli fortifications on the east bank of the Suez Canal had expanded to become much larger than Egyptian fortifications to the west. Sadat insists that ‘it was all Nasser had left me. He made no plans for an offensive action of any kind’, and goes on to sketch how during his tenure ‘the October 1973 War plan was laid down by the whole of our armed forces’. Again, Gamasy, Heikal, and Shazly concur in stressing that coming into 1971, Egypt had no real offensive plan.122

In el-Shazly’s account, grandiose ideas about completely ejecting Israel from the Sinai were disregarded by early 1971, to be replaced by two more modest alternative offensive plans. The minimalist ‘High Minarets’ plan limited war aims to seizing and entrenching positions to the immediate east of the Suez canal, while the more ambitious ‘Granite Two’ plan aimed to capture the strategic Sinai mountain passes at

121 James, Nasser at War, pp. 167-169.
Giddi and Mitla. In October 1972, recognising the unfeasibility of Granite Two, Egypt’s leaders settled on the more minimal plan, which was renamed Operation Badr, and as seen below, this plan was actually implemented in the first week of war in October 1973.\textsuperscript{123}

Sadat himself is clear that he laid his war plans with the minimalist version in mind, famously recalling that he ‘used to tell Nasser that if we could recapture even 4 inches of Sinai territory (by which I meant a foothold pure and simple), and establish ourselves so that no force on earth could dislodge us, the whole situation would change – east, west, all over’.\textsuperscript{124} Heikal gives a similar account, recalling that during ‘heated discussions’ in October 1972, Sadat clashed with members of his senior military staff who doubted the possibilities of the limited war which the President believed capable of paying such large political dividends... The President argued strongly in favour of a limited war, making his favourite point that if we could win only ten millimetres of ground on the east bank of the Suez Canal this would immeasurably strengthen his position in subsequent political and diplomatic negotiations.\textsuperscript{125}

Even Kissinger recounts that:

\begin{quote}
After the October war, the Israelis learned from prisoners that Egypt had no serious expectation of reaching the Sinai passes twenty to thirty miles from the Suez canal. Egyptian forces had drilled for years to perfect the technique of crossing the Suez Canal; beyond it they had no operational plan except to hang on.\textsuperscript{126}
\end{quote}

Gamasy offered further corroboration during the post-war military-level direct negotiations with Israeli officials, during which he served as chief Egyptian negotiator. He impressed upon the Israelis that Egypt ‘started the war to liberate Sinai... not to liberate all of Sinai, because we did not have the capability to do it. But as a result of war, we will liberate Sinai’.\textsuperscript{127}

Among Arab leaders, the debate on alternative war plans is not related to superpower politics, but seems to reflect divisions in Arab alliance politics. While Egypt conceived of a ‘war of movement’ designed to start a political process, Syrian fought a ‘war of liberation’ aiming to recover its territories by military force alone. Addressing the

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{124} Sadat, \textit{In Search of Identity}, p. 244.
\textsuperscript{125} Heikal, \textit{The Road to Ramadan}, p. 181.
\textsuperscript{126} Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, p. 459.
\textsuperscript{127} Stein, \textit{Heroic Diplomacy}, p. 107
\end{footnotes}
difference in Egyptian and Syrian ambitions, Syrian foreign Minister Abd al-Halim Khaddam recalls that

For Syria, it was a war of liberation, not a war of movement. The objectives of the war were to liberate Golan and Sinai. The Syrian forces advanced according to that plan. The Egyptian forces, however, just passed the Canal and stopped.\(^{128}\)

Kalb and Kalb cite a clash between Sadat and Assad during Sadat’s visit to Damascus in June 1973, as

there was still a major disagreement between them about the purpose of the war. Was it, as Assad demanded, “to drive Israel into the sea,” the slogan of all Arab extremists? Or was it, as Sadat preferred, to drive Israel out of some of the occupied lands and then, using Faisal’s oil as an economic weapon, to blackmail the United States into forcing the Israelis to go back to the 1967 borders? After lengthy deliberations, Sadat finally won Assad to his more limited objectives.\(^{129}\)

Shazly recalls that this dispute was not settled so decisively in Sadat’s favour however. In early 1973, despite Shazly’s warning on ‘the present military impossibility of Granite Two’, the plan was revived on ‘a political instruction’ as ‘It was clear that if the Syrians realised that our plan was limited to capturing of a line less than ten miles east of the canal, they would not go to war’.\(^{130}\)

This led to the revised Granite Two plan (in Shazly’s view little more than a sop to the Syrians) which introduced the novelty of an ‘operational pause’ once the bridgeheads had been established, and reassessment before Egypt would ‘develop our attack to the passes’.\(^{131}\) However, there was no detailed coordination of tactical or operational plans,\(^{132}\) and Heikal stresses that ‘an ‘operational pause’ is not a concept known to military theorists’ and that its actual meaning ‘led to a fierce argument between the Egyptian and Syrian political and military commands’, which was never resolved.\(^{133}\)

Gamasy alludes to the controversy obliquely, saying that once bridgeheads had been established, it was planned that the ‘attack to the east of this point would continue-

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\(^{129}\) Kalb and Kalb, Kissinger, p. 453.

\(^{130}\) Shazly, The Crossing of the Suez, pp. 36-37.

\(^{131}\) Ibid.

\(^{132}\) Zisser, ‘Syria and the October War: The Missed Opportunity’, p. 73.

\(^{133}\) Heikal, The Road to Ramadan, p. 215. Aronson’s first generation history speculates on the possibility that the ‘operational pause’ may have reflected hesitation in the face of Israel’s nuclear deterrent, but this consideration does not appear in available Egyptian sources, and the argument has not gained much currency. Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining in the Middle East, p. 179.
with or without a tactical halt-until we reached the line of the mountain passes'. 134

Egypt’s military mission statement hinted at this prevarication, hinting at the compromise with Syria by stating that after establishing bridgeheads Egypt ‘would contain and destroy every counter attack of the enemy and would be ready to execute any further combat mission assigned to it later’. 135

During the actual fighting, Egypt wavered between the High Minarets and Granite Two. Divisions that successfully crossed the Canal Suez were consolidated into two army strength bridgeheads on the east bank of the canal by 9 October, positions which were successfully defended for first week of the war. But after a five day ‘pause’ maintaining the bridgeheads without attempting to advance, on 14 October Egyptian armour attempted to advance to the Sinai passes, in an effort to reduce severe military pressure on Syria. The good reasons for Egypt restricting its operations to the Suez Canal zone soon became evident, as the drive into the Sinai proved a military debacle, allowing Israeli ground forces to break up the Egyptian front and advance southward, a turning point as Israel went on the offensive and ultimately defeated Egypt. 136

Available evidence on Egyptian war planning and its relationship to actual performance during the war is limited. Nonetheless, it seems clear that Egypt fought a limited war for political objectives, and this is unanimously accepted, with no dissenters. There is little evidence to suggest that Sadat sought to ‘engineer’ a superpower crisis however, a thesis which is not based on primary evidence, but on extrapolated reasoning or theorising apparently premised on an assumption that outcomes reflected intentions. 137 As seen in the next chapter, the dénouement of the

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134 Gamasy, *The October War*, p. 139
135 See p. 159 above.
137 The only Egyptian source cited in support of the assertion that Sadat plotted a superpower crisis is an unnamed ‘senior official in President Sadat’s office’, who is paraphrased rather than quoted in a footnote: A senior official in President Sadat’s office was unequivocal, however, in his insistence that Sadat’s overriding purpose was to extract a commitment from Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories. The president anticipated that, after the initial attack, the risk of superpower confrontation would move the superpowers to impose these terms’. This passage clearly states Sadat’s intention of recovering occupied territories, which is well known in any case. But it is unclear whether the Egyptian official made a direct statement regarding Sadat’s premeditated manipulation of superpower behaviour, or whether, with the last sentence quoted above, Lebow and Stein have added their own interpretation. I have contacted Professor Lebow, who advised me that his co-author Professor Janice
October War did indeed bring about a brief crisis in superpower relations, but only when Egypt’s Third Army was close to destruction and Sadat’s presidency imperilled. Sadat’s pleas for intervention (addressed to both superpowers) set them on a collision course, but to claim that this represented an element of pre-mediated grand strategy rather than a tactical resort under severe pressure is to conjecture considerably further than the available evidence.

Another major element of this theorising involves interpreting events through a Cold War prism. Perhaps it is unsurprising that among the American policy making community the key proponents of this interpretation are Nixon and Kissinger, both famous for approaching the world at large with precisely this frame of reference, and, in Kissinger’s case, notorious for insensitivity to Middle Eastern regional dynamics. Lebow and Stein, recently channelled by Daigle, have been the most vocal proponents of this interpretation among the academic community. Lebow and Stein’s book *We All Lost the Cold War*, though a formidable text, painstakingly reconstructing American and Soviet perceptions and policy-making in great detail, is also shot through with polemic intent. Their approach to the October War is preoccupied with demonstrating how the war and all its episodes represent failures of détente.\(^{138}\) Ironically, this rigid Cold War frame of reference reproduces the worldview of Cold Warriors such as Nixon and Kissinger (and their counterparts in the Brezhnev politburo), with American/Soviet global rivalry conflict imposed so heavily on the Arab-Israeli conflict as to distort the picture by minimising regional actors and dynamics.

**CONCLUSION: BOUND TO BE STILLBORN?**

Sadat’s hopes for either an American-assisted diplomatic solution or Soviet-assisted military solution to his central problem of recovering Egyptian territories occupied by Israel seemed distant in early 1972. This chapter has traced how, over the next

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Gross Stein, is responsible for their account of the October War. Unfortunately Professor Gross Stein has not responded to correspondence. Lebow & Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, p. 467, Note 20.

\(^{138}\) Daigle, *The Limits of Détente*, esp. pp. 297-298, 346. Lebow & Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*. See chapters on The Failure to Avert War, The Failure to Stop the Fighting, The Failure to Avoid Confrontation etc.
twenty months, Sadat crafted an ambitious military-diplomatic strategy which managed both to bridge the monarchical-radical schism in the Arab world and to reconcile the paradox of waging war with Soviet military hardware against Israel as a means of enlisting American political patronage.

In February and May 1973, Egyptian National Security Advisor Hafiz Ismail presented his American counterpart, Henry Kissinger, with an ambitious programme for settlement of the Arab-Israel conflict, whereby Egypt would move ahead on a separate peace track with Israel, hoping to eventually bring the rest of the Arab world in its wake. This would be achieved by framing the separate Egypt-Israel peace process within a nominal framework of overall regional settlement, but Ismail made clear that the major purpose of the framework was merely to provide Egypt with political cover from ‘radical’ propaganda. Egypt fully intended to move ahead with a staged negotiating process soon, leaving the Palestinians, Syrians, and others to their own devices, but with the hope that progress between Egypt and Israel might generate new opportunities and inspiration for resolving problems between Israel other Arab powers.

For its part, Egypt was willing to recognise and commit to ‘a state of peace’ with Israel, ending violence, and accepting the American formula for separation of sovereignty and security in the Sinai, which allowed for Israeli security forces (within a UN framework) on sovereign Egyptian soil. Egypt invited the United States to take an active and dominant role in the region, but insisted that a more balanced American role was necessary in order to seize the opportunities presented. Kissinger had no intention of presenting counter-proposals to the Egyptians, but was intrigued enough to package together concepts from previous negotiating efforts into his own proposal for private consideration by Israel’s leaders. The Israelis, more interested in general elections scheduled for November, were unreceptive, and Kissinger was perfectly willing to await the elections results before attempting to implement his proposal.

As with debates on the lost opportunities of 1971, it is important to consider whether, had a withdrawal process based on Sadat’s proposals begun in the summer of 1973, war in October could have been averted. In this case the answer must be an
unequivocal yes, with greater certainty than can be claimed for 1971. This is not because of the nature of the proposals or negotiations, but because of the nature of Egypt’s military capabilities and planning. From October 1972 until October 1973, Egypt planned for a limited offensive to seize and hold the east bank of the Suez Canal, drilling its infantry for this sole objective. If Israel had withdrawn even a few miles from the Canal, Egypt would be forced to re-plan and re-prepare for an entirely different war, openly attacking the IDF in the Sinai without the element of surprise, with surface to air missile cover against Israeli airpower, and in a quite different political context. Even if it is possible that a war might have ensued in this context, but it would have been a very different war, one much more difficult for Egypt to prosecute either militarily or politically.

By the summer of 1973, Egypt was advanced in developing a realistic diplomatic programme towards eventual settlement with Israel. Sadat simultaneously plotted a war against Israel as a last resort to forward this strategy, aggressively pursuing funding and diplomatic support, (including the solidarity required to wield the ‘Oil Weapon’) from wealthy Arab states, weaponry from the Soviet Union, and a military pact with Syria. Egyptian officials have consistently stressed that Cairo viewed war as a last resort, but that serious preparations were nonetheless laid in the absence of diplomatic progress. But in western interpretations, the attack on Israel in October 1973 has overshadowed prior diplomacy, to the extent that Egyptian diplomacy towards the United States earlier in 1973 has been largely dismissed, and in Kissinger’s account, as deliberate deception.

Such interpretations of Sadat’s diplomacy are flawed because they regard diplomatic and military aspects of Sadat’s strategy as somehow mutually exclusive before war, but inextricably intertwined after it had begun. Sadat pursued a two track military-diplomatic policy towards Israel and the United States, beginning war preparations in late 1972 at the latest. It does not follow that an irrevocable decision had been made, as asserted by Kissinger and others.139 Analysis has swung from one unrealistic

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139 Sadat had announced a ‘Year of Decision’ in 1971 and 1972 and was regarded as a laughing stock in Egypt, in the Arab world, on the international stage, and in Kissinger’s words a ‘bombastic clown’. Cited in Reynolds, *One World Divisible*, p. 565.
extreme to another, from (in the face of all available evidence) dismissal of all Sadat’s explicit warnings of and preparations for war as empty boasts, to dismissal of Sadat’s diplomatic proposals, all of which were vital to later negotiations and which in fact framed US strategy, as empty façade. Neither argument is sustainable. The next chapter demonstrates how Sadat’s diplomatic strategy was implemented with American participation during the October War, shaping American diplomacy and tactics, and laying the foundations for the post-war Egypt-Israel peace process and a new regional order.
CHAPTER 5.
TAKING SADAT SERIOUSLY: THE OCTOBER WAR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter assesses Nixon administration policy with regard to the October War, with central emphasis on bilateral Egypt-US diplomacy. US diplomacy during the crisis has received a good deal of coverage, but secondary texts have focused largely on intra-Washington bureaucratic politics and on relations with Israel and the Soviet Union, with little mention of US-Egypt interactions. This chapter presents an alternative perspective, arguing that Egyptian diplomacy had a defining impact of the Nixon administration’s conduct during the crisis. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat waged and lost his war against Israel, by presenting unexpected options to the United States, he was ultimately successful in shaping its strategic outcomes.

National Security Advisor and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger dominated the American response to the October war from the outset. President Nixon himself was

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1 Military aspects of the October War have dominated the literature on the October War, with particular attention devoted to Egypt and Syria’s achievement of strategic surprise. The two key Egyptian military decisions of interest to this thesis, the decision to attempt a surprise attack against Israel (in conjunction with Syria) on 6 October and Sadat’s resolution, against his general’s advice, to launch a major tank offensive in the Sinai on 14 October were considered in the previous chapter’s discussion of Egyptian war planning. The decisions are touched on briefly here in context of their diplomatic implications, but otherwise minimal attention is afforded to military developments, which are covered in rich detail in many other works. For overviews of the military historiography see Siniver, ‘Introduction’ pp. 1-11 esp. pp. 6-7, in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War; Beckerman-Boys ‘Assessing the Historiography of the October War’, Ibid., pp. 11-28 esp. pp. 12-15; Jones, ‘Gone But Not Forgotten?’, esp. 251-253. Detailed, book length, day by day and even hour by hour reconstructions of the fighting can be found in Herzog, The War of Atonement; Rabinovich, The Yom Kippur War; Boyne, The Yom Kippur War.

Also, although Syria’s participation in the October was militarily significant, Syria did not have diplomatic relations with Washington at this time and had no contact with the Nixon administration during the crisis. As the focus here is on US diplomatic involvement and bilateral interaction was nil, Syria is mentioned only briefly, in context of Egyptian and Israeli decision making. Zisser offers a detailed account of the Syrian diplomatic engagement during the war. Zisser ‘Syria and the October War: The Missed Opportunity’, in Siniver ed., pp. 67-84.

2 Bundy, A Tangled Web, p. 433; Dallek, Partners in Power, p. 521; Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 511-512; Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 188; Hanhimaki, Flawed Architect, p. 303; Yergin, The Prize, p. 610. The Soviets shared this perception. Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin recalls that ‘American policy during the war seemed to be almost exclusively designed by Kissinger, while Nixon was
increasingly consumed by the Watergate scandal, and in early October he was in Key Biscayne, Florida (ostensibly on vacation but in fact embroiled in legal discussions on containing the domestic crisis), leaving control of his foreign policy in Kissinger’s hands. Throughout the October 1973 Middle East crisis, therefore, Kissinger set American strategy, personally managed tactics and diplomacy, and, despite Nixon’s efforts to maintain the appearance of being in control, at times seemed to eclipse the President altogether.3 In assessing the American role in the October War, the body of literature focusing on Kissinger and his role are arguably as important as general histories of the region or histories of the Cold War and Arab-Israeli conflict.4 Running over two chapters and some one hundred and twenty pages of his memoir Years of Upheaval, Kissinger’s own account of the October War is among the most detailed and influential about the crisis. Despite a reputation as a sometime fabulist, declassification of the relevant American documents has largely supported Kissinger’s presentation of facts, as an increasing number of quotations from his meetings and telephone conversations interspersed throughout his text have reappeared verbatim in this still-growing body of evidence.5

This chapter argues that where Kissinger is misleading is on context. The previous chapter noted how Kissinger has misrepresented his meetings with his Egyptian counterpart Hafiz Ismail in February and May of 1973 with claims that Sadat was an ‘unknown quantity’ in Washington, making no mention of Sadat’s efforts to disassociate from the Soviet Union and restore diplomatic relations with the US during meetings with Rogers in 1971. Similarly, his account of ‘Shaping a Strategy’ at the outbreak of the October War attempts to cast the Egypt-Syria attack as representing the vindication and ‘critical test of the strategy we had been pursuing in the Middle East ever since entering office’, claiming that to ‘demonstrate the futility of Soviet


3 Most notably, it was Kissinger who made the decision to move American forces to ‘Defense Readiness Condition’ (DEFCON) III on 25 October, as discussed below.

4 Kissinger biographies tend to include lengthier and more detailed accounts of the conflict than more general histories. Important works include Dallek, Partners in Power, pp. 486–571; Hanhimaki, The Flawed Architect, pp. 302-331; Isaacson, Kissinger, pp. 511-545; Siniver, The Machinery of Crisis, pp. 185–222.

5 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, pp. 450-544; Kissinger ed., Crisis: the Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises (Simon and Schuster, New York, 2003), pp. 5-418.
backed blackmail had for some time been the key to our diplomacy; it was now culminating in an unexpected showdown’.  

In fact, Sadat had been working to defect from east to west since the earliest days of his presidency, but Kissinger himself had resisted State Department efforts to develop relations with Egypt at every turn, and shown little appreciations for Ismail’s plans for reconstituted US-Egypt relations and a separate Egypt-Israel peace, pitched to him personally earlier in 1973.  Sadat turned to his risky military option only after his dealings with Kissinger convinced him that peaceful diplomacy was exhausted.  As such, Sadat’s war more a product of frustration of dealing in with Nixon’s White House than it was with Brezhnev’s Kremlin.

This chapter shows that it was precisely this military action, combined with an unexpected reintroduction of the diplomatic programme previously presented by Ismail, which finally brought Kissinger (in his own words) to ‘take Sadat seriously’, paving the way for the US-Egypt cooperation at the heart of the post-October War peace process. Rather than a turning point for Egypt, the fourth Arab-Israeli war represented an irrevocable commitment to implementing a strategy conceptualised and developed over the preceding three years.  Although militarily unsuccessful, Sadat’s war was a political and strategic triumph, finally winning the Nixon administration over to his vision of US-Egypt partnership in forging a separate Egypt-Israel peace.  While, as seen in the thesis introduction, western historiography presents Sadat’s first meeting with National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger in the weeks after the October War as a major turning point for Egypt, this chapter demonstrates that Kissinger himself undertook a major revision in perspective at a very early stage of the October War, shaping his Middle East diplomacy thereafter.

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6 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 468.
7 Ibid. p. 482.
THE VIEW FROM WASHINGTON: AMERICAN CONSIDERATIONS AT THE OUTBREAK OF WAR

Firmly convinced that Egypt and Syria had no prospects of success in a war with Israel and would therefore not dare to attack, on 6 October 1973 both American and Israeli officials initially believed that Egyptian manoeuvres into position for a massive assault across the Suez Canal and Syrian preparations for an attack on Israeli positions in the Golan Heights were likely provoked by a mistaken belief that an Israeli attack on them was imminent.\(^8\) Kissinger spent the morning in frantic but futile attempts to avert war by reassuring the Arabs that Israel had no plans to attack, and by urging restraint on the Israelis, warning that if they struck first they would ‘be alone’.\(^9\)

Despite Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir’s later suggestion that Kissinger had removed Israeli’s first strike option, she had already in fact decided against pre-emption, accepting the advice of Defence Minister Moshe Dayan over that of IDF Chief

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\(^8\) On 5 October Meir contacted Kissinger personally to warn that intelligence on ‘military preparations in Syria and Egypt, the battle deployment and state of alert of their armed forces, and in particular their the increased military concentrations at the front lines with us’ might indicate two possibilities, either ‘a bona fide assessment… that Israel intends to carry out an offensive military operation’ or ‘The intention on their part… to initiate a military operation against Israel’. Meir offered reassurances that ‘In case, however, this development stems from their apprehension about an offensive military operation from the side of Israel, such apprehensions are completely without foundation’. Message From Israeli Prime Minister to Secretary of State Kissinger, 5 Oct 1973. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 136, Dinitz, June 4–Oct. 31, 1973.

Early on 6 October Meir met with US Ambassador to Israel Keating again requesting that Washington ‘inform the Soviets and the Egyptians that Israel is not planning to attack Syria or Egypt… Israel is aware of military dispositions in Egypt and Syria and knows that in any war they will lose, even if Israel suffer some casualties’. Quandt – Scowcroft, 6 Oct 1973. NPLM, NSC Files/ME, Box 664, Middle East War, Memos & Misc., Oct. 6, 1973–Oct. 17, 1973.

US Secretary of Defence James Schlesinger was suspicions of an ‘Israeli trick’, claiming that ‘it would be the first time in twenty years that Israel had not started a Mideast war’. Telecon, Haig-Kissinger, 6 October 1973, 8:35 am. Kissinger, Crisis, p. 18.

\(^9\) Kissinger called the Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly Dobrynin at 6.40am to pass on the Israeli message that ‘that if the reason is that you are expecting an Israeli attack… there is no intention of any attack’, immediately afterwards calling Egyptian foreign minister Zayyat with assurances that any expectations of an Israeli attack were ‘groundless’. Telecon Kissinger – Dobrynin, 6 October 1973, 6.40 am. Telecon Kissinger – Zayyat, 6 October 1973, 7am. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Chronological File, Box 22. Daigle & Howland eds., Foreign Relations of the United States 1969-1976, Volume XXV, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973 (henceforth FRUS XXV), Doc. 100, 101. Telegrams were dispatched to the Jordanian Saudi embassies with the same message. Telegram Department of State - Embassies in Jordan and Saudi Arabia, Message from the Secretary to King Faisal and King Hussein, 6 October 1973, 1233Z. NPLM, NSC Files/ME, Box 659, [Computer Cables—Mideast War—1], October 1973.
of Staff David Elazar. Kissinger praised this as ‘the right decision’, but Dinitz responded that it bestowed ‘a special responsibility on America not to leave us alone, as far as equipment is concerned’.11

This appeal notwithstanding, an early meeting of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), Nixon’s dedicated high-level international crisis management unit, which included senior representative from State and Defence Departments, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), CIA, and the National Security Council (NSC) decided that ‘no US military equipment should move to either side’. JCS representatives expressed confidence that Israel did not need help to defeat the Arabs, while warning that that ‘if we give them a single item of equipment, we’ll have de facto taken sides’. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near and Middle Eastern Affairs Alfred ‘Roy’ Atherton added that ‘A lot of sympathy is with Egypt and Syria over what is seen as their patience over the last six years’. State Department representatives rated the prospect of an Arab oil embargo against the US as ‘very high’, with Saudi Arabia being the ‘real danger point’, warning that the wider US regional position could be compromised by major Israeli military advances, creating a situation that would force the US to ‘de facto choose sides’. In addition to refraining from sending supplies, therefore, the WSAG also agreed to avoid discussing the Middle East crisis with the press until an agreed government line was developed.12

10 Options were presented to Meir at a meeting of ministers and bureau chiefs held at 8am 6 October local time. (The war commenced at 6pm). Eriksson, ‘Israel and the October War’, p. 29; Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 464. See also, Bar-Joseph, The Watchmen Fell Asleep, pp. 198-201; Herzog, The War of Atonement pp. 44, 53.

When discussing the war’s events in private, Kissinger persistently denied that he had blocked Israeli pre-emption. For example, during a meeting with his staff on 10 October 1973, Kissinger referred to a ‘legend that has absolutely no foundation in fact is that we prevented an Israeli pre-emptive attack’. He repeated the same line in another meeting on 23 October. Minutes of the Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting Washington, 10 October 1973, 3:15 pm, E.g. Minutes of the Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting, Washington, 23 October, 4:35 pm NA, RG 59, Transcripts of Secretary of State Kissinger’s Staff Meetings, 1973-1977, Lot 78 D443, Box 1, Secretary’s Staff Meetings.


12 WSAG Minutes 6 October 1973, 9:01-10:06 am. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H–Files), Box H–117, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1973. FRUS XXV Doc. 103.
Confident that Israel faced no real military danger, for Washington the ‘basic objective’ from the first day of conflict was to manage diplomatic outcomes.\(^\text{13}\) Kissinger took the lead in hammering out the American policy line on 6 October during a second WSAG meeting and in telephone discussions with Nixon and White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig. Reporting to President Nixon immediately after the WSAG meeting, Kissinger argued ‘that the primary problem is to get the fighting stopped and then use the opportunity to see whether a settlement could be enforced’. Nixon agreed, but felt that, if necessary, the US rather than Israel should call for a ceasefire at the UN Security Council. He instructed Kissinger not to ‘take sides’ on the grounds that ‘Nobody ever knows who starts wars out there’.\(^\text{14}\)

For all the strategic complexity of the situation, defining concrete American policy during the first week of the conflict amounted to presenting a position on two specific issues: the positions Washington would take on calling for a ceasefire, and on resupplying the Israeli Defence Force (IDF). The WSAG consensus held that resupplying Israel during the fighting was, firstly, militarily unnecessary, as supplies dispatched would not arrive before the fighting was over, and, secondly, politically undesirable as it could damage détente and shaky US relations with the Arab world.\(^\text{15}\) The position on the ceasefire was regarded as the immediate key issue and the basis for American strategy, and for Kissinger, the main tactical challenge was to secure this ceasefire at the ‘exact calibrated moment’ for best diplomatic advantage. Two basic options were considered; either to call for a ceasefire status quo ante, or to call for a ceasefire in place.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^\text{14}\) Telecon Nixon-Kissinger 6 October 1973, 9.25 am. HAK Telecons, Chronological File, Box 22. FRUS XXV Doc. 103.


\(^\text{16}\) Telecon Dobrynin-Kissinger, 6 October 1973, 7:20 pm. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 22. FRUS XXV, Doc. 111.
Operating on the assumption that Israel would counterattack and swiftly gain the upper hand the WSAG agreed that a call for ceasefire status quo ante was the best course, and that in any case Israel would accept nothing less. Dinitz reported that Israel needed ‘two-three days of good fighting’ to pushback beyond the starting lines, capturing more Arab territory, and the Americans, who readily accepted this assessment, calculated that once Israel had turned the tables on its attackers, continued American calls for a status quo ante ceasefire would retain the appearance of impartiality and consistency, and encourage Egypt and Syria to cooperate with the United States during post-war diplomacy.

While the situation was challenging, Kissinger and his NSC colleagues were confident that they enjoyed a strong position diplomatic position relative to the Soviets. With relations between Cairo and Moscow already shaky, the Kremlin felt it had to support Sadat’s action, but with another presumed Arab defeat in the offing, Washington foresaw a further ‘Setback for Soviet-Arab relations’. The Soviet position would be vulnerable, as Soviet arms were once again proven unable to secure clients’ interests. As Israel remained dependent on American support, and the United States was the only potential restraining force on Israel, it was expected that the Arabs and Soviets would soon turn to Washington for diplomatic intervention. Kissinger warned Dobrynin that ‘In three days you’ll be begging us for’ the ceasefire, a refrain which was repeated in the WSAG meeting later that evening, and in other discussions over the following days.

ALIGNING WITH CAIRO, 6 – 8 OCTOBER

Kissinger spoke by telephone with Egyptian Foreign Minister Hassan El-Zayyat just before 9 pm on October 6, stressing that if ‘the fortunes of war’ should not favour the
Arabs, Washington ‘would not look with favour on any further territorial gains... we would like to have this thing wound up in a way that’ did not ‘make... more difficult... possibility for discussion’. Zayyat saw the military action as facilitating rather than hindering diplomacy, arguing that as the ceasefire had the cemented ‘the fact of... occupation for seven years’, it was ‘better... for the evolution to find there is a war really, and therefore to find a solution to it’. Kissinger concurred, stressing: ‘On that I agree with you on completely’.21

To Kissinger’s surprise, Zayyat stated that Egypt would not seek a UN General Assembly debate, which would isolate the United States and Israel, but would hold off until November, to give Kissinger a chance to resolve the situation. Zayyat personally invited Kissinger to propose a solution, saying

I don’t really know. You are far away. You have more cool head, you can tell me what to think and I plan to take a plane tomorrow morning to see the President [Sadat] and then come back. I will do anything because I sincerely believe until the end all wars are going to end by some sort of peace and the peace that we want... can you think about it until tomorrow and we call you again and see what can be done.22

The promised follow-up came the next day through Ismail, employing his direct backchannel to Kissinger, which the pair had established during their meeting the previous May. The Egyptian communique took responsibility for going to war, attributing the Arab military action to a decision to confront ‘continuous Israeli provocations’ and a determination to ‘show to Israel that we are not afraid or hopeless and that we refuse to capitulate to... aggressive planning to retain our land as a hostage in bargaining’. Cairo claimed that as ‘a result of the engagements a new situation has been created in the area’ and set out to ‘define the framework of our new position’. Defining the ‘basic objective as always, the achievement of peace in the Middle East and not partial settlements’, Cairo disavowed any intention ‘to deepen the engagements or widen the confrontation’, but demanded that Israel ‘withdraw from all the occupied territories’. However, Cairo also agreed to ‘freedom of navigation in the Straits of Tiran’ for all nations and accepted ‘as a guarantee, an international presence for a limited period’, affirming that upon Israeli withdrawal

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22 Ibid. Zayyat evidently made an impression, as Kissinger repeated his formulation verbatim in his memoir, recounting that ‘Zayyat had gotten to the heart of the matter. Every war ends in some peace, but too often leaders let military options dictate their intentions’. Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 476.
Egypt would ‘be then prepared to participate in a peace conference in the UN or in whatever agreeable form’. The settlement terms made no mention of other Arab powers.23

This unexpected message transformed Kissinger’s perspective on the conflict. It is necessary to quote at length from Kissinger’s memoir *Years of Upheaval* to convey the sense of surprise and new possibilities which the unexpected Egyptian message is said to have generated in Washington, or in Kissinger at least:

> Its tone was friendly; its substance reflected a mood not a policy... Egypt’s terms for ending the war... were clearly only an opening position... What was significant was the fact of the message, not its content. Sadat was inviting us to participate in, if not take charge of, the peace process, despite the fact that at the UN we were advocating that he give up territory that he considered his own and that his armies had just captured... Ismail’s message opened a strange dialogue with a country that had attacked our ally and whose aims were being thwarted by American arms. Throughout the war, hardly a day went by without a communication to or from Cairo. And even as our later airlift to Israel turned the battle gradually against Egypt, Sadat kept his promise not to whip up anti-American hatred... His plan was to establish a relationship with us in which we would be not only formally but psychologically the meditator, that is to say, we would treat Egypt’s claims on a par with Israel’s—a stunning conception for Nasser’s successor after two decades of hostility.

> Until this message, I had not taken Sadat seriously... The expulsion of Soviet advisors suddenly took on a new significance... Sadat wanted to be rid of the Soviets as an encumbrance both to the war he was planning and to his projected move towards the United States. Acts of historic magnitude must not be mortgaged by petty manoeuvres... Sadat’s ability from the first hours of the war never to lose sight of the heart of his problem convinced me that we were dealing with a statesman of the first order. Hafiz Ismail’s message, while avowing sweeping terms, stated a modest and largely psychological objective: “to show” so the message said, “that we are not afraid or helpless.” That objective Sadat achieved brilliantly. It was the precondition of his subsequent peace diplomacy. With the... Egyptian messages now in hand, our course settled itself.24

This passage invokes Sadat’s removal of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972 as relevant context, but omits reference to previous overtures to the US and Israel, including Sadat’s ‘peace initiative’ and offer to restore diplomatic relations with Washington in 1971, and the very pertinent Ismail-Kissinger dialogue in February and May 1973. During these meetings Ismail had repeatedly stressed that the general framework of Middle East settlement Cairo envisaged was a nominal construct, designed to protect Egypt from criticism of its planned diplomatic engagement with the US and Israel, and towards the end of the May session Kissinger and Ismail had specifically agreed that their backchannel should remain open ‘if military action should

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Sadat had announced to the world that diplomacy would continue ‘before, during, and after the battle’ in April 1973, and in late 1971 he had told the CPSU General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev he would that ‘on the day on which I begin military operations I shall declare that I am willing to discuss a solution of peace’. Kissinger was aware of this as he had received a verbatim transcript of the Brezhnev-Sadat meeting, and now, during the first days of fighting the Egyptians reiterated that the war was intended to launch a political process, inviting Kissinger himself to forward a peace proposal.

Sadat’s diplomacy and US-Egypt relations began to take on a different complexion in Kissinger’s eyes, opening new horizons for the US in the Middle East. The Soviet exodus established the necessary minimum threshold for American-Egyptian rapprochement, but Ismail’s presentations from February and May provided the concrete political programme for moving forward, leaving the Soviets and other Arabs behind. The invitation for the US to take ‘a very big role’ in bringing about peace, now reiterated by both Ismail and Zayyat, recast both US-Egypt relations and prospects for an exclusively American-sponsored Egypt-Israel peace process in a new light. In February, Kissinger had regarded the Egyptian programme as a ‘series of ultimatums [which were] beyond our capacity to fulfil’, but now that Sadat had made good on his threats of military action, he saw an ‘identical’ proposal as ‘clearly only an opening position’. Indeed, Sadat, acting in the classic Middle East negotiating style, invited an immediate counter-proposal.

The introduction to this thesis noted how Kissinger’s first meeting with Sadat on 7 November 1973 is celebrated as a highly significant turning point, when Sadat finally abandoned Soviet-supported military solutions to his dispute with Israel in favour of an American-supported political solution. But in fact, no sooner had Sadat attacked Israel than he turned to Kissinger to renew his calls for a US-Egypt partnership for peace. The diplomatic pieces which Sadat had been pushing over the previous three year finally fell into place, as Kissinger began to take Sadat seriously for the first time,

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26 Chapter 3, p. 125, Chapter 4, p. 149.
27 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 483.
and to consider a policy line conceived in terms of mutual American-Egyptian as well American-Israeli interests. This marked the beginning of the Kissinger-Sadat partnership, which would define the transformations in Middle East politics over the remainder of the 1970s.

**The Ceasefire/Resupply Dilemma, 9 – 13 October**

With the Egyptian message in hand, Kissinger was waiting for the right moment to secure a ceasefire, but none of the principals in contact with Washington expressed any interest during the first days of fighting. On 7 October, Dinitz reported to Kissinger that ‘by tomorrow noon, we will be at full striking capacity; we need two to three good fighting days’. Cairo and Moscow seemed equally content to let the fighting continue. Zayyat used Kissinger as an intermediary to his Israeli counterpart, Abba Eban, to arrange an agreement that neither foreign minister would speak on the conflict at the United Nations, while Dobrynin offered assurances that Moscow would not introduce any sort of resolution at the Security Council.

From the American perspective, an Israeli pushback of the Arab forces across starting lines, gaining some ground without completely dominating or destroying their rivals, was the desirable outcome, but in the early days of the conflict the main American concern was that Israel would inflict too heavy a defeat on the Arabs. Kissinger confessed that he found ‘the Arab mind... hard... to fathom’, as he believed that to resist a ceasefire was ‘to ask for their total destruction’. Nixon worried that the ‘poor dumb Egyptians’ would cross the Canal only to be cut off- thirty or forty thousand of them’ and that

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32 Kipnis, 1973 *The Road to War*, p. 225.
The one thing that we have to be concerned about... is that the Israelis, when they finish clobbering the Egyptians and Syrians, which they will do, will be even more impossible to deal with than before and you and I have got to determine in our minds, we must have a diplomatic settlement there.  

Although the first days of fighting had been unexpectedly tough for Israel, Meir continued to insist that Israel needed to ‘gain time to finish the job’, insisting that ‘we not only reject that which freezes the ceasefire but that which calls for a return [to status quo ante] which is unrealistic’. Instead, she made an urgent personal appeal for an ‘immediate start to the delivery of at least some of the new Phantom planes’.  

Comfortable expectations of early Israeli military dominance were ‘exploded’ early on 9 October. Calling an urgent meeting with Kissinger, Dinitz warned that the IDF had suffered severe losses including 49 planes and ‘something like 500 tanks’, and urgently needed resupply. Fighting had been significantly more difficult and costly than anticipated on both fronts, with heavy casualties, and Egyptian reversals of major counteroffensives in the Sinai. The Syrians had broken through Israeli lines on the Golan Heights, clearing the path for a potential tank invasion of Israeli proper, including population centres, and had successfully repulsed strikes from the Israeli Air Force (IAF), preventing participation in the ground war. Dinitz pressed for immediate replacement of Israeli losses, and even suggested that Golda Meir might make an emergency visit to Washington to press the urgency of the Israeli case, although Kissinger rejected this idea as representing ‘either hysteria or blackmail’.  

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34 Telecon Dinitz-Kissinger, Washington, 8 October 1973 1:14pm. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 22. FRUS XXIV Doc. 126.
36 The journalist Seymour Hersh, suggests that the ‘blackmail’ referred was a threat of Israeli recourse to its nuclear arsenal in the absence of American supplies, but this is a decidedly minority position among historians, and both Dinitz and Kissinger deny that this was explicit or implicit in their discussion. CIA director William Colby, who produced an updated report on Israeli nuclear capabilities in the first days of war, also categorically states that ‘[t]here was no nuclear blackmail. There was no emphasis on it in any of our discussions’. Hersh, The Samson Option: Israel’s Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy (Random House, New York, 1991); Dinitz ‘The Yom Kippur War: Diplomacy of War and Peace’ in Kumaraswamy ed., Revisiting the Yom Kippur War, pp. 104-126; Colby cited in Lebow and Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 19. A recent comprehensive study drawing on interviews from several key participants and American and Israeli declassified sources found no evidence of Israel efforts to ‘signal’
This unexpected Arab military success caused problems for Washington. As the unforeseen prospect of the victory of Soviet over American arms now had to be taken into consideration, the issue of resupplying Israel began to assume importance not just in terms of the local military struggle, but in terms of superpower competition. As NSC staffer William Quandt reported, supply of Israel became a Cold War imperative in conflict with Kissinger’s aspiration to cooperate with Sadat, raising an ‘acute dilemma’. Kissinger was at a loss, complaining to Dinitz that the American ‘strategy was to give you until Wednesday [October 10] evening, by which time I thought the whole Egyptian army would be wrecked’. In the absence of a ‘quick victory’, he said, Washington could ‘face massive problems’. Quandt later identified the 9 October Dinitz-Kissinger meeting the ‘point the Israeli and American positions began to diverge’, as

The United States wanted an early cease-fire, at least within the next two days. Israel wanted arms in sufficient quantity to secure a military victory. Over the next forty-eight hours the United States seemed to move slowly either, as Kissinger maintains, because of bureaucratic confusion, or, as other believe, as a form of pressure to induce the Israelis to accept a cease-fire in place and in the conviction that the fighting was over.

In the event, US supplies to Israel were not dispatched until 13 October, a full week after the Arab surprise attack and four days after Dinitz’s appeal. Controversy around the delayed American response to Israel’s plight has persisted, despite Kissinger’s rejection of ‘the canard that the Nixon administration deliberately withheld supplies from Israel to make it more tractable in negotiations’, with lingering suspicions of deliberate foot-dragging by either Kissinger or Schlesinger.

Historiographical debate on American policy during the first week of the October war largely focuses on resupply policy, and seems to have coalesced around the issues of Kissinger’s loyalty to, and fair dealing with, the Israelis, and whether Kissinger or Schlesinger was more responsible for delays in resupplying the IDF. Dinitz, the key Israeli liaison in Washington, presents the bureaucratic struggle to secure resupply as

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38 Memcon Dinitz - Kissinger, 9 October 1973, 8:20-8:40 am.
39 Quandt, Peace Process, p. 156.
40 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 496.
‘a battle against so many odds’ in which Kissinger rallied to Israeli’s side once apprised of its difficult situation. Dinitz squarely blames the Pentagon for delays, arguing that Schlesinger ‘feared a strong Arab reaction including an oil embargo and an Arab threat not to refuel the 6th Fleet in the Mediterranean’, and was thus was unwilling to use the US airforce to resupply the IDF. Dinitz’s line of argument is reproduced by Kissinger’s quasi-official biographers Kalb and Kalb and in Dallek’s more recent volume on the Nixon-Kissinger White House. Casting Kissinger as hero and Schlesinger as villain, these works argue that after days of procrastination by the Pentagon, Kissinger ‘forcefully’ clashed with Schlesinger on 12 October, and, according to Kalb and Kalb, later that day ‘persuaded Nixon to ignore Schlesinger’s advice and allow him to begin a large-scale resupply of Israel that would allow it to achieve a balanced outcome to the fighting’. As the bureaucratic logjam was swept away and the massive American airlift swung into action, Kissinger could claim victory in what his biographers have termed the ‘Battle of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue’.

By contrast, Siniver’s recent volume on Nixon administration crisis management cites Quandt to the effect that ‘in reality it was Kissinger who ordered Schlesinger not to resupply Israel’, giving new voice to a suspicion which has persisted since the mid-1970s. Matti Golan’s first generation history, based on leaked Israeli sources, argues that while Kissinger may have used his Defence Department colleagues as alibis in explaining delays to Dinitz, he basically stalled on Israeli requests for his own purposes. According to Golan, ‘Kissinger fed the ambassador [Dinitz] expressions of solidarity and empty promises that gained him time’ while attempting to use the US position as Israeli supplier as a bargaining chip in superpower negotiations. Even as he fobbed Dinitz off, he ‘told the Soviet ambassador of pressures put on him by Israel and that he was holding his ground. In return, he asked that Moscow exert its influence for a ceasefire and prevent an escalation of the war by holding back supplies to his own allies’. Golan regards Kissinger’s transmission of Nixon’s decision ‘in principle’ to full replacement of Israeli losses as a further means of evasion and stalling, a commitment with no real meaning, and claims that Dinitz was ‘seduced’ and

43 Siniver, The Machinery of Crisis, p. 201.
duped by Kissinger, who was less concerned with Israel’s ‘agony’ than with his own Cold War strategising. Adopting a similar line, Siniver argues that it was the threat of an immediate negative publicity campaign spearheaded by Dinitz which led Nixon to overrule Kissinger as ‘Already consumed by two domestic scandals, the last thing the White House needed was a scandal over foreign policy.

Walter Isaacson, a Kissinger biographer who enjoyed access to an incomplete but not inconsequential primary source base consisting of ‘various participants or aides... telephone transcripts, memos of conversation and meeting notes’, and who also conducted interviews with Nixon, Kissinger, Dinitz, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near and Middle Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco (among others), claims to resolve this controversy through his knowledge of ‘who said what to whom during this week long debate’. Isaacson lends support to Kissinger’s claim that he alone argued for limited resupply of Israel from the outset. However, when the American and Israeli civilian aircraft proved inadequate for the job, Kissinger who, according to Isaacson, ‘hoped to begin a new diplomatic round, still wanted to avoid the use of US military planes’ remained ‘adamantly opposed’ to direct US involvement. Isaacson cites a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Haig, during which Kissinger warned that sending US military aircraft ‘would be a disaster’ and rejected Haig’s suggestion ‘that we send some American planes in there’ as ‘stupid’. In Isaacson’s account it was Schlesinger who, overnight on 12-13 October, came to the view that the changing situation required a change in policy, and who saw little difference between using chartered American airplanes and US military aircraft. Unable to convince Kissinger, Schlesinger bypassed him by having Haig telephone Nixon to secure a direct presidential order. Schlesinger himself later asserted that ‘there was no halfway house’ and that the United States would ‘have to use its own military aircraft if Israel was to be resupplied in time’. Lebow and Stein also accept that Schlesinger, supported by WSAG member (and JCS Chairman) Admiral Thomas

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47 Ibid. p. 522
48 Siniver, The Machinery of Crisis, p. 201.
Moorer, came to accept the necessity of direct US government intervention, as both men believed that ‘a military airlift would be efficient and easier to control’. But they argue that in the end, Nixon overruled both Kissinger and Schlesinger, as he rejected their joint recommendation of using not more than three C-5A transport airplanes, insisting that Washington ‘would take just as much heat for sending three planes as thirty. Goddamn it, use every one we have! Tell them [the Pentagon] to send everything that can fly’. 49

But for all the historiographical attention, these secondary accounts say little on the American ceasefire diplomacy in the first week of the October War or about bilateral US relations with Egypt, which insiders uniformly present as the key to the American resupply decision. Aside from discussion of the surprise attack which launched the war and the superpower confrontation at the end of the war, Sadat, or indeed any other Egyptian official, go all but unmentioned in even the most recent volumes from Daigle and Siniver. In his discussion of the American airlift, Siniver makes no mention of Sadat or ceasefire diplomacy, while Daigle asserts that ‘the decision to proceed with the airlift ultimately come down to a simple decision not to let an American ally be defeated by countries supported by the Soviet Union’. Daigle only briefly mentions ceasefire diplomacy and makes no causal linkage between these two key aspects. 50

This is surprising, as insiders uniformly present the decision to begin a massive airlift to Israel using US military aircraft as a direct response to Egypt’s rejection of a ceasefire initiative brokered by Kissinger and forwarded to Sadat on 13 October by UK Foreign Secretary Alec Douglas-Home, who acted as intermediary. Quandt recounts that on 13 October, ‘having received confirmation of Sadat’s refusal of a ceasefire in place, President Nixon took then responsibility of ordering a full-scale airlift of military equipment to Israel’. 51 Similarly, Kissinger reports that once Sadat had rejected the ceasefire offer, ‘All that was left was to force a change in the perception of their interests. We would pour in supplies. We would risk a confrontation’. 52 Dobrynin’s account is a mirror image:

49 Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, pp. 192-193.
50 Craig Daigle, The Limits of Détente, p. 305.
51 Quandt, Decade of Decisions, p. 183.
52 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 518.
On October 13 Kissinger informed me of reports that Sadat strongly opposed a cease-fire resolution. Nixon therefore no longer supported our joint efforts in the Security Council: let things take their course- by that time Israel had begun regaining its strength. Kissinger said the president would therefore by forced to revise his pledge to exercise restraint in resupplying Israel... spurning the cease-fire earlier, it was obvious Sadat that had made a gross political and strategic blunder, because it brought him military disaster some days later.53

As these excerpts clearly show, those actively involved in the diplomacy are agreed that Sadat rejected a ceasefire initiative on 13 October, and that the decision to resupply Israel using US military aircraft was taken in direct response. This critical linkage is all but absent from the secondary literature however. In order to redress this discrepancy, and to demonstrate the impact of Egyptian diplomacy on US decision making, the following subsection uses declassified American materials now available to reconstruct US decision making and diplomacy during 9 - 13 October, providing a primary-source based account independent of participant accounts.

THE FAILED CEASEFIRE AND NIXON’S RESUPPLY DECISION

Declassified evidence demonstrates the supposed Kissinger-Schlesinger disagreement delaying resupply to be largely artificial. Throughout the first week of the October War, WSAG members were agreed on the undesirability of resupplying Israel during the fighting, blaming Israel’s predicament on its own military errors. The consensus held that while a full-scale resupply of Israel with US military aircraft was to be avoided as militarily unnecessary and politically undesirable, a smaller resupply using chartered commercial aircraft (a standard operating procedure during the Vietnam War) would demonstrate American support for Israel, alleviating strains on bilateral relations and avoiding alienating Jerusalem in advance of post-war negotiations. The division of labour between Schlesinger, as Secretary of Defence, and Kissinger, as Secretary of State, was clear. Schlesinger would arrange the airlift logistics, while Kissinger would arrange the ceasefire. All Kissinger required was a respectable Israeli military advance, to avoid suing for peace from a position of apparent weakness, but by 13 October, a week into fighting, neither man had made appreciable progress, causing tempers to flare.

After meeting with Dinitz on 9 October, Kissinger presented the ‘desperate’ Israeli situation to a hastily convened principals-only WSAG meeting as complicating American diplomacy. He stressed that although ‘the best way would be for them to win without our help’ if the Israelis could represent Washington ‘as having screwed them in their hour of need, we lose any leverage we have’. The WSAG members tended to agree with Kissinger’s recommendation of providing consumables for immediate use in battle, but to leave aircraft, tanks and other ‘heavy equipment on a time schedule which would put it beyond the war’. Schlesinger remained sceptical of the urgency of Israel’s situation, finding it ‘strange’ that only a day previously they claimed that they would not need help before the end of October, and insisting that ‘the situation had not changed that much... What we are seeing is not a tactical change but ammunition shortages’. CIA director William Colby was suspicious of a ‘long-term Israeli strategy’ to secure major arms agreements, creating a scenario where ‘If they wrap it up in a few days, they will lose their chance to lock us in’.55

Kissinger sought Egypt’s ceasefire terms on 9 October, employing the backchannel to Ismail to request clarification ‘as to the views of the Egyptian side on how the present fighting can be brought to an end’.56 He did not wait for a response before advising Nixon that at that point neither the Egyptians or Israelis were interested in a ceasefire, but diplomatically the US was ‘in good shape’ as the Americans were ‘the only ones that both sides are talking to’. Nixon decided immediately to provide M60 Tanks in addition to consumables as a gesture of American support for Israel, but insisted that ‘the quid pro quo is to tell Golda to call off the Jewish community in this country’ in their vocal criticism of delays in resupplying Israel.57

None of the approved items were dispatched over the next seventy-two hours, however. In accounting for delays in finding a logistical solution that did not involve

54 Kissinger, Schlesinger, CIA Director William Colby, Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Rush, and JCS Chairman Thomas Moorer.
using US military aircraft, Schlesinger, Deputy National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft and Deputy Secretary of Defence William Clements insisted that, according to their information and instructions, there was no emergency before 12 October. As they understood the situation, for Israel to go on the offensive all that was required was guarantees of future supplies, to be delivered after the fighting, and these guarantees were already in place. Kissinger held a similar understanding. As late as 12 October, Nixon directly asked Kissinger whether they had ‘yet actually run short of equipment’, to which Kissinger replied ‘No. And of course the most important assurance you gave them was that you’d replace the equipment’.58

Although Israel struggled to make headway against Egyptian positions in the Sinai, by 10 October almost all territorial losses in the Golan Heights had been recovered. IAF units, deterred from attacking Syrian troops positions by effective anti-aircraft defences, were redeployed to carry out strategic bombing in and around Damascus.59

On the same day, a message from Brezhnev outlining his consultations with the leaders of Egypt and Syria about ending hostilities arrived on the heels of intelligence reports that the Soviet Union had begun airlifting supplies to Syria. Brezhnev reported that ‘conversations with the Arabs were protracted and not easy’ but that the Soviet Union was now prepared to abstain from voting on a simple ceasefire resolution at the UN Security Council. The Soviets warned however that attempts ‘to broaden this task, to attach to it all kinds of conditions – like withdrawal of troops to the initial lines, creation of some kind of fact-finding commission and so on’ would ‘in advance doom the good thing for which we have agreed to act jointly’.60

Brezhnev indicated, in other words, that although unwilling to forward it themselves, the Soviets and the Arabs would accept a straightforward ceasefire in place if it was offered.

This offer came too early for Washington and Jerusalem, who were determined that Israel should make advances beyond starting lines before accepting a ceasefire.

58 Telecon Nixon-Kissinger, Washington, 12 October 1973, 8:38 am. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 23. FRUS XXV Doc. 159.
Despite setbacks and terrible suffering, the Israelis continued to share Kissinger’s immediate priorities of securing battlefield gains before accepting any ceasefire. Kissinger explained to his staff that despite reported casualties of over a thousand dead, Israel continued to reject ‘a simple ceasefire as long as the Arabs hold territory on their side of the pre-hostilities line’, which would have amounted to accepting military defeat. He saw two challenges, to achieve ‘cessation of hostilities’, and ‘to create conditions from which we can conduct the diplomacy in the Middle East designed to bring about a more permanent peace’. As ‘the strategic and therefore the political situation in the Middle East’ had ‘changed radically’, Kissinger stressed the importance of thinking ‘not in terms of short-term publicity’, instead focusing on longer-term strategic outcomes. Outlining his approach to his staff, Kissinger made no mention of resupplying Israel, but stressed that ‘if we can hold it together for another forty-eight or seventy-two hours... we may be able to crystalize the consensus that is needed to begin moving to a conclusion’. Once again elucidating reasons against direct American involvement in the conflict, Kissinger stressed that:

When I say hold together, I don’t mean for a particular military outcome. My definition of a successful outcome is one which both parties accept, though grudgingly, that does not get us into a confrontation with the Soviets, and it doesn’t radicalise the moderate Arab countries. And if we can navigate between these shoals, we then may be in a condition... to face the issue of a more permanent settlement.61

Kissinger again sought Egypt’s ceasefire terms with a backchannel message to Ismail early on 12 October. He promised that the US would exert its ‘maximum influence to prevent any attacks on civilian targets’ by Israel and would do its utmost to conduct itself so as to be able to play a useful role in the resolution of the problems of the Middle East, both in ending current hostilities as well as in bringing a permanent peace based on justice. The United States stands ready to consider any Egyptian proposal for ending hostilities with consideration and goodwill. It will attempt to be helpful when hostilities are ended. Whatever the inevitable pressures of the moment, the US hopes both sides will not lose sight of that objective.62

Later that day, Dobrynin approached Kissinger with a proposition that the superpowers might encourage a third party to introduce a ceasefire resolution at the Security Council but abstain from voting themselves, claiming that Sadat was ready to

61 Minutes of the Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting Washington, 10 October 1973, 3:15 pm. NPLM, RG 59, Transcripts of Secretary of State Kissinger’s Staff Meetings, 1973–77: Lot 78 D 443, Box 1, Secretary’s Analytical Staff Meetings.

accept such a deal. Kissinger asked Lord Cromer, the UK Ambassador to the UN, to table a resolution on the evening of 13 October, but the British, unimpressed to learn that Kissinger had discussed their involvement with the Soviets before consulting with them, insisted on verifying Egyptian readiness to accept a ceasefire through their own sources before committing to do so.63

Dinitz called another emergency meeting with Kissinger during the overnight wait for the Egyptian response, complaining of foot dragging by Schlesinger and warning that ‘our decision to start a new offensive or not depends on our power’ and of an impending ‘mutiny’ among the Jewish American community. Kissinger made a dramatic show of phoning the Secretary of Defence on the spot to demand an explanation and action, before calling Haig to complain ‘of massive problems with the Israelis because the sons of bitches in Defense have been stalling for four days’, instructing the White House Chief of Staff to ‘throw the fear of God into Schlesinger’.64

Much of the supposed Kissinger-Schlesinger struggle appears to have been staged, however, or at most squabbling over details rather than rooted in any fundamental disagreement. The pair spoke privately immediately after Dinitz left, with Kissinger continuing to stress that the ‘One thing we cannot have now given our relations with the Soviets is American planes flying in there. Anything else is acceptable’. Schlesinger emphasised that the Defence Department had requested regular updates on Israel’s supply status, and that

only five hours ago we talked to these people... they... exhibited no uneasiness about it all... they simply cannot be that short of ammo... It is impossible that they didn’t know what their supply was- and suddenly they’ve run out of it... We had the impression they had fifteen days of supply.

Kissinger readily accepted the contention that Israel’s reports were inconsistent and unreliable, complaining that the Israelis had ‘obviously screwed up every offensive’ but were ‘not about to take responsibility themselves. I have no doubt whatever that they are blaming us for their own failures... they fucked it up’. The secretaries agreed that while the Israelis were responsible for their own predicament, it was now

necessary to get some supplies to Israel as quickly as was possible without using US military aircraft. Kissinger closed the conversation by stressing to Schlesinger that the two were ‘in complete agreement on the strategy’. 65

The agreed strategy came unstuck that evening however, as the British Foreign Office, after contacting Cairo, reported that Sadat would not accept leaving the Israelis in ‘their present position’. Douglas-Home reported that London was unwilling to ‘risk being turned down by Sadat, and on our present information, he will’. London was therefore unwilling to table the ceasefire motion requested by Washington. Neither the US nor the UK were impressed with one another’s conduct, but this was incidental to the fact that Kissinger’s ceasefire, which had taken a week to organise, had collapsed, prompting Nixon to commit to a massive overt resupply of the IDF using US military aircraft. 66

Sadat claims that in his reply to British Prime Minister Edward Heath, he made clear that Heath should ‘tell Kissinger... I haven’t agreed to a ceasefire proposed by the Soviet Union or any other party. He should contact Cairo, not Moscow, in respect of anything concerning Egypt’. 67 Heikal recalls that British Ambassador to Cairo, Sir Philip Adams, ‘handed over a request from Heath’ directly to Sadat late on 12 October, ‘which asked Egypt to a standstill ceasefire on existing positions, pointing out this was a condition the Israelis had already been compelled to agree to’. 68 But at this point Sadat remained unwilling to accept a ceasefire without an Israeli pledge to withdraw

65 Telecon Kissinger-Schlesinger, Washington, 13 October 1973, 12:49 am. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Chronological File, Box 23. No classification marking. FRUS XXV, Doc. 161. Nor did close colleagues did not see the two as at odds, but rather as in cahoots. On 12 October, Clements complained bitterly to co-WSAG Moorer about ‘the idea of Jim [Schlesinger] and HAK [Kissinger] informally meeting in the Men’s Room, or the White House, or on a Street Corner’ to make ‘decisions which affect anything as important as what we are involved in here’, which he did not like ‘a damn bit’. Nor did Moorer appreciate the situation, who expressed concerns that they would ‘have to testify on this someday and it wouldn’t be good if we have to tell them “like it is”’. Telecon Moorer-Clements Washington, 12 October 1973, 10:55 am NARA National Archives, RG 218, Records of Admiral Thomas Moorer, Diary, October 1973. FRUS XXV, Doc. 161.

67 Sadat, In Search of Identity, p. 258.
from Egypt’s territory, or at a minimum some form of proposal for political settlement. Heikal recalls that 

Heath’s message was discussed the following morning and the consensus was that Egypt could not accept a standstill ceasefire at a moment when we were advancing, especially as a big offensive was to begin on the Egyptian front the next day.

As discussed in the previous chapter, this offensive, mounted after several days of ‘operational pause’, marked a move from the more minimalist Egyptian war plan, ‘Operation Badr’ (to simply capture the east bank of the Suez Canal and defend bridgeheads under their surface to air missile [SAM] shield), to the more ambitious ‘Granite Two’ plan (to capture the strategic Gidi and Mitla mountain passes some 40km east). Sadat’s key military advisers, Field Marshal Gamal el-Gamasy and Chief of Staff Saad El Shazly, had warned during planning stages that Granite Two was militarily unfeasible, but it had been retained as a back-up plan to secure Syrian participation in the war effort. Against his general’s advice, Sadat now reactivated Granite Two, a move which soon proved to be a major military blunder.

The course of the October War changed on 14 October. Israel’s strategy of concentrating its offensive against the Syrian front, including bombing in civilian population centres in and around Damascus, finally bore fruit. With Israeli forces within twenty miles of the Syrian capital, Egypt’s forces were drawn out from the protection of their SAM shield, giving open battle in a massive tank engagement, but suffering decisive defeat. By sundown, Israel had destroyed over two hundred and fifty Egyptian tanks while suffering less than ten tanks lost. This was the conflict’s decisive engagement, as victory allowed the IDF to attack the SAM sites directly, destroying Egypt’s counter against Israel’s overwhelming advantage in airpower. From this point onwards military events began to conform to American-Israeli expectations at the beginning of the war, with the IDF making daily gains.

For Washington, the worry was no longer about Israel’s military security but that its massive airlift, resupplying the IDF daily, would completely alienate the Arab world.

69 Meital, ‘The October War and Egypt’s Multiple Crossings’, p. 65.  
70 Ferraro, Tough Going, p. 41.  
These fears, however, proved unfounded. Even as Israel opened a new phase of military operations, Sadat opened a new phase of diplomacy. On 15 October, the day following Egypt’s defeat in the massive Sinai tank engagement, Ismail contacted Kissinger with another backchannel message, expressing ‘determination’ to maintain the ‘special channel of contact’. This message remains classified, but according to Kissinger’s account contained four key points: that no other party spoke in Egypt’s name, indicating that Washington should pay heed to Egyptian rather than Soviet statements on Egyptian intentions and policy; disavowal of any intention to inflict ‘humiliation’ on Israel; ‘appreciation’ of Washington’s ceasefire efforts as a preliminary to a peace settlement (thus once again requesting negotiation terms); only then was the American airlift termed ‘unacceptable’, but ‘amazingly’ Kissinger was personally invited to Cairo for negotiations. On the next day, 16 October, Sadat delivered a speech at the Egyptian National Assembly, calling on Nixon to intervene diplomatically to stop the fighting and resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

For Kissinger, who is almost as gushing about this communication, which he regarded as ‘the message of a statesman’, as about Ismail’s 7 October message, Egypt had responded to the American airlift in a manner and with vision ‘that under the circumstances can only be called extraordinary’. Once again, Ismail reiterated the themes of his previous presentations in February and May – distancing Egypt from the Soviet Union; emphasis on good US-Egypt relations and on maintaining close secret contact between Cairo and Washington military developments notwithstanding; and continuing interest in peace with Israel brokered by the US.

The October War and US diplomatic involvement entered a new stage in the wake of the Cairo’s rejection of the ceasefire and Washington’s commitment to resupply. During the first week of fighting, the Nixon administration foreign policy establishment had regarded resupplying Israeli as militarily unnecessary and politically undesirable, as such a move threatened to compromise US interests in the Arab world, particularly the renewed prospects for better US-Egypt relations and attendant opportunities for a

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73 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 527. Italics in original.
75 Ibid. Original emphasis.
new regional role. But while keen to cooperate with Sadat in post-war diplomacy, the White House would not stand by while he achieved the unthinkable of inflicting military defeat on Israel. When Israel seemed to be threatened with military defeat, the Cold War imperative of victory of American over Soviet arms, previously taken as given, came to fore, reframing the situation within a framework of global considerations. Nixon would not ‘allow a Soviet-supported operation to succeed against American supported operations’, and was convinced that the US needed to ‘do enough to have a bargaining position to bring Israel kicking and screaming to the table’ in post-war negotiations.⁷⁶ Although initially reluctant to resupply Israel, once committed to the airlift, Washington was determined to outmatch the Soviet airlift and sealift in full public view with an impressive demonstration of American power. Convinced that the consequences of sending even one plane were the same as sending an entire fleet, Nixon overruled his hesitant subordinates with the instruction to ‘send everything that can fly’. On 16 October, the WSAG decided to increase the airlift of equipment to Israel ‘until the rate of delivery is 25% ahead of Soviet deliveries to the Arabs’.⁷⁷ In private consultation, Kissinger assured Dobrynin that US was ‘prepared to stop the airlift immediately after a cease-fire if you are prepared to stop your airlift’.⁷⁸

Sadat’s unexpected backchannel response to the American airlift dispelled Kissinger’s worries of destroying opportunities for US-Egypt cooperation in post-war diplomacy, allowing him to refocus on his objective of securing a ceasefire at the right moment without giving further thought to supplies, beyond overmatching the Soviets. Sadat had simplified the situation for the Americans, placing the Egyptian prize within Kissinger’s grasp even as he feared that Washington had fumbled, and thus pointing the way forward for US diplomacy in the Middle East.

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⁷⁷ Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, pp. 192-193.

⁷⁸ Telecon Kissinger - Dobrynin Washington, 14 October 1973, 12:36 pm. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 23. FRUS XXV, Doc. 183.
Nixon and Kissinger received foreign ministers from Algeria, Kuwait, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia at the White House on 16 October. The Saudi Foreign Minister Omar Saqqaf expressed an admiration felt in the Arab world towards the United States, emphasising ‘that the Arabs have no ill-feeling; they are not your enemy, but they do not accept the occupation of their land’, and that ‘Israel was not being threatened by the Arabs with annihilation’, but American ‘help to Israel’ was ‘seen as hostile to the Arab world’. Morocco’s Ahmed Benhima emphasised that the Arabs were ‘trying to free their land because diplomacy has failed’, but while the US claimed ‘to be working for a just peace’, it also underwrote the occupation through its policy of ensuring Israeli military dominance, in what appeared ‘to be a contradiction in the US position’.79

Nixon presented the American airlift to Israel as an effort to ‘maintain a balance’ against the Soviet supply, promising that ‘as soon as we can reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, we will cut off arms’, and that the US would work towards negotiations leading to ‘the implementation of 242’ once the fighting was stopped. While avoiding commitments on 1967 borders, Nixon said that he had ‘told Prime Minister Meir… that my goal is a negotiation leading to permanent settlement, which would be just and which would require a settlement of the territorial issues’. Acknowledging that previous efforts to move Meir ‘had fallen on deaf ears’, Nixon promised that ‘it will not now’ insisting that his decision would not be affected by US political considerations- ever!’80

Saqqaf held a Rose Garden press conference after consulting with Nixon, announcing that ‘the talks had been constructive and friendly’. Nixon was pleased, having found the meeting with the Arab foreign ministers ‘spectacular’, while Kissinger was gratified to ‘see the Saudi Foreign minister come out like a good little boy and say they had very

80 Ibid.
fruitful talks with us’ confidently asserting that ‘we don’t expect a cut off in the next few days’.  

Both men had badly misread the Arab position. Later that day, the Organisation of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries (OAPEC) retaliated against the American airlift to Israel, announced a five percent cut in oil production, to be incremented by a further five percent each successive month until Israel withdrew from occupied territories and Palestinian ‘legal rights’ were restored. Apparently confident that the Arabs had done their worst, Nixon moved to head off domestic criticism of his Middle East policies and damage to relations with Israel on 19 October by making a request to congress for a further $2.2bn military aid package to Israel. The six Persian Gulf OPEC states retaliated again the next day by announcing a complete embargo of oil sales to the United States (and the Netherlands) and a seventy per cent increase in the price of crude oil. While the unsheathing of the ‘oil weapon’ was an event with major global ramifications throughout the 1970s and beyond, this was not immediately apparent and did not have an appreciable impact on American strategy during the October War. The ‘oil weapon’ and appropriate countermeasures were discussed at the WSAG and in other high-level meetings and correspondence, but did not affect US diplomacy with regards to the principals involved during the fighting.

**DE-LINKAGE – KISSINGER’S CEASEFIRE, 19 – 22 OCTOBER**

The Egyptian military position had steadily worsened after the defeat in the Sinai tank engagement. After three meetings between Sadat and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin over 16-18 October, Brezhnev cabled Washington with a three point draft UN resolution, calling for a ceasefire in place, Israeli withdrawal ‘to the line in accordance with Res. 242 of the Security Council’, and ‘appropriate consultations to create a just

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83 Aronson, Conflict and Bargaining, p. 181; Painter, ‘Oil and the October War’, pp. 176-177; Yergin, The Prize, pp. 602, 607-608
84 WSAG Minutes, Washington, 17 October, 3:05-4:04 pm. NPLM, NSC Institutional Files (H-Files), Box-117, WSAG Minutes, Originals, 1973. FRUS XXV Doc. 198.
and lasting peace in the Middle East’ to ‘start immediately’. Dobrynin suggested that the ‘participants in these consultations’ should be restricted to the belligerents and the superpowers, and that the superpowers could act as co-guarantors of the ‘territorial integrity, security, and inviolability of the borders of all, including Israel’. Although rejecting the second point as unacceptable to Israel, Kissinger was pleased, finding the first and third points ‘highly acceptable’, and reporting to Nixon that ‘the Russians... are moving in our direction’.

Nixon’s response to Brezhnev’s proposal was essentially to stall. Although he praised the previous Soviet proposal for a ceasefire in place as ‘a very statesmanlike act’ and agreed in general terms to calls for recognition of new realities, the need for durable peace, and the incompleteness of détente in its absence, in actual policy terms he promised only that ‘in the days ahead we will be doing a good deal of thinking about the substance of this matter, and we will wish to exchange further views with you’. The Soviets were not prepared to await days of American musings however. A further cable from Brezhnev to Nixon the next day, requested that ‘Dr. Kissinger comes in an urgent manner to Moscow to conduct appropriate negotiations with him as your authorised personal representative’.

Kissinger was dispatched to Moscow, but for the remainder of the crisis Nixon’s attention was elsewhere. The Watergate scandal was sharply intensified on 19 October by what was soon termed the ‘Saturday Night Massacre’, the firing of Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox in response to his efforts to compel the President to surrender tapes recorded by the secret White House taping system, which triggered

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85 Daigle, The Limits of Detente, p. 310.
88 Message Nixon - Brezhnev, Moscow, 18 October 1973. NPLM, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 70, (CF/USSR), Exchange of Notes Between Dobrynin and Kissinger. FRUS XXV Doc. 204.
89 Telecon Kissinger-Dobrynin, Washington, 19 October 1973, 11:04 am. NPLM HAK Telecons Box 23. FRUS XXV Doc. 209
the resignations of Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General William Ruckelshaus.\textsuperscript{90}

Before setting out for Moscow, Kissinger contacted both the Egyptians and Israelis. In a backchannel message to Ismail, Kissinger urged close contact throughout his trip, stressing that ‘the fastest and most effective way would be means of this special channel’, and reiterating that his objectives were ‘an immediate ceasefire and to begin promptly a diplomatic process to move towards a fundamental settlement’.\textsuperscript{91}

Apprising Dinitz of the situation, Kissinger stressed that it was ‘important that the President look good and is not accused of having sold anybody out’ but promised that ‘no phrase’ of Soviet proposal’s second point (about Israeli withdrawal) would be incorporated. Instead, Kissinger confirmed Dinitz’s understanding that the ceasefire would stipulate a link to direct negotiations between Israel and the belligerent Arab powers, and also promised to stall the Soviets while Israel consolidated its military position.\textsuperscript{92}

With circumstances now more propitious, Kissinger refocused on his objective of finding the right moment to secure a ceasefire on what he, rather than Sadat, Brezhnev, or even President Nixon, considered suitable terms. Kissinger’s vision of an appropriate ceasefire resolution was clear. Israel’s demand for direct negotiations could be accommodated, but otherwise the ceasefire should provide for maximum latitude in post-war negotiations by avoiding specific mention of overall settlements or plans, and it should be worded in a way to ensure a major American role in negotiations, while avoiding commitment to a significant Soviet role.

But to his consternation, \textit{en route} to Moscow, Kissinger received negotiating instructions indicating that the President and was ‘prepared to pressure the Israelis regardless of the domestic political consequences’, and had belatedly come around to Brezhnev’s view that the superpowers should jointly impose a Middle East settlement,


granting Kissinger ‘full authority’ to set this process in motion.\textsuperscript{93} In a move which ‘horrified’ Kissinger, Nixon had also notified Brezhnev of his preferences, restricting room for manoeuvre, and, crucially, capacity to stall by claiming to seek presidential authority for decision making.\textsuperscript{94} The President added a handwritten postscript, indicating that ‘Mrs. Nixon joins me in sending our best personal regards to Mrs. Brezhnev and to you’, a personal flourish which not which not only reportedly ‘touched the Soviet leader deeply’, but also made it impossible for Kissinger to rewrite the message before delivery.\textsuperscript{95}

Although Kissinger learned of the Saudi boycott en route to Moscow, he nevertheless rejected the President’s sudden shift as the ill-considered product of emotional duress, angrily telephoning and cabling Washington to voice his opposition, and ultimately ignoring Nixon’s orders.\textsuperscript{96} Kissinger cabled Scowcroft to say that he ‘was shocked at the tone of the instructions, [and] the poor judgement in the content of the Brezhnev letter’, complaining that the lack of room for manoeuvre made his position ‘almost insoluble’, and that to ‘carry out the letter of the President’s instructions’ would ‘totally wreck what little bargaining leverage I still have’. For Kissinger the ‘first objective’ was to secure a ceasefire, which would ‘be tough enough to get the Israelis to accept... impossible as part of a global deal’.\textsuperscript{97}

Kissinger did not represent Nixon’s or Sadat’s preferences or judgements in Moscow, but rather his own, overcoming Egyptian and Soviet efforts to achieve tight, specific linkage of the ceasefire to an overall settlement, in favour of vague, loose formulations, avoiding committing to a major Soviet role in negotiations. A backchannel message outlining Egypt’s preferred ceasefire terms reached Kissinger in Moscow on 20 October, which included a clause on ‘convening a peace conference with the object of reaching a fundamental settlement [and] a guarantee by the United

\textsuperscript{93} Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, pp. 85-86.
\textsuperscript{94} Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 547; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, pp. 85-86.
\textsuperscript{95} Israelyn, Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War (Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania, 1995), p. 125.
\textsuperscript{96} Aronson, Conflict and Bargaining, p. 187; Hanhimaki, Flawed Architect, p. 308; Lebow and Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 211; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 86.
Kissinger remained unwilling to explicitly link the ceasefire to overall settlement or any joint ‘guarantee’ with the Soviet Union, and thus continued to stall. Sadat gave way on 21 October, dispatching a new message indicating his willingness to separate a cease-fire from an overall settlement. With this in hand, Kissinger and Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco drafted a new ceasefire resolution overnight, simply omitting Sadat’s guarantee, and ‘calling for negotiation between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices’. To Kissinger’s ‘amazement’ this formulation was accepted by the Soviets with alacrity. Unbeknownst to him at the time, Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Vinogradov had contacted Brezhnev directly to tell the General Secretary that Sadat was now ‘begging’ for a ceasefire ‘on any terms’, making the Soviets quick to accept terms while ‘Sadat’s desperate position was unknown to the Americans’.

The three-point Kissinger-Sisco draft was introduced to the UN Security Council on 22 October, and adopted as Resolution 338 at 12:50 am eastern time. The resolution stipulated a simple ceasefire in place ‘no later than 12 hours after the moment of adoption of this decision’, in the positions that the sides occupied at the time, accompanied by a call for ‘the parties concerned to start immediately after the ceasefire implementation of Security Council Resolution 242 in all its parts’ and ‘negotiations... under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East’. Kissinger offered the ‘appropriate auspices’ clause as a sop to the Soviets, whom he intended to marginalise in post-war negotiations. He had insisted that Brezhnev sign a separate secret understanding defining ‘appropriate auspices’ as meaning a role for both superpowers in negotiations, but explicitly stating

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98 Kissinger reports a communication breakdown with Israel while in Moscow, delaying communications- to beyond the point where Israel could make any input or amendment. Kissinger’s suggestions of Soviet ‘jamming’ have been received with scepticism in some quarters. Interestingly, communications with Egypt remained in good working order. Excerpts from Backchannel US-Egyptian messages, 20-26 October 1973. NPLM, HAK/ME, Box 130, Saunders-Memorandum-Sensitive. Burr, ed., The October War and US Policy, Doc. 44. Available at http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/octwar-40.pdf accessed 25 August 2014.

99 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, pp. 553-554.

100 Israelyn, Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War, pp. 17-18, cited in Lebow and Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 212.

that Soviet involvement would not be ‘at every session, but at key points’, which he had insisted was necessary in order to secure Israeli acceptance of the ceasefire.\textsuperscript{102}

\textbf{THE ENDGAME: FINALISING THE CEASEFIRE}

Kissinger had secured Egyptian and Soviet consent to a ceasefire on his terms, but not yet that of the Israelis. Nixon’s direct presidential authority was invoked for this task, with Kissinger’s team drafting a letter for the President to sign before delivery to Meir. The White House informed Meir that the superpowers intended to jointly call a Security Council meeting and submit the resolution at 9 pm, with the ceasefire to come into effect twelve hours later, but the Moscow-Washington relay was delayed by four hours by a technical fault, foreshortening this period.\textsuperscript{103} The Nixon letter promoted the agreement as ‘a major achievement for you and for us’, emphasising that Israeli forces would maintain their current positions, that there was ‘absolutely no mention whatsoever of the word “withdrawal”’, and that ‘for the first time, we have achieved the agreement of the Soviet Union to a resolution that calls for direction negotiation without conditions or qualifications between the parties’. Exerting polite but firm pressure, the White House expressed the ‘wish that there had been time for fuller consultations’, but insisted that with bloodshed continuing, Israel in a dominant position, and ‘the risks increasing by the hour as substantial supplies are being poured in by both major powers... it was imperative that an understanding be reached promptly’.\textsuperscript{104}

Meir was reportedly livid at the \textit{fait accompli}. She reluctantly agreed to the ceasefire, but requested that Kissinger visit Tel Aviv before returning to Washington.\textsuperscript{105} Kissinger assured his Soviet hosts that his acceptance of the invitation to Israel was on condition that ‘they had to accept the resolution and there had to be substantial compliance

\textsuperscript{102}Stein, \textit{Heroic Diplomacy}, p. 88.
\textsuperscript{103}Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, p. 555.
\textsuperscript{105}Golan, \textit{The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger}, p. 77.
with the resolution’. However, Kissinger also cabled ahead to Israel with his ‘profoundest apologies’ for the communication delay, stressing that ‘in the circumstances we would understand if the Israelis felt they needed some additional time for military depositions before cease-fire takes effect’. He added, however, that this encouragement of premeditated ceasefire violations ‘for obvious reasons requires total discretion’.107

Arriving in Tel Aviv, Kissinger was greeted with complaints from Meir that the ceasefire resolution did not explicitly mention ‘direct negotiations’ and that Sadat ‘thinks he has won’ and would survive politically as ‘the hero’ because ‘he dared’. Kissinger insisted that direct negotiations were ‘indissolubly linked to 242. Nothing can be implemented without the direct talks’ and promised that there was no intention ‘to float an American plan’. He claimed instead that the ‘beginning of the process will be a historic event, even if it totally stalemates – which I expect, frankly’.108

In addition to insisting the ceasefire agreement provided for direct negotiations (which he suggested would likely lead nowhere), in order to win Israeli support, Kissinger again indicated that the Israelis need not fear ‘violent protests from Washington if something happens during the night, while I’m flying home’. He affected indifference as to whether or not the Arabs adhered to the ceasefire, as he considered the matter under Israeli ‘domestic jurisdiction’.109

Kissinger’s ‘green light’ for post-ceasefire advances, which enabled the IDF to encircle the Egyptian Third Army Corps outside the city of Suez, has proved a source of intense controversy, fuelled by differing accounts from various participants, but the question

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106 Memcon Kissinger- Gromyko, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, Moscow, 22 October 1973, 8:45-9:45 am. NPLM NSC Files, HAK, Box 136, (CF/USSR), Kissinger Trip to Moscow, Tel Aviv, and London, 20-22 October 1973.


is not so much whether Kissinger tolerated ceasefire violations however, but the scale and timeframe he envisaged. Israeli political and military representatives claim that Kissinger was complicit in the encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army. His account of his own role in Israeli ceasefire violations has attracted scepticism from scholars who argue that he strongly implied that inflicting significant damage on Egyptian forces and a timeframe for the offensive measured in days rather than hours were both acceptable to Washington.\(^{110}\) In response to Israeli airforce commander Major General Binyamin Peled’s estimation that without SAM cover Egyptian armies could be destroyed in two to three days, Kissinger is cited as exclaiming ‘Two or three days? That’s all? Well, in Vietnam the ceasefire didn’t go into effect at the exact time it was agreed on’.\(^{111}\) However, Kissinger and his entourage insist they took a ‘very firm line’ with the Israelis during a ‘very hostile’ encounter, claiming that intelligence reports estimated that at least another three days would be necessary to destroy the Third Army, and that the Israelis understood that ‘there was no scenario by which Israel could have been given three more days without risking a superpower crisis and destroying the American position in the Arab world’.\(^{112}\)

Declassified evidence shows that while Kissinger was initially blasé about the ceasefire violations, as military pressure built on Egypt over 23 October, Cairo and Moscow in turn placed increasingly intense diplomatic pressure on the United States to restrain Israel. Both Brezhnev and Sadat repeatedly used their hotlines and backchannels to demand a new three-part resolution calling for an immediate ceasefire, a return to the lines of the previous ceasefire, and deployment of UN observers. Brezhnev was particularly furious, cabling Kissinger directly to rail against what he saw as an ‘absolutely unacceptable... flagrant deceit on the part of the Israelis’.\(^{113}\) As he later indicated, Brezhnev believed that ‘in Moscow... Kissinger behaved in a cunning way. He vowed fidelity to the policy of détente, and then while in Tel Aviv he made a deal

\(^{110}\) Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation*, p. 418; Lebow and Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, p. 217.
\(^{112}\) Lebow and Stein *We All Lost the Cold War*, p. 216-218; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 561, 569.
with Golda’. Sadat called on both superpowers to ‘intervene effectively even if that necessitates the use of forces’ to restore the ceasefire, but also repeated his invitation for Kissinger to visit Cairo in November.

Dinitz reported that Israel had ‘no problem’ with the first and third clauses of the new resolution early on 23 October, but agreed with Kissinger that previous ceasefire lines were impossible to determine and withdrawal to these lines was therefore unworkable. Kissinger updated Cairo on Israel’s stated willingness to abide by the ceasefire immediately afterwards, and conveyed that he might accept ‘the kind invitation of the Egyptian side to visit Cairo’ in November. He stressed, however, that it was ‘essential that prior to Dr. Kissinger’s visit, US–Egyptian relations be conducted in such a manner as to maintain an atmosphere conducive to constructive discussions’.

Kissinger briefed his staff in the late afternoon of October 23, to the effect that ‘there is a little flap because... the Israelis... grabbed some more territory... the Arabs and the Soviets... are screaming for another Security Council Resolution’. Yet he went on to identify a serious divergence in US and Israeli interests, observing that:

> From an Israeli point of view it is no disaster to have the whole Arab world radicalized and anti-American, because this guarantees our continued support. From an American point of view, it is a disaster.

Fighting continued well into the next morning, forcing Nixon to personally demand from Dinitz that Israel halt to military action, warning that ‘a continuation of these operations will mean a total reevaluation of our relations, including supplies’ and to reassure Sadat that he had made ‘urgent representations to the government of Israel

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requesting its full compliance with Security Council Resolution 338’.

Kissinger advised Dobrynin that Washington had made a ‘very violent representation’ to Israel.

The Israelis continued to press their offensive nonetheless, cutting off all supply routes to the Egyptian Third Army deployed outside the city of Suez by 24 October. Admiral Moorer reported to the WSAG that the ‘Israelis are astride the two main roads and the Egyptians’ water and supplies have been interdicted. I don’t think they have more than three days’ supplies’. With supply lines severed, no further military movement was necessary to liquidate the Egyptian Third Army, which would soon atrophy from dehydration, hunger, and lack of medical attention.

A further Brezhnev message to Nixon arrived at 10pm complaining to Nixon that ‘Israel continues to drastically ignore the ceasefire decision of the Security Council... brazenly challenging both the Soviet Union and United States... It continues to seize new and new[sic] territory’. The Kremlin warned that ‘if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter we should be faced with necessity urgently to consider taking appropriate steps unilaterally’. The suggestion of combined superpower action was ‘unthinkable’ for Kissinger as, aside from the domestic political impossibility of a joint American-Soviet ‘power play against Israel’ and risks of military clash, ‘If we agreed to [a] joint role with the Soviet Union, its troops would re-enter Egypt with our blessing’.

With Nixon indisposed, Kissinger took charge in convening an emergency JCS/NSC meeting setting the American response. The Americans decided on a ‘tough’ formal diplomatic reply indicating that ‘US would in no event accept unilateral action on the part of the Soviets... Such action would produce incalculable consequences’, but this

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124 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 584.
125 Nixon, overwhelmed by Watergate, had taken to drinking and fallen asleep intoxicated. Kissinger asked Haig ‘Should I wake the President?’ but Haig demurred with a firm ‘No’. Memcon Haig-Kissinger Washington, 24 October 1973, 9:50 pm. NPLM, HAK Telecons, Box 23.
communication was delayed in order to allow the Kremlin to pick up on the ominous signals of the redeployment of naval forces to the Mediterranean, the recall of seventy-five B52 bombers from Guam, placing European forces and the 82nd Airborne Division on high alert, and a general (i.e. worldwide) Defence Condition (DEFCON) III, a state of readiness for imminent war. The situation soon subsided however, as another message from Sadat requesting a non-superpower ‘international force’ of UN peacekeepers obviated the need for either superpower to intervene.

The DEFCON III alert has generated a sub-literature of its own, grouped into two general schools of thought. The first interpretation views the alert as an effective exercise in deterrence and nuclear diplomacy, basically endorsing Kissinger’s famous boast that ‘the Soviets subsided as soon as we showed our teeth’. Critics however, condemn the ‘alarmist’ response, arguing that there is no evidence to suggest the Soviets intended to send troops to Egypt. Brezhnev’s proposal for a coordinated superpower response, if genuine, can be seen as ‘the capstone of détente’, or if less than this, as propaganda exercise, deflecting blame from the Soviet Union for failing to respond to Egypt’s predicament. Golan shows that until 24 October, the Soviet ‘tone was still that of a partner rather than an adversary’ and that while ‘surprised’ by the American response to his letter, ‘Brezhnev finally decided simply to ignore the American alert and thereby avoid confrontation’.

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128 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 586. Dallek’s for example reproduces this interpretation unmodified, arguing that ‘[t]he message and the alert, which became worldwide news, had an immediate desired effect. The Soviets and Egyptians declared their readiness by the afternoon to accept a larger observer force, which would not include US or Soviet troops’. Dallek, Partners in Power, p. 531. See also Kaufman, The Arab Middle East and the United States, p. 85.
129 Galia Golan, ‘The Soviet Union and the October War’ pp. 112-115 in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War, pp. 101-118; Siniver, The Machinery of Crisis, p. 210. Garthoff, Détente and Confrontation, p. 430-432; Hanhimaki, The Flawed Architect, p. 315; Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, pp. 198-260. Stein argues while the Americans understood Brezhnev’s message as ‘an ultimatum… No one in the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s Department of International Organisations, which consulted with the politburo throughout the war believed, even after the message was sent to Nixon, that Brezhnev or others would have undertaken “unilateral Soviet military action”’, Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 93.
130 Golan, ‘The Soviet Union and the October War’, pp. 112-113; Lebow and Stein We All Lost the Cold War, p. 234.
Offering a view from the Kremlin, Dobrynin rejects ‘the myth of the Middle East being saved from a Soviet armed invasion’ cautioning that:

Many American historians describe the Middle East War as the deadliest crisis in our postwar relations, comparable to the Cuba crisis. While it was indeed a serious political crisis, which made a rather unpleasant impact on our relations, there was no threat of a direct military clash between us. At least that was and is Moscow’s assessment. We took no measures to put our armed forces on high combat alert even in response to the American move, and we certainly did not alert our strategic nuclear forces as the Americans did.\textsuperscript{131}

The Soviet Ambassador voices suspicion that it was precisely the novel idea of American-Soviet military cooperation which inspired the American reaction, arguing ‘that a major factor in American behaviour was its determination not to accept a joint Soviet-American military presence to supervise or observe the cease-fire under UN auspices’. But while Dobrynin confirms that Kissinger privately reassured him that the alert was in large part a publicity gesture, he claims that Kissinger expressed its significance with reference to domestic politics, which could only mean Watergate:

Kissinger excused himself by saying that the White House instructions for limited combat readiness should not be taken as a hostile act on the part of the US government and were mostly determined by “domestic considerations”. He assured me that the order would be revoked the next day, and that in the meantime I could urgently inform Brezhnev about it strict confidence. Indeed, [the] order was revoked on October 26.\textsuperscript{132}

Declassified evidence shows Dobrynin to be largely correct. Writing to Sadat on 24 October, Kissinger admitted that neither superpower had forces deployed in readiness for immediate intervention at Suez, and as such ‘it would be impossible to assemble sufficient outside military power to represent an effective counterweight to the indigenous forces now engaged in the Middle East’.\textsuperscript{133} The JSC/NSC members debated Soviet motives, focusing on the question of whether Brezhnev’s message was a genuine response to the situation or part of a premeditated plot involving the ‘charade’ of inviting Kissinger to Moscow ‘with the intention of seizing on any opportunity offered by the Israelis in violation of the Ceasefire’, but were given pause by the consideration that ‘the Soviets were correct in saying the Israelis had violated the ceasefire’. Kissinger responded to Schlesinger’s suggestion that the Soviets could ‘move into Egypt with between 5,000 and 6,000 men and take credit for stopping the

\textsuperscript{131} Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, p. 306.
\textsuperscript{132} Ibid. 304
Israelis and regaining their status in the Arab world’ by asserting that a Soviet deployment indicated an intentional Soviet challenge and ‘that, if they get in, they’ll never get out’. Kissinger insisted that ‘the Soviets were influenced by the situation the President finds himself in’, that ‘if the Democrats and the US public do not stop laying siege to the government… sooner or later someone will take a run at us’, and that the ‘strategy of the Soviets now appears to be one of throwing détente on the table since we have no functioning President… we must prevent them getting away with it’.134 Nixon has railed against allegations that DEFCON III alert was calculated to draw attention away from Watergate and to reassert American strength, but the records of this meeting show that while these charges do have some basis, it was Kissinger, without the President’s consent or knowledge, who took this gamble.

But for all the nuclear posturing, the situation was resolved not at the superpower level, but through direct contacts with Egypt and Israel. Just before midnight on 24 October, Washington dispatched a backchannel message to Sadat in Nixon’s name, warning that the US could not agree to dispatch forces, which ‘to be effective would have to be so large that they could overpower on both sides’. The White House pleaded with Cairo to ‘consider the consequences if the two great nuclear countries were thus to confront each other on your soil’, stressing that this was ‘the beginning of a new period in the Middle East. Let us not destroy it at this moment’.135 Egypt was responsive, relaying that Cairo ‘had asked for a joint US-Soviet presence to guarantee the ceasefire. Since the US refuses to take such a measure, Egypt is asking the Security Council to provide an international force’.136 Further messages confirmed agreement to ‘the presence of an international force composed of units from non-permanent members of the Security Council as long as it is backed by the full support of the permanent members’.137 American diplomacy quickly turned towards arranging for safe passage of the new measure through the Security Council (and exclusion of communist forces from the UN observation mission) while simultaneously restabilising

137 Ibid.
relations with Cairo and Moscow. Nixon again assured Brezhnev that he ‘personally intervened with the Prime Minister of Israel to halt the fighting’ and that

> We are prepared to take every effective step to guarantee the implementation of the ceasefire and are already in close touch with the government of Israel to ensure that it abides fully by the term of the Security Council decision.

Offering similar reassurance to Egypt, Nixon also stressed that Washington was very encouraged by your substantive preparations for discussions during Secretary Kissinger’s upcoming visit. You can be sure he will adopt a constructive attitude. We hope this visit may represent a milestone on the toward a permanent and just settlement.

Sadat’s diplomacy had again shaped US policy. His challenge to both superpowers to enforce the ceasefire they had agreed upon briefly escalated the situation from a local conflict to a superpower (diplomatic) confrontation, but galvanised both to action. When the ceasefire took hold, preserving his Third Army Corps, Sadat de-escalated the confrontation with a face-saving proposal welcome to both superpowers and sparing Egypt a returned superpower military presence. With Nixon and Sadat already looking forward to Kissinger’s approaching visit to Cairo as the crisis subsided, Sadat’s political framework for post-war negotiations was already emerging in clearer focus.

**CONCLUSION**

This chapter has examined US diplomacy during the fourth Arab-Israel war, with a specific focus on bilateral US-Egypt diplomacy, arguing that Egyptian input was important to shaping American policy throughout the conflict. Ismail’s re-introduced the strategic programme previously presented to his Kissinger, during their secret meetings in February and May 1973, on the second day of fighting, and invited Kissinger himself to forward a settlement proposal. The invitation for bilateral strategic cooperation offered and repeatedly reoffered by Sadat provided the guiding

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light for Kissinger’s strategy and diplomacy throughout the war. Although the crisis presented a series of difficult tests for the nascent partnership, at each critical point – in the wake of the US decision to resupply Israel and Egypt’s defeat in the Sinai tank engagement, the American imposition of a simple ceasefire decouple from overall settlement, and the near-destruction of the Third Army – Sadat responded by reaffirming his interest in US-Egypt cooperation, underlined each time by re-extending his invitation for Kissinger to visit Cairo.

Although Kissinger has since been at pains to emphasise the importance of Sadat’s diplomacy in guiding his own approach during the October War, he has also, less candidly and less coherently, attempted to decontextualize this from Sadat’s overtures to the Nixon administration from the beginning of his presidency in October 1970. Kissinger admits that until Ismail’s message on 7 October he had not comprehended Sadat’s strategy, but cites only the exit of Soviet personnel from Egypt in July 1972 as relevant prior context. Sadat’s overtures to Nixon in late 1970, the ‘peace initiative’ and engagement with the State Department in 1971, and Ismail’s presentations to Kissinger himself are pointedly omitted in Kissinger’s account of the October War, and prejudicially dismissed elsewhere in his writings.

This tendency seems to stem at least in part from a genuine misunderstanding or mistrust of Sadat’s diplomacy. As seen in chapter three, only in April 1972, eighteen months into Sadat’s presidency, and almost a year after Rogers met the Egyptian president and made a similar recommendation, did Kissinger finally feel ‘confident enough to advise Nixon that the Soviet Egyptian relationship was clearly more reserved than in Nasser’s time’. Towards the end of the October War, Kissinger repeatedly emphasised to colleagues that Washington was in the ‘catbird seat’. As he put it:

> the fact of the matter is that any rational Arab leader now knows that whether he hates us, loves us, despises us- is there is no way around us. If they want a settlement in the Middle East, they have to come through us.\(^{142}\)

\(^{141}\) WSAG Minutes, Washington, October 24, 1973, 10:21–11:11 a.m. NPLM, NSC Files, NSC Institutional Files (H—Files), Box H–117, WSAG Meetings Minutes, Originals, 1973. FRUS XXV Doc. 259

\(^{142}\) Minutes of Secretary of State’s Staff Meeting, Washington, October 23, 1973, 4:35 p.m. NARA, RG 59, Transcripts of Secretary of State Kissinger’s Staff Meetings. FRUS XXV Doc. 250
But as seen in this and the previous two chapters, this basic insight had informed Sadat’s diplomacy towards the Nixon administration since the beginning of his presidency in October 1970. It was not Sadat who was disabused of his preconceptions by the October War, but Kissinger, his colleagues, and the Israelis.

If Kissinger has underrepresented or even misrepresented Sadat’s diplomatic-strategic contribution during the first three years of his presidency, only to place it centre stage in his account of the October War, much of the historiographical secondary literature does not include even this much recognition. Although it is recognised that Kissinger dominated American policy during the October War, for all the significance he attaches to American-Egyptian wartime dialogue, most secondary accounts overlook this aspect and the Egyptian contribution, instead focusing on superpower politics, Washington’s bureaucratic politics, US-Israel relations and the oil weapon.

This oversight is understandable in first generation works, but for later scholars with access to a more robust primary source base – particularly those such as Dallek, Isaacson, Hanhimaki, and Siniver, who place Kissinger at the centre of their analysis – this is puzzling. Kissinger’s main biographers, such as Hanhimaki and Isaacson, make no mention of American-Egyptian backchannel diplomacy in their accounts of the October War, referring only to ‘Egypt’ and ‘the Egyptians’ in general terms. Nor do they refer to any specific communications or personnel in reconstructing the first two weeks of the conflict. In Hanhimaki, Isaacson and Siniver’s works, the first direct mention of Sadat in their coverage of the October war is in connection with his appeal for superpower intervention in the last days of war, in passages which demonstrate little appreciation of almost daily US-Egypt communications and understandings throughout the fighting and their impact on US policy.

Indeed, in discussing the October War, Hanhimaki gives more space to Kissinger’s dialogue with China’s UN Ambassador Huang Chen than to any discussion with Egyptian officials, on the justification that ‘triangular diplomacy remained at the forefront of his [Kissinger’s] thinking, and influenced, to a degree, Kissinger’s policy towards the October War’.\(^{143}\) But the nature or extent of this ‘degree’ is not

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elaborated upon, nor is its relationship to other aspects of Kissinger’s policy. Hanhimaki’s approach to the October War may be orientated towards the broader themes and thesis of his work on Kissinger as a global strategist, but it demonstrates a less than complete understanding of the American role in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a less than complete engagement with the available source base, even Kissinger’s own memoirs and edited collections.

Dallek’s even more recent work claims that ‘[w]e know almost all of what they [Nixon and Kissinger] did during their five and a half years in the White House... Why and how they acted, however, is incomplete and imperfectly understood’. Dallek sets out to rectify this situation, arguing that ‘the availability of the richest presidential records in history makes their White House more transparent than any before or since’. But Dallek seemingly found no evidence of American-Egyptian dialogue during the October War worthy of mention, and no Egyptian personnel are mentioned by name.

Dallek, Hanhimaki, and Siniver provide examples of recent major works devoted specifically to Kissinger’s and Nixon’s diplomacy, but which largely overlook American-Egyptian diplomacy prior to ceasefire US-Soviet ceasefire negotiations in Moscow from 20 October 1973. The same is true of more general histories of American involvement in the Middle East, such as works by Kaufman, Lenczowski, or Little. These histories seem to sacrifice detail and nuance for a simple story of the Nixon Administration supporting Israel during wartime. Kaufman, for example, reduces the resupply issue in its entirety to two sentences with no reference to ceasefire diplomacy or American-Egyptian contacts. In this and similar generalist accounts such as Lenczowski’s or Little’s, the authors do not engage with Kissinger’s very strongly stated claims on the significance of American-Egyptian contacts.

Craig Daigle’s account focuses specifically on Nixon Administration Middle East diplomacy up to and including the October War, but again downplays and

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145 ‘On 12 October, Israeli ambassador Dinitz delivered a note to the White House from Prime Minister Meir warning that Israel was in danger of losing the war unless the United States began a full-scale airlift of military equipment to Israel. Nixon responded affirmatively to Meir’s request and for the first used American cargo planes to deliver goods to the Israelis’. Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, p. 83; Little, *American Orientalism*, p. 106-108; Lenczowski, *American Presidents and the Middle East*, p. 129-131.
misrepresents Egyptian strategy and diplomacy and its impact on US policy and the conflict. In dealing with Egypt’s backchannel diplomacy throughout the October War, Daigle only mentions Ismail’s 7 October message, as supposed evidence to support his doubtful claim that ‘Anwar Sadat had no intention of securing a military victory and fully expected his forces would be overmatched as soon as Israel mobilised its reserves’. In attempting to account for Sadat’s rejection of a ceasefire during the first week of war, Daigle sticks doggedly to a superpower-fixated analytical framework and the shopworn ‘crisis engineering’ thesis. This leads to the unlikely claim that this was not because Egypt’s strategy (seizing the East bank of the Sinai and maintaining positions under its SAM shield) was highly effective, to such an extent that, on the southern front at least, Israel was prepared to admit military defeat at this point. Instead, contrary to the evidence, Daigle claims that ‘Sadat fully understood that his army would be unable to withstand the eventual Israeli counterattack’ but ‘he had no intentions of stopping the fighting until Washington and Moscow were more deeply involved in the war’. Beyond these sketchily-supported assertions about a supposed commitment to crisis-engineering and recognition of the inevitability of his defeat, Sadat’s diplomacy and strategy are ignored. Thus even the most recent specialised scholarship continues to overlook critical Egypt-US bilateral diplomacy throughout the October War, distorting the picture not just of the war itself, but of pre-war and post-war diplomacy.

Kissinger himself has attempted to portray the October War as the fruition of his efforts to drive a wedge between the Soviet Union and the Arabs. Something like the opposite is true. Sadat had attempted to distance himself from Soviets from the outset of his presidency, but Kissinger, jealous of State Department diplomacy and unwilling to see the Middle East in anything but a reductive Cold War framework, instead shunted Israel into the ‘West’ column and Egypt to the ‘East’. But during the October War, recognising the opportunity for Egypt to move west and for a renewed American regional role, Kissinger was reluctant to move against Sadat by resupplying Israel, procrastinating for a week while attempting to secure a ceasefire. Rather than

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147 Ibid, p. 300.
Kissinger driving a wedge between Cairo and Moscow, Sadat had forced a degree of separation between Washington and Jerusalem.

By the time of his arrival in Jerusalem on 22 October, the difference between Kissinger and Meir on their perceived interests vis-à-vis Sadat’s Egypt was evident.\textsuperscript{148} Sadat had just inflicted an unexpected and unprecedented trauma on Israel, and Meir was not so much interested in the destruction of the (replaceable) Third Army as she was in deposing Sadat, remarking that ‘The Third Army is not in danger – Sadat is’.\textsuperscript{149} But the White House had by this point already committed to preventing Arab ‘humiliation’. In practice, this translated into preserving the Egyptian Third Army, and with it Sadat’s presidency. In Kissinger’s eyes at least, the war had transformed Sadat into the key figure in Middle East diplomacy, indispensable not just for any foreseeable Middle East peace, but also for Washington’s Cold War strategy in the region. The final chapter of this thesis examines how, in post-war diplomacy, Nixon’s White House finally committed to a strategy designed to implement the concepts which Sadat had been promoting since 1970-1971.

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\textsuperscript{148} Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 527 Stein, We All Lost the Cold War, p. 214
CHAPTER 6.
US - EGYPT COMMON STRATEGY?
KILOMETRE 101, THE GENEVA PEACE CONFERENCE, AND THE FIRST
DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The denouement of the October War set the stage for a new era of trilateral Egypt-Israel-US relations, with the twelve weeks immediately following the war seeing a series of unprecedented developments. Direct negotiations between Egyptian and Israeli officials, long sought by Israel but resisted by Arabs, commenced on 29 October 1973, just five days after the ceasefire, conducted in the first instance at a military level in the actual Sinai theatre of operations, 101 kilometres east of Cairo. A week later, in a celebrated encounter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger met for the first time. Sadat agreed to restore diplomatic relations with Washington once a military disengagement agreement with Israel was secured, and to accept American stewardship of the Egypt-Israel negotiating process.

While military disengagement remained elusive until mid-January, Egypt and Israel co-signed a six-point agreement on 11 November at Kilometre 101, a symbolic ‘milestone’ in the Arab-Israeli conflict, with provisions for release of prisoners of war (POWs) on both sides, ‘scrupulous observation’ of the ceasefire, and medical relief and basic sustenance for the Egyptian Third Army surrounded near Suez.1 Five weeks later, another landmark event, a Middle East Peace Conference with representatives from Egypt, Israel, and Jordan sharing the same table, was hosted in Geneva by the UN under joint US-Soviet auspices. Although the Geneva Conference was a short-lived, symbolic occasion, by prior arrangement Egypt and Israel used the event to launch bilateral negotiations on military disengagement, separate from consideration of other issues such as the Israel-Palestine or Israel-Syria disputes. These talks were soon overtaken by indirect political negotiations overseen from the highest level on

1 The text of the Six-Point agreement is included in Editorial Note, FRUS XXV, Doc. 324.
both sides, and facilitated by the first round of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s famous ‘shuttle diplomacy’. An Egypt-Israel disengagement of forces agreement was announced on 16 January 1974.

But rather than Sadat finally conforming to Kissinger’s programme in the aftermath of the October War, as suggested by the Cold War-oriented and Kissinger-centric historiography, something close to the opposite is true. Sadat had proposed restoring diplomatic relations to Kissinger’s predecessor, William Rogers, in May 1971, and while the Geneva Conference is universally recognised as a multilateral façade providing political cover for a separate Egypt-Israel peace process, this idea was pitched directly to Kissinger in February 1973 by Sadat’s Advisor for National Security Affairs, Hafiz Ismail. As this chapter shows, the ‘shuttle diplomacy’ facilitating the Egypt-Israel disengagement was, once again, a brainchild of Sadat’s, which he suggested to a startled Kissinger in mid-January 1974. During the disengagement negotiations, Sadat overruled his most senior advisors, sacrificing hopes of any future military option to regain the Sinai in favour of an American-sponsored peace process.

Israel had scored a military victory against both Egypt and Syria in October 1973, and had the capability to destroy Egypt’s army, and with it, in all likelihood, Sadat’s presidency. But what counted was that Kissinger, who was in control of US foreign policy, considered the October War ‘a strategic defeat for Israel’.\(^2\) Israel’s aura of military invulnerability and truculent attitude toward negotiations had been discredited, and Kissinger was determined to impose new realities on the situation. Sadat, although resolutely refusing to allow his forces to surrender to Israel, for his part of the bargain was willing to forego any future military option for regaining the Sinai, and to abandon Syria, the Palestinians and other Arabs to their own devices as the price of peace. This chapter shows that what Sadat had worked for since late 1970 became manifest in the months following the October War, establishing the

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\(^2\) Kissinger repeatedly used this phrase, beginning as early as a 9 October WSAG Meeting, and even during his first meeting with President Hafiz Assad of Syria, a sworn enemy of Israel. Memcon Kissinger, Schlesinger, Ambassador Kenneth Rush, Moorer, Colby, Washington, 9 October 1973, 9:40–10:25 am; 11:55 am–12:20 pm. Ford Library, National Security Adviser, Memoranda of Conversation, Box 2. FRUS XXV, Doc. 135.

foundations of a new regional order, based on an Egypt-Israel modus vivendi as co-
clients of the United States.

RESTORING RELATIONS: KILOMETRE 101 AND THE SIX POINT AGREEMENT

Halting the fighting between Egypt and Israel in late October 1973 had required three 
ceasefire resolutions, as the ceasefires stipulated in UN Security Council Resolutions 
338 and 339 (adopted on 22 and 23 October) had soon broken down. Resolution 340 
held from 24 October, but the military situation was volatile, with Egyptian and Israeli 
forces entangled on both the east and west banks of the Suez Canal, and all principal 
parties aware that, with supply lines severed, no further military movement was 
necessary to strangle the encircled Egyptian Third Army. The tense situation 
generated pressures for both sides to negotiate immediately. Israel was preoccupied 
with swift repatriation of POWs and war dead, and knew that maintaining full military 
mobilisation over an extended time period was economically unsustainable. For his 
part, Sadat had declared victory in war and was unable to publicly acknowledge the 
peril of the Third Army, making an early disengagement of forces vital to securing his 
political survival. On 29 October, Egypt accepted an Israeli proposal for military level 
talks, and Egyptian Chief of Staff Mohamed el-Gamasy and Israeli General Arahon 
Yariv began negotiations at Kilometre 101.³

Kilometre 101 has given its name to a diplomatic procedure that was actually 
structured on two tiers. Although the Kilometre 101 negotiations were designated as 
military-level disengagement talks, unplanned high-level political talks ran 
concurrently in Washington, as Egyptian Acting Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy and 
Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir both arrived uninvited in Washington in late October 
seeking immediate White House attention. Fahmy brought an eleven point framework 
for agreement with Israel and the United States covering disengagement of forces, 
return of POWs, lifting the blockade of Bab-el-Mandab, and restoration of US-Egyptian

³ Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining, p. 197; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 97. In a press conference on 31 
October Sadat claimed that 'The Israelis say that the Third Army is encircled. But you must know that 
the major part of this army is west of the canal and not east... Should I wipe out their force, which is 
squeezed between two parts of the [Third] army? Or should I obey the cease-fire?' Golan, The Secret 
Conversations of Henry Kissinger, pp. 96-97.
diplomatic relations. For her part, Meir had arrived to ‘straighten out’ complications in American-Israeli relations which had arisen during the war, and to present an extensive ‘shopping list’ of armaments desired to rebuild damaged Israeli military power.

The Washington talks paved the way for Kissinger’s first visit to Cairo, and first meeting with Sadat in early November. The pair agreed ‘in principle’ to restore US-Egypt diplomatic relations immediately, and with Kissinger acting as Egypt-Israel intermediary soon settled on a Six-Point Agreement to be introduced at Kilometre 101 over the following days. The agreement, signed by Egyptian and Israeli representatives at Kilometre 101 on 11 November, stipulated that both sides would ‘scrupulously observe’ the ceasefire and that discussions on withdrawal to the lines of 22 October, when the fire ceasefire was adopted, would begin immediately. The city of Suez would receive daily food, water and medical supplies, with no impediment of non-military supplies to the east bank of the Suez Canal and Israeli checkpoints on the Cairo-Suez road would be replaced by UN checkpoints. There would be an immediate POW exchange.

Subsequent debates about Kilometre 101 and the Six-Point Agreement has focused on three dimensions. Firstly, the authorship of the Six Point Agreement is disputed. On the Egyptian side, Sadat claims that he and Kissinger worked out the agreement during their first meeting on 6 November, while Fahmy insists that this encounter added nothing to what had already been agreed between himself and Kissinger in Washington a week previously. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Golda Meir claims she ‘brought a six-point proposal’ to Washington, which was later adopted at Kilometre 101, an assertion that is supported by her Foreign Minister Abba Eban, and, perhaps more surprisingly, Mohammed Heikal, editor of Al-Ahram, Cairo’s quasi-

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5 By some accounts, she was also prompted by the unwelcome news of Fahmy’s sojourn in Washington. Safran, Israel, p. 508.

6 Editorial Note, FRUS XXV, Doc.324.

7 Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East, pp. 55-57; Sadat, In Search of Identity, p. 268.
In Heikal’s account, US Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, who accompanied Kissinger on his visit to Cairo,

Opened his briefcase and produced a ready-made six-point-plan whose terms reflected demands which Golda Meir had made during a visit to Washington a week earlier. One of Sadat’s few conditions in accepting the Israeli-American plan was that he should be able to present it to Egypt as his own. This method of selling concepts to the Egyptian public was used repeatedly in subsequent negotiations. Kissinger would listen to Golda Meir’s ideas and propose them to Sadat as if they had come from the US; Sadat would present them to the Egyptian public as his own, and the Israelis would then be invited to accept their own demands.

Assuming that there were genuine substantive differences between the Egyptians and Israelis, and they did not independently arrive at similar positions only to separate themselves rhetorically, then this is not merely a semantic issue, but cuts to the heart of post-October War diplomacy. If, as Meir, Eban, and Heikal claim, the Six-Point Agreement was basically an Israeli settlement accepted by Egypt through the good offices of the United States, then this represents a continuation of familiar pre-war patterns, with the United States bulwarking and promoting Israel’s position. But if, as Sadat and Fahmy claim, the Six-Point Agreement was basically an Egyptian proposal foisted on Israel by the United States, this represents a definitive shift in American behaviour, and, in this particular instance, an Egypt-Israel role reversal vis-à-vis their relations with the US.

The second important dimension of debates on Kilometre 101 and the Six-Point agreement pertains to the place of Palestinians and other Arabs in US-Egypt deliberations. In Kissinger’s account of his 29 October meeting with Fahmy, the Foreign Minister conveyed that Egypt had ‘no interest in putting Israel into the sea or invading Israel, regardless of the Palestinian situation’. According to Kissinger, ‘Fahmy left no doubt that it would not let the Palestinians stand in the way of a solution, a marked change from the stand Hafiz Ismail had taken with me earlier in the year.’ Fahmy rejects this however, arguing that

The implication here is quite false. What is true is that we never discussed the Palestinian issue at the time, for the simple reason that we were only dealing with the urgent issues of the

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8 Eban, Personal Witness, pp. 544-545; Meir, My Life, pp. 376-377.
9 Heikal, Secret Channels, p. 216.
10 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 618.
ceasefire and not with a comprehensive solution to the problems of the Middle East. There is no evidence that Egypt was ready to betray the Palestinians.  

This controversy is largely overlooked in the secondary literature, but the question of whether Egypt sought a separate peace, without regard for the fate of Syria, the Palestinians, or other Arabs is important to understanding Egyptian diplomacy and US-Egypt relations not just during and after the October War, but from the beginning of Sadat’s presidency.

A third question, which is actually less important than the first two, but that has received more attention in the secondary literature, is on the significance of the Kilometre 101 talks in themselves. Aronson asserts that ‘the talks at Kilometre 101... were of little practical significance’. Touval, concurs ‘that it was not at Kilometre 101 that the important negotiations would take place, but in Washington’.  However, in Stein’s account, the earliest version of Egypt’s eleven point plan was introduced simultaneously in Washington by Fahmy and by Gamasy at Kilometre 101 on 29 and 30 October. More refined versions were discussed in the following days by Kissinger and Meir in Washington and by Gamasy and Tal at Kilometre 101. Stein attributes the acrimony between Kissinger and Meir to the lag in information relay from Kilometre 101 to Washington, claiming that Meir was actually better apprised of what Sadat was likely to accept, because ‘[w]hile Kissinger did not know what was transpiring at Kilometre 101, Sadat and Meir did. Their generals had reached workable understandings’. This accounts for rapid progress in the Kissinger-Sadat talks, as en route to Cairo Kissinger was unaware that Gamasy and Tal had explicitly agreed ‘that Israeli troops on the western bank should move to the east’, and thus ‘before Kissinger made his first trip to Cairo on November 7, Sadat knew from el-Gamasy that the Israelis would withdraw from the western side of the canal’. However, it is not explained why Meir did not allude to the already-agreed Egyptian-Israeli ‘workable understandings’ during notoriously difficult and acrimonious negotiations with Kissinger, when, according to Stein, he complained that ‘You are not giving me

11 Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East, p. 46.
anything to go to Cairo with. I have nothing to offer them’. Thus while there is a consensus that the Kissinger-Meir discussions in late October 1973 were among the most strained in their political relationship, it remains unclear whether this is because Kissinger or Meir was most closely attuned to Sadat at that moment.

American records of the Kissinger-Fahmy and Kissinger-Meir meetings in Cairo (though unfortunately not those of presidential level meetings with Nixon and Sadat) are now available, allowing these controversies to be resolved. On the significance of the Kilometre 101 talks in themselves, it appears that they were mainly symbolic and procedural, contributing little to decision-making. Gamasy complains that the Israelis procrastinated at every stage of each of the seven meetings at Kilometre 101, and, in discussion with Nixon, Yariv admitted that he stalled on Egypt’s ‘plan for a first phase on a general agreement’ by knowingly responding with an unacceptable proposal, deliberately stalling the talks. The more substantial questions of the authorship of the Six-Point Agreement and the place of Palestine in the immediate post-war negotiations are discussed in the following section.

**WHO’S AGREEMENT AND WHITHER PALESTINE?**

Declassified records show not just that Fahmy’s contention that all aspects of the Six-Point Agreement were discussed and agreed during his sojourn in Washington is accurate, but that Kissinger introduced the Egyptian eleven point plan as the basis for discussion with Meir, effectively representing aspects of Sadat’s position as the American position.

Fahmy opened his presentation to Kissinger on 29 October with the first two of the six points, emphasising that the ‘main element’ of Resolution 338, which Israel had accepted, was the ceasefire, and that it was ‘important that the ceasefire be restored so that there will be no problems which remain affecting the more substantive elements, the more substantial talks later’. Fahmy reminded Kissinger that Resolution

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336 had stipulated ‘that everybody stayed as they were on October 22’, and that the ‘second Security Council Resolution said back to October 22’, insisting that ‘we cannot start negotiations or preparations until the ceasefire resolutions are carried out... a conference cannot go on’. Egypt was preoccupied with this point because Israel had cut the Third Army supply lines after 22 October, and restoration of those lines would allow Cairo to relieve its beleaguered soldiers.

Anxious to resolve the situation, Fahmy recommended that Egypt and Israel should ‘Respect fully the ceasefire [and] allow the UN forces to take their positions’. Fahmy conveyed that Egypt was ready to exchange POWs with Israel, and offered the ‘assurances of President Sadat that there will be no military equipment moved in there by Egypt’, but was adamant that ‘Our people won’t surrender. All that we need is food and some water’. Kissinger was receptive, reaffirming that it was ‘against US policy that Egypt should surrender’ and praising Fahmy’s ‘constructive proposal’, but emphasised that ‘If Israel is to move to the October 22 positions there must be an immediate release of all POWs’. This would be necessary ‘to get a solid ceasefire’. Fahmy repeatedly requested an American guarantee against Israeli military action on the west bank of Suez, and, although Kissinger was evasive, Nixon himself forwarded the guarantee. Records of the first Kissinger–Fahmy meeting thus strongly support Fahmy’s claim that he bore the basic form of the Six-Point Agreement with him to Washington, which was ratified at Kilometre 101 thirteen days later.

By contrast, Meir’s visit to Washington was marked by sharp disagreement, hitherto unknown in her close and warm relationship with the Nixon White House. Meir was taken aback by the reception offered by Nixon, who made clear that he ‘had talked to

16 In a subsequent meeting of 2 November, Kissinger reminded Fahmy that ‘The October 22 position is only important in relationship to supply; it should not be used as a red flag and everything else forgotten. We want to be sure that we are going in the right direction. We have to think in terms of bigger steps’. Memcon Fahmy, El Erain, Kissinger, Sisco, Washington, 2 November 1973, 8:19 pm NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 132, Egypt, Vol. VIII, November 1 - December 31, 1973.
17 Ibid. Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, 48.
the Egyptians about a settlement’, and that Israel would not be permitted to destroy the Third Army. Nixon insisted that the time for compromise had come, as

The Egyptians want Israel to return to the 1967 borders. Israel wants to change those borders. Neither side will get what it wants. I have always said that the borders must be “secure”… Everybody has to give a little… I want to see you be the one at last who works this out, who creates an Israel not burdened with a huge arms budget or with war every five years.\(^{18}\)

Having established the basic premises that Israel would have to withdraw and not be permitted to destroy the Egyptian Third Army military, Nixon left Kissinger to thrash out the details during the following day’s notoriously acrimonious sessions with Meir. The Americans forwarded Sadat’s eleven point framework document to the Israelis prior to the Kissinger-Meir meeting, and in his discussion with Meir, Kissinger treated Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 22 October (when UN Security Resolution 338, the first October War ceasefire was adopted) as non-negotiable, but though suggested two ‘theoretical possibilities’ for implementation. Israel could either ‘invent a line, and if they agree, go back to it’, or ‘agree to go back and agree to discuss where it is’, holding current positions ‘until the line is agreed’. Kissinger insisted to the Israelis ‘that in either event, non-military convoys have to be let through’ though as a quid pro quo Israel could ‘insist on the prisoners and the lifting of the blockade’.\(^{19}\)

Deploying a range of persuasion techniques, Kissinger attempted playing ‘good cop’ to Nixon’s ‘bad cop’ (by grumbling that ‘when [Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoly] Dobrynin saw the President, the President practically committed himself to a return to the October 22 lines’), superpower intimidation (by warning that it was ‘not inconceivable you’ll get forced back to the 22 lines’ by a ‘joint US-Soviet Resolution’), a display of sympathy (by emphasising that Meir’s ‘reasonable arguments’ were insubstantial given ‘the facts’ of the situation, and claiming that this was his ‘lousiest assignment’ to date), and by sweetening the deal (with an offer of an additional forty Phantom F4s).\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Memcon Meir, Dinitz, Gazit, Shalev, Yariv, Former Director of Military Intelligence, General Yisrael Leor, Kissinger, Rodman. RG 59, Central Files 1970–73, POL ISR-US. FRUS XXV, Doc. 302.

\(^{20}\) Ibid.
But, to Kissinger’s frustration, Meir responded emotionally to his presentation (of what was largely Fahmy’s plan), insisting that as Israel had ‘a democratic form of government’, her only option was resignation as she would not ‘go to my people and tell them I accept this plan’.21 Quandt recalls Meir’s anger at, as she saw it, ‘being deprived of victory by “friends”’, while Kissinger was ‘incensed’ by Israeli intransigence, later ranting to Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) colleagues that the Israelis had repeatedly deliberately misled him on the military situation during the war.22 Kissinger insisted that Washington ‘did not go through four weeks of agony here to be held hostage to a nation of two and a half million people’ and that ‘US foreign policy will be decided by the United States, not by Israel’.23 After their initial session on 1 November Kissinger refused to see Meir the next day, requesting that she send a representative instead, a rebuff which he believed ‘shook her up a bit’, but the sticking points on withdrawal, POW exchange, and control of checkpoints remained.24 After concluding his talks with Meir, Kissinger warned Israeli Ambassador to Washington Simcha Dinitz that ‘this suicidal impulse of the Israelis must be stopped’ and that if Israel was ‘not willing to open the roads’ there was ‘no chance’ ‘other things can be discussed’.25

Kissinger himself claims that ‘[t]he issue, of course, was not even remotely of imposing Egyptian preferences on Israel. As we saw it, keeping the Third Army from being destroyed was the minimum prerequisite for any peace process - which no country needed more than Israel’.26 But in the view of Meir and Israeli defence minister Moshe Dayan, it was evident that the United States and Soviet Union had resolved matters between themselves, and ‘the crisis turned into one between the US and

21 Ibid.
22 Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining, p. 204; Safran, Israel, pp. 508-509; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 118.
NPLM, HAK Telecons, Chronological File, Box 23.
26 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 621. Italics in original.
Israel’.  

The Israelis were mistaken. In fact, as has been seen, the prior agreement was not between Washington and Moscow, but between Washington and Cairo.

On the Palestinian issue, the American transcript of the meeting shows that Kissinger’s memoir does in fact quoted Fahmy verbatim. Fahmy had asserted that ‘For the first 13 days, we felt that Egypt was in full control of the war... we made our point’ and was not interested in invading Israel regardless of the Palestinian situation. Moreover, Yariv recounts that a very similar message was conveyed directly at Kilometre 101 the following day when el-Gamasy told him ‘halasna Filastin – We are finished with Palestine’. The Egyptian general was clear that Cairo had ‘started the war to liberate Sinai. We did not do anything for the Palestinians during this war. And the Syrians did not do anything [for them]’. Gamasy went on to say ‘peace would come to Israel if all the Sinai were returned, but when asked about the other Arab countries, Yariv recalls that the Egyptian general replied that ‘They do not matter’.

This attitude stood in pointed contrast to that of Syrian Vice Foreign Minister, Mohammed Zakriya Ismail, who met with Kissinger on 2 November, and stated unequivocally that Syria’s ‘acceptance of Resolution 338 was conditional on two essential elements: Withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of the occupied territory, and the safeguarding of the rights of the Palestinians’.

However, while Kissinger correctly identifies Egyptian disassociation from Palestine, he is misleading in asserting that this was a novel element of Egyptian policy, and a turnaround from Hafiz Ismail’s presentation in February 1973. As seen in chapter four, the overall settlement suggested by Ismail was a nominal framework, designed to deflect criticism of Egypt for pursuing what would be in practice a separate peace, and Ismail had specifically stated that his government was not interested in the details of Israel’s settlement terms with Jordan and the Palestinians. And as seen later in this

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29 Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, p. 107. See also chapter 4, p. 162.
30 Memcon Kissinger, Sisco, David Korn (NEA/ARN), Syrian Vice Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mohammed Zakariya Ismail, Mr. Diyallah El Fattal, Director, Office of UN Affairs, Syrian Foreign Ministry. NARA, RG 59, Central Files 1970-1973, POL 27 ARAB-ISR. FRUS XXV, Doc. 310.
chapter, the Geneva Conference on December 1973 was designed precisely to serve this agenda.

**Together at Last: When Anwar Met Henry**

Kissinger’s proximity talks in Washington were decisive in developing the diplomatic context for his first tour of the Arab Middle East, and his first meeting with Anwar Sadat in Cairo on 7 November. In preparing for the meeting, the Americans were focused on establishing that ‘the negotiations have to move ahead by stages, without guarantees of the outcome in advance’. Anticipated pressure for the US commit to eventual Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines would have to resisted, and Kissinger would have to ‘hold to the position that this cannot be settled in advance of negotiation’.

Kissinger was thus pleasantly surprised when Sadat not only accepted his suggestion that Egypt drop insistence on Israeli withdrawal to 22 October 1973 lines (a much more modest demand for than a return to the 1967 borders), and instead accepted American assistance in brokering a broader ‘step by step’ disengagement of forces, but also that ‘in principle’ to restore diplomatic relations once disengagement was achieved.

Further American-Israeli negotiations in Tel Aviv between 7 November and the signing ceremony at Kilometre 101 on 11 November involved a good deal of quibbling, but left the agreed text basically unchanged. However, that these last-minute negotiations occasioned the first instance of a public agreement signed between Egypt and Israel, supported by private commitments and underwritten by an American guarantee. Sadat was unwilling to publicly acknowledge that Israel controlled the Third Army supply route, or that he had agreed to a schedule for POW release and to end the blockade of Bab el Mandeb (and thereby cashed in bargaining chips accrued during the October War), but Israel eventually accepted an American assurance of Egyptian implementation of the secret clauses. These private memorandum of understanding

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31 Memo Saunders and Quandt - Kissinger, Washington, 2 November 1973. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 1188, henceforth HS/ME, Secretary Kissinger’s Middle East Trip, 11/5/73–11/9/73 (First) [2 of 3]. FRUS XXV, Doc. 313.

32 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 639-640, 646.
between the US and Israel, supporting and supplementing public agreements with the Arabs, would become integral and essential features of the US brokered Egypt-Israel peace process throughout the 1970s.33

As seen in the introduction to this thesis, Kissinger and his biographers celebrate the first Kissinger-Sadat meeting as bringing a ‘dramatic breakthrough’ and ‘major turn in the foreign policy of Egypt and therefore in the whole orientation of the area’, and also, at the personal level, a transformation in perception, as before Kissinger’s eyes Sadat metamorphosed from ‘a clown’ to a ‘statesmen of the first order’.34 But in fact, as demonstrated over the previous chapters of this thesis, Sadat’s eagerness to collaborate with Washington in resolving his dispute with Israel did not represent any manner of fundamental change, but rather conceptual and strategic continuity from the earliest days of his presidency. It was Kissinger whose attitudes and policies had reversed, but as shown in the previous chapter, his Damascene moment had occurred exactly a month previously, on the second day of the October War.

A SEPARATE PEACE PROCESS: PREPARING FOR GENEVA, NOVEMBER – DECEMBER 1973

By 9 November, 1973, just two days after the first Kissinger-Sadat meeting, the superpowers had agreed to convene a UN Security Council meeting on November 19, during which the US would declare ‘that according to its understanding Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Syria have agreed to attend the first stage of negotiations dealing with disengagement and other matters relating to a peace agreement’ at a conference ‘convened under the auspices of the United Nations... under the co-chairmanship of the United States and the Soviet Union... on December 8 or 9, 1973, in Geneva’.35

Kissinger was determined to keep the Kilometre 101 talks restricted to the technical and military implementation of the Six-Point Agreement in the interim between signing the Six-Point Agreement and the Geneva Conference, leaving political

negotiations to the politicians. On 13 November, just two days after the agreement was signed, he cabled Fahmy from Beijing to emphasise ‘that the important thing is to keep our eyes fixed on the forthcoming conference and to avoid anything which could complicate it getting started’, arguing that questions about supplying the Third Army, Suez arrangements, and POW exchange could be ‘worked out by the military representatives promptly and pragmatically’. Drawing a clear division between military-level and political-level negotiations, Kissinger urged that ‘the less said about the specifics of a final settlement before the conference begins, the better’.36

For two weeks Egypt and Israel traded ‘unofficial proposals’ on Israeli withdrawal eastwards in return for thinning of Egyptian forces on the Suez east bank, but the Kilometre 101 talks collapsed abruptly on 29 November when Israel suddenly returned to its initial demands of mutual withdrawal to the line on 5 October 1973.37 While the Egyptians were angered by what they considered Israeli duplicity, Kissinger had actually requested Israel stall the Kilometre 101 negotiations. Meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban on 21 November, Kissinger requested that Israel attend the upcoming conference, and ‘agree with the Egyptians in Kilometre 101 talks to transfer further discussion of [the] disengagement issue to January-February sessions of Geneva peace conference’. The Israeli cabinet approved these requests on 25 November.38

Kissinger claims that too-rapid progress on the disengagement of forces at Kilometre 101 threatened to strip the planned Geneva Conference of areas of easy agreement, thus potentially precipitating diplomatic deadlock. This explanation is accepted as valid by most commentators, though some identify personal motives as also playing a

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38 Telegram Embassy in Israel to State Department, Tel Aviv, 27 November 1973. NPLM, NSC Files, Box 611, CF/ME, Israel, Vol. 13, Nov 73-Dec 73. See also Quandt, Peace Process, p. 194; Sheehan, The Arabs, the Israelis, and Kissinger, pp. 80-81.
part. Isaacson argues that Kissinger’s narcissism moved him to suspicion and doubt of a negotiating process in which he was not personally involved, and Stein’s extensive interviews with participants show that many American, Egyptian, and Israeli officials involved support to this assessment. The Kilometre 101 talks are reported to have been conducted in an atmosphere of mutual respect, and Gamasy and Yariv have expressed the belief that agreement on wider political issues could have been reached had the talks not been terminated. However, both men moved ahead of their political masters when trading disengagement proposals, and while taken at Kissinger’s request, the decision to adjourn the disengagement agreement until Geneva was taken at the cabinet level in Jerusalem.

To be fair to Kissinger, he had demonstrated genuine concern about the fragility of the embryonic peace process. His 13 November cable to Fahmy on had raised two specific issues. Firstly, Kissinger worried that Egyptian representatives had ‘been discussing the elements of a peace plan in certain European capitals’, warning that ‘the premature circulation of peace plans of any kind will make it especially difficult for all of us, but especially the United States, when negotiations begin’. Secondly, Kissinger expressed concerns that discussion in other international forums, particularly the Organisation of African Unity, which planned a meeting of Foreign Ministers on 19-20 November, or in a proposed Arab Summit prior to the Geneva Conference, would ‘take the initiative away from the parties to the negotiations and adopt public positions on the specific aspects of a settlement’, making ‘it all the more difficult to explore practical ways to make progress in the negotiations themselves’.

The abrupt termination of the Kilometre 101 talks created its own dangers, however. Vulnerable to criticism from more radically minded Arabs for his open engagement with Washington and for not continuing the fight against Israel, Sadat continued to publicly deny the encirclement of his Third Army Corps, and in late November began

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39 Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 542; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 112.
40 Golan, The Secret Conversations, pp.120-121; Stein Heroic Diplomacy, pp. 112-113; Sheehan, The Arabs, The Israelis, and Kissinger, pp. 80-81.
to make threatening noises about ‘liquidation’ of the Israeli forces west of Suez and intercepting Israeli shipping in the Red Sea. On 1 December, Eban voiced ‘serious concern over [the] “explosive” situation existing between Egypt and Israel as result of GOE insisting disengagement be settled in KM 101 forum prior to opening of peace conference’. Egypt had walked out from the Kilometre 101 talks, adopted a ‘threatening order of battle’, and blockaded Israeli shipping. Eban warned that ‘Israel is prepared for [the] worst but wants to avoid break-down of cease-fire and will not take [the] initiative to upset it’.43

A swift White House response reassured Sadat that Washington agreed ‘that the six-point agreement is a package’ and it did ‘not believe that certain elements can be implemented and others left to languish indefinitely’. Nixon also issued a stiff caution that

However, the disengagement proposals which Egyptian and Israeli military representatives have been discussing in recent weeks are far-reaching. This is the reason we have felt... that final agreement was probably not possible before the peace conference. I can assure you, however, that in our view the groundwork laid in the military representatives’ talks has not been in vain. We will make every effort to ensure that the ideas on disengagement discussed in that forum will be carried over for consideration at the Geneva conference...

To retreat now on the understanding reached in easing the blockade of the Red Sea and to permit your disappointment over the lack of progress in the Kilometre 101 talks to divert us from opening the peace conference on the 18th of December would be a major set-back with incalculable consequences.44

The White House response thus did demonstrate real concern of the possibility of overreach at Kilometre 101, but with military-level negotiations stalled and political negotiations at Geneva weeks away, the situation remained tense.

The ‘secret resolutions’ of the Arab Summit at Algiers, adopted on 28 November and soon leaked through the Lebanese newspaper *Al Nahar*, did little to alleviate Israeli concerns. The resolutions warned that ‘the cease-fire in the field means in no way that the struggle has ended’ and that the ‘cease-fire is not yet peace and peace presupposes, if it is to be achieved, a certain number of conditions’. These included ‘Evacuation by Israel of the occupied Arab territories and first of all Jerusalem’ and ‘Re-establishment of full national rights for the Palestinian people... according to the

43 Embassy in Israel - Department of State Tel Aviv, 1 December 1973.
decisions of the Palestine Liberation Organization, as the sole representative of the Palestinian nation’.45

Rafai warned that the ‘secret resolutions on PLO adopted at [the] Algiers conference were very dangerous’ as Jordan was being asked to ‘negotiate with Israel for return of [the] West Bank and Arab Jerusalem, assume responsibility... for... territorial concessions... then turn over what might be [a] truncated West Bank to PLO’. This Jordan would not do. Instead, setting aside previous insistence that Jordan would not attend Geneva if the PLO was designated as Palestinian representative, Rifai suggested that Jordan was willing to attend Geneva as ‘part of an Arab delegation including Egypt and Syria which will share responsibility for decisions reached at conference regarding the West Bank and Jerusalem’.46

Israel had its own ideas regarding military disengagement and political settlement with Egypt. Dayan visited Kissinger in Washington on 7 December, presenting a long shopping list of armaments and his ‘personal’ ideas for Egypt-Israel disengagement of forces.47 Dayan contemplated an Israeli withdrawal of 6 to 10 miles east of the Suez canal,48 in exchange for an official Egyptian termination of belligerency and ‘practical steps’ towards normalisation of life around Suez, including rebuilding and civilian resettlement of war-damaged cities along the waterway and opening the canal to international, including Israeli, shipping. A UN buffer zone would separate forces, and that the US navy would guard the Bab-el-Mandeb waterways against blockade, ensuring freedom of navigation for all. Dayan was disappointed that Kissinger, who he claims ‘lacked expert knowledge’, expressed doubts and reservations regarding these disengagement ideas (in particular, he regarded expectations that Egypt would terminate belligerency at this stage as unrealistic) and by American reticence regarding Israeli arms requests. Although Dayan was reportedly badly shaken during

48 Discussion of Egypt-Israel territorial positions in the Sinai are usually discussed in kilometres, but Dayan’s autobiography uses miles.
the first days of the October War, his confidence both in himself and in negotiating tactics based on wielding occupied territory as a trump card seemed to have recovered, as he proudly recalls that ‘I told Kissinger that if Egypt failed to accept our political terms, we would remain in our present military positions and Egypt would eventually accept the terms she had rejected’.

Israel presented the US with specific objections to participating in Geneva on 10 December, insisting that it ‘would not participate if the talks were held under UN auspices’ and was not prepared to attend an event with Syria, which refused to supply a list of Israeli POWs captured during the recent war. Nor would Israel accept the language of ‘the question of the participation of the Palestinians’ which, given the Algiers secret resolutions, seemed to amount to an invitation to the PLO, a body sworn to Israel’s destruction. Israel insisted that invitations should not include any specific named reference to the Palestinians, and that other countries or groups could be invited only with the consent of all primary participants, effectively granting an Israeli veto over Palestinian participation.

Even as Israeli attendance at Geneva came into question, the US interests section in Cairo warned that Sadat had staked his prestige on Kissinger’s promised disengagement, as he had ‘boldly gave justificatory assurances that this would happen’ to fellow Arab and African leaders. He now found himself in a ‘awkward position’ where he ‘must now eat crow’. In the absence of disengagement, Egyptians remained ‘fearful that they will be fed a bone and lose face at home and abroad.

Just over a week before the scheduled opening, Geneva seemed uncertain, but the White House remained convinced that ‘the purpose of the Egyptian complaints’ was not to scuttle the event, but ‘had almost surely been... to concert a common strategy’. To this end, and to secure the attendance of other invitees, Nixon dispatched Kissinger

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49 Dayan had called for a retreat to the Sinai passes in the first days of war, fearing ‘the end of the Third Temple’ (Israel) and had offered Meir his resignation, though Meir declined. Siniver ‘Introduction’ p. 5 in Siniver ed., The October 1973 War; Eriksson, ‘Israel and the October War’, pp. 43.

50 Dayan, Story of My Life, pp. 553-554.


on his second Middle East tour in as many months, which saw him visiting Cairo, Riyadh, Damascus, and Tel Aviv between 13-17 December.\textsuperscript{53}

**ASSEMBLING THE CAST: KISSINGER’S SECOND MIDDLE EAST TOUR**

As might be expected, Sadat, who has his own pressing reasons for wanting the conference to be convened and disengagement to get underway sooner rather than later, proved to be the Middle Eastern leader who was most in tune with Kissinger. With the continuing encirclement of the Third Army, maintaining political momentum was essential for Sadat, and Geneva presented the only, available avenue. Kissinger reported to the Israelis that, in line with Dayan’s suggestions, Sadat was ‘willing to demobilise his forces, start economic reconstruction and conduct himself in such a way as to make war harder’.\textsuperscript{54} Despite his own sense of urgency, Sadat demonstrated a sensitivity to Israeli politics hitherto unknown from an Egyptian leader, accepting that Israel could not make real moves until after general elections scheduled for late December 1973. Meir’s position was in question not just because of upcoming elections but because Israel also awaited the findings of the Agranat Commission, a National Commission of Inquiry established in late November to investigate failings prior to the October War. The Egyptian President thus agreed that the conference would be restricted to ‘ceremonial and procedural matters’, accepting Kissinger’s assurances that disengagement of forces would come after Geneva, and that the Palestinian question should not be discussed until after the disengagement stage.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{53} Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 754.
President Houri Boumedienne of Algeria and Saudi King Faisal met with Kissinger on 14-15 October, but remained more circumspect on Geneva, insisting on Israeli withdrawals from occupied territories as a precondition to lifting Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Counties (OPEC) sanctions against the United States. Kissinger portrays these meetings in a positive light, emphasising that Boumedienne, the first leader he visited, accepted that disengagement should be the first item on the conference agenda, while Faisal accepted the principle of compensation for Palestinian refugees in lieu of a right to return to Palestinian territories. This was a new departure, which Kissinger argues represented the first hint of Saudi cooperation in any Arab-Israeli peace process.

Kissinger met with President Hafiz Assad of Syria (who he later described as ‘the toughest and least conciliatory Arab leader I have ever met’) on 15 December for an exchange of views lasting over six hours. High-level bilateral contacts since the October War had been limited to Kissinger’s meeting with the Syrian Vice Foreign Minister, Mohammed Zakriya Ismail in November, and thus a good deal of time was spent on familiarisation with one another’s positions. Assad opened by identifying ‘the main problem’ as ‘Israeli aggression’, stressing ‘concern over US opinions and its stance’. While Kissinger argued that the ‘principal subject is bringing peace and justice to the Middle East’, he seemed to acknowledge some validity in Assad’s position, accepting that ‘[t]here would be no chance of a peaceful solution without Syrian and Egyptian effort on the battlefield’, and that ‘strong domestic pressures in US in favor of support of Israel’ were an ongoing consideration. Arguing that ‘to waste capital, to waste ammunition’ on a withdrawal of ‘a few kilometres’ back to the 22 October positions was senseless, the Secretary of State pitched a deal similar to that already agreed with Sadat, offering the ‘same promise’ to Assad, that ‘after January 1… the

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57 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, pp. 766, 777.
same principles should be applied to Syria. There should be a first phase withdrawal from Syria’.  

Assad was noncommittal, but outlined his own position point by point. Apparently forgetting the rhetoric of his Baathist predecessors, Assad opened by claiming that Syria had ‘never... been against the people of the United States’, but was aggrieved that ‘had it not been for US assistance in support of Israel, Israel could not remain in occupation and force out the Palestinians from their lands since 1948’. Secondly, as ‘non-aligned’ power, Syrian policy was ‘decided in light of our national interests... in a completely independent way. Thirdly, Assad assured Kissinger that people of the region wanted ‘to realize a just peace. We are serious. We want to build our own country’. Fourthly, according to Assad there could ‘be no peace with justice unless the Arab Palestinian question is settled. The Arab people of Palestine were driven out by force and are now living in camps’. Assad wondered aloud how there could be peace without settling this problem, and expressed his belief that the US was both ‘the major factor to check the aggressive Israeli spirit’ and ‘a major factor in encouraging the aggressive spirit’. Noting that historically the Middle East was ‘an area of Judaism, Christianity and Islam’, Assad denied anti-Semitic intent, but claimed that the ‘Zionist movement by their attitudes’ had brought trouble on Jews throughout the region. 

Finally, like Sadat, Assad insisted ‘that no leaders of a regime can give up any sovereignty. We cannot compromise one inch of territory’. Again elaborating, Assad claimed that

Israel does not want peace and cannot realize her dream without the US Israel talks about secure borders. The invalidity of this theory is obvious. Are there secure borders in these important times? Modern weapons show there are no real secure borders. This theory is invalid. If we are to suppose there are such secure borders, history shows we are in the need of secure borders if anyone. Why should secure borders be at the expense of Syria. Let secure borders be at Galilee if anywhere. Under what logic should secure borders be at the expense of the population of Golan? Why should the line of danger be closer to Damascus than Tel Aviv? The distance from the ’67 border to Damascus is 80 kilometers; the distance from the ’67 border to Tel Aviv is 135 kilometres. So why should they want secure borders? If the idea behind it is to keep danger away from both capitals, why not?

60 Ibid.
Posing two direct questions to Kissinger, Assad wanted to know whether ‘the US is with us on the idea that we cannot give up one inch of territory’, and whether Washington ‘believe[d] that there can’t be a solution without the people of Palestine’?

The Egyptian and Syrian positions thus differed in one critical aspect. While both Sadat and Assad were adamant that they would not relinquish an inch of sovereign territory in a final settlement, Sadat considered territorial sovereignty and Palestinian rights as two separate issues (and as such was willing to abandon the Palestinians to their own devices in pursuit of an Egyptian settlement with Israel), while Assad saw the two as inextricably linked, rejecting any settlement which did not adequately accommodate the Palestinians.

Kissinger responded by indicating that the purpose of the conference was ‘peace not trivialities’, that ‘a final settlement must take into account the problems and aspirations of the Palestinians’ and that Washington was ‘prepared to discuss with you now or later withdrawal of Israeli forces in a first stage’. Affirming ‘that there can be no settlement without Syrian agreement’, Kissinger argued that ‘after the first stage of disengagement we must then address the specific problems of security guarantees, borders, and so on’ which would then be ‘less difficult to resolve’. Assad, however, insisted that the ‘question of POWs should be linked to disengagement’ and that there ‘must be prior agreement on Syrian-Israeli disengagement’. As Kissinger was unable to promise disengagement in advance of Geneva, Assad’s declined the invitation to the conference, lamenting that he had ‘nothing at all to offer’, but insisting that for Syria to engage, it was ‘important that there be disengagement on both fronts.61

Kissinger claims that:

The seemingly perverse reaction hid a major breakthrough. In his convoluted way, Assad was in fact blessing the peace process and our strategy. If Syria did not object to the peace conference and was indifferent to the content of the letter of invitation, all roadblocks would disappear. We could finesse the Palestinians by simply placing them among “other participants” in the draft letter. Israel’s insistence on the release of its POWs as a precondition for participation in the peace conference with Syria now became academic.62

Assad’s decision did do a good deal to resolve Israeli dilemmas, but whether it amounted to a Syrian ‘blessing’ of Geneva is questionable. As Kissinger and Meir

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61 Ibid.
62 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, pp. 784-785.
agreed the next day, Cairo had carefully cultivated relations with Washington over the past months, and Egypt had already released Israeli POWs. But American promises and goodwill meant less to Assad, who preferred to withhold his agreement on participation and detain his prisoners until Syrian disengagement was assured.

Moreover, at the time, both Kissinger and the Israelis had difficulty taking Assad’s ‘no’ for an answer. Kissinger promised the Israeli cabinet that Assad would come, and on 17 December Jerusalem offered to open disengagement negotiations and to allow some fifteen thousand Syrians displaced during the war to return to their homes in exchange for a list of Israeli POWs held in Syria and Red Cross access to the prisoners. Over the following days Kissinger brought diplomatic pressure to bear from every angle. He passed the Israeli offer on to Sadat, with the ‘hope that you can use your influence to persuade Syria to create the conditions for the progress which is now so attainable’, and impressed upon King Hussein that the ‘important issue now is whether Syria will attend’. He also attempted to exert pressure through Moscow, telling Dobrynin that it was ‘up to the Soviets, both on the POW issue and attendance at the conference, to assure adequate Syrian performance’. Only when all efforts had failed did Kissinger have a change of heart, reporting to Nixon that ‘Syrian non-participation decision is very satisfactory for us – a blessing in disguise’.

Far from feeling that Egypt enjoyed Syria’s blessing at Geneva, Sadat later publicly claimed that Assad had actively sought to undermine Egypt’s participation by

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dispatching messages to the monarchs of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait claiming that ‘Egypt had given up the fight... The aim was obviously to sow dissent in Egypt and make it accept the decision of the Ba’ath party [to boycott Geneva]’. 68 Egyptian-Syrian relations had deteriorated during the October war, and worsened in its aftermath. Assad was reportedly ‘white with anger at the lack of military coordination during the war’ and ‘enraged’ when he ‘learned that military separation of forces discussion held at Kilometre 101 had not only touched on military topics, but included discussion of political issues’. 69 Hussein met with Assad just days after the Geneva Conference, and reported that he was ‘more furious at Egypt than ever’. 70

Nonetheless, Syria’s withdrawal from the Geneva Conference, and effective policy of neutrality with regard to its agenda – including the issue of Palestinian representation – simplified matters for Kissinger during his visits to Amman and Jerusalem over the next days. Meeting later that day, Kissinger and King Hussein agreed that the PLO should be excluded. Hussein complained that he did not think the PLO had ‘any claim’, but that the ‘trouble is the Palestinians sit back, complain, and leave the problem to others. The Soviets are playing a double game with the Palestinians’. Jordan was in an awkward position, and to show some substantive progress from its participation at Geneva, ideally disengagement agreement similar to that promised to Egypt, was desirable. Prime Minister Rafai stressed that Jordan had ‘no problem discussing the Palestinians so long as it is not linked to withdrawal. We should first get withdrawal and then a Palestinian settlement’. 71

In the event, neither would transpire. Kissinger indicated to King Hussein that disengagement would involve ‘mostly those who were in the last war, but should not exclude Jordan’, and expressed doubt that Rifai’s suggestion to re-occupy ‘a few kilometers on the West Bank would help’ was feasible, warning that a formal agenda

69 Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, pp. 128-129.
rather that ‘just speeches…would complicate matters’. Nonetheless, Kissinger recommended ‘that Jordan should go and establish its presence. When the other Arabs look at the problem, they will want Jordan to negotiate. Israel will not give up the West Bank to Arafat’. 72

Kissinger and Sadat have been accused of duping Hussein into participation in an event which offered little potential return.73 Kissinger did not discuss West Bank engagement with the Israelis in December 1973, merely stating that ‘[i]f we have any preferred solution, it is to strengthen Hussein. We’re not cooking up a deal to turn it over to the PLO’.74 During an interview with King Hussein’s biographer Nigel Ashton in 2001, Kissinger claimed that he envisaged ‘a staged disengagement, with the Jordanian disengagement being the last of the three’. Yet, as Ashton notes, whatever the intention, this never came to pass.75 For his critics, the failure to tackle the Jordan/Palestine issue in any meaningful way after the October War was the cardinal mistake of his Middle East diplomacy, leaving the root of the Arab-Israeli conflict to fester.76

But for Kissinger in mid-December 1973, under pressure to orchestrate a major international conference and with only days to go and Israel objecting to participation, these were considerations for another time. Geneva posed a substantial domestic as well as diplomatic challenge for Meir’s Labour government, whose reputation and popularity had been badly damaged by the October War, and which faced a situation where, in her own words, ‘the general mood in Israel was very black’. Meir and Dayan, facing calls for their resignations and unprecedented criticism and dissent from across the political spectrum, were in no humour to commit to withdrawal from the West Bank as the entry price for speaking to the Arabs.77 Indeed, Meir warned that no

72 Ibid.
73 According to Stein, for Sadat, the Algiers Arab Summit Resolution successfully alienated Jordan and mollified the PLO, without allowing the PLO to be an obstacle to Sadat’s interest in reaching an agreement through Washington. Outside of inter-Arab discussions, Sadat privately abandoned the PLO to focus on Sinai. Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, pp. 128-129.
74 Memcon Kissinger-Meir, Jerusalem, 16 December 1973, 9:30 pm-12:42 am
75 Ashton, King Hussein of Jordan, p. 179.
76 Ibid., pp. 179-182; Chamberlin, The Global Offensive, pp. 231-235; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 219; Sheehan, The Arabs, the Israelis and Kissinger, p. 100; Yaqub ‘The Weight of Conquest’.
77 Eriksson, Israel and the October War, p. 43.
major foreign policy decisions could be taken before general elections, postponed by the war and rescheduled for 31 December, and that for electoral reasons her government ‘absolutely can’t have [PLO Chairman Yasser] Arafat at the conference’. 78

An emerging bloc of right wing parties led by Likud, newly formed by General Ariel Sharon, the hero of the Yom Kippur War, posed a real challenge to established Labour dominance and the previously-entrenched ‘Meir-Dayan elite’. Meir and Dayan, both of whom had previously gloried in their status as Israel’s leading security hawks, now found themselves outflanked on the right. With Likud campaigning on Meir’s mishandling of the October War and a hard-line approach to Arab relations and military security, Labour recast itself as the party of peace, claiming the sole ability to deliver long-sought political solutions. 79

The Nixon administration favoured a returned Meir government rather than the uncertain prospect of negotiating with a new Likud-led cabinet, and Kissinger therefore attempted to convince Meir personally that ‘a short run of the Geneva show’, creating ‘the symbolism of sitting around the conference table with the Arab foreign ministers…would be a terrific [electoral] bonanza point’. 80

In private, reproducing the format already agreed with Sadat, Kissinger assured the Israelis that Geneva would be a symbolic occasion merely establishing the framework for negotiations, which would be separated into geographical ‘working groups’ with Egyptian-Israeli disengagement forming the first item of substantive negotiations that would take place later. 81 Kissinger was aided by two stiff letters from Nixon in dealing with the specific objections raised by the Israelis with regard to participating at Geneva. The UN issue was resolved relatively easily, as Meir was mollified by personal assurances from Nixon that the Secretary General, Kurt Waldheim, did not have a ‘substantial role’ rather a ‘specifically limited and symbolic’ one. 82 Waldhiem would...

78 Memcon Kissinger-Meir, Jerusalem, 16 December 1973, 9:30 pm-12:42 am
80 Kalb & Kalb, Kissinger, p. 524; Sheehan The Arabs, the Israelis, and Kissinger, p. 101; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 121.
81 Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining, pp. 212-222; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 121; Touval, The Peace Brokers, p. 238
issue invitations, meaning that he would play no substantive role in the (non-
substantive) conference. With regard to Syria, in the face of a stern warning from
Nixon, Meir relented insofar as Israel agreed to attend the conference with the Syrians
present, but refused to sit in the same room as Syrian representatives while they
refused to supply an Israeli POW list.83

The Palestinian issue was the most serious from the Israeli perspective. Nixon
inveighed heavily on this, rejecting the Israeli demand to delete the provision for
discussion of later Palestinian participation during the first stage of the conference.
He stressed that ‘the present formulation does not in any way prejudge the question’,
that accepted international procedure on accommodating additional participants at a
conference required the approval of all initial participants, and that he ‘had already
approved a formal understanding to this effect’. The President closed by stating that

...I want to say to you in all solemnity that if Israel now fails to take a favourable decision to
participate in the conference on the basis of the letter that we have worked out, this will not
be understood either in the United States or in the world and I will not be able to justify the
support which I have consistently rendered in our mutual interests to your Government.

I urge that you transmit promptly your favorable reply.84

After and two day’s hard bargaining with Kissinger (which he recalls as a ‘teeth
grinding, exhausting, ordeal by exegesis’), and the added incentive of promised White
House intervention with the Department of Defence to secure Israel’s lengthy list of
other arms requests, the Israeli cabinet accepted a compromise formulation. The
stipulation that ‘the question of participation of other factors in the Middle East will
be discussed at the first stage of the conference’ was accompanied by two private
American-Israeli memoranda of understanding, the first affirming that the United
States would ‘oppose, to the point of veto, any invitation to the PLO without Israel’s
consent’.85

84 Letter From President Nixon to Israeli Prime Minister Meir1 Washington, 13 December 1973. NPLM,
85 Memcon Meir, Allon, Eban, Dayan, Gazit, Dinitz, Elazar, Yariv, Kidron, Evron, Kissinger, Keating, Sisco,
Atherton, Saunders, Rodman, Jerusalem, 17 December 1973, 9:30 am – 1 pm. NARA, RG 59, Records of
p. 127; Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 790; Safran, Israel, p. 518; Sheehan, The Arabs, the Israelis, and
The second, a thirteen point memorandum, was intended to ‘express how Israel and the United States will approach their respective roles at the Geneva Conference’. In addition to restating the provisions of the Six-Point Agreement, the memoranda stipulated that Washington would ‘consult fully with Israel on a step-by-step basis with respect to any ideas it may wish to explore with the Soviets or with the Arabs concerning the settlement’. The US would also make a ‘major effort with the Syrians and Soviets to achieve a prompt and satisfactory solution to the Israeli-Syrian POW problem’, and agreed that UN representatives would attend in a ‘non-substantive capacity’. The prime focus should be negotiations between the parties concerned, and as such Washington would ‘work in concert with Israel to maximize opportunities for negotiations between the parties without the presence of either of the major powers’. No substantive discussion or action would take place ‘prior to the elections in Israel, other than the question of the disengagement and separation of forces’, and the conference would ‘reconvene only after the new Cabinet is formed, to prevent any attempt to convene the UN Security Council or any other UN body for the purpose of discussing or taking action on any of the outstanding issues which were discussed at Kilometer 101 or which will be discussed at the Peace Conference’.  

American objectives at Geneva were modest, merely ‘to set a clear course for the disengagement phase of the Peace Conference’ by ‘roughly the end of January’ and get conference procedures ‘established as quickly as possible before the Saturday session with the least possible formal discussion among the parties’. This would avoid stalling by the parties, and publicly ‘establish a sense that the Conference means business and that it has a realistic plan for achieving early agreement on some issues, particularly disengagement’.

The Middle East Peace Conference, held on 21-22 December 1973, was of symbolic rather than substantive significance. The conference was directly precipitated by the October War, but two of the belligerents, Egypt and Israel, attended on the prior understanding that substantive matters would be dealt with elsewhere, under

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American mediation. The third, Syria, boycotted the conference and was represented only by a name plate at a vacant table. After opening speeches by attending representatives, which are generally regarded as framed for domestic audiences, the conference recessed indefinitely, never again to be convened in plenary session. In the aftermath of the Geneva meeting, Prime Minister Zaid al-Rafai complained that it ‘was the most peculiar conference I ever attended. I expected it would be based on Resolutions 242 and 338. But it had no terms of reference, no rules of procedure, and no agenda’.

However, there is a strong consensus that it was not so much that Geneva lacked an agenda, but that, by prior arrangement between Cairo, Tel Aviv, and Washington, the agenda was to provide political cover for a separate Egypt-Israel disengagement agreement, excluding Jordanian, Palestinian, Syrian, and Soviet involvement. Kissinger assured the Meir Cabinet that

I frankly want to keep them [the Soviets] out of the negotiations as much as possible. If we get a disengagement agreement, I want it to be clearly the product of Sadat’s moderate course towards us and ignoring the Russians.

In his memoirs, Kissinger acknowledges that ‘[w]e strove to assemble a multilateral conference, but our purpose was to use it as a framework for an essentially bilateral diplomacy. Soviet cooperation was necessary to convene Geneva; afterward, we would seek to reduce its role to a minimum’. The Soviet dilemma in the Middle East, that of maintaining credibility as the defender of radical Arab interests while attempting to pursue détente with the United States had worsened in late 1973, and with Syria absent, the US was optimally placed to achieve this unstated objective at

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88 Report by Secretary of State Kissinger to President Nixon 21 December. NPLM, NSC Files, Kissinger Office Files, Box 43, Kissinger Trip Files, HAK Trip—Europe & Mideast, State Cables, Memos & Misc., 8-22 December 1973. Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 191. Kissinger argues that strident public displays offered sops to hardline domestic opinion, paradoxically allowing more flexibility in negotiated international diplomacy. One of the few points on which Kissinger and Heikal agree is in identifying a particularly bellicose speech from Jordanian Prime Minister Zaid al-Rafai ‘which reflected the necessities of Arab politics’, rather than Jordan’s actual moderate policy line as exemplary in this regard. Heikal, *Secret Channels*, p. 221; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 794


91 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 755.

Geneva. Of the other attendees at Geneva, Israel did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, Jordan was an American client dedicated to minimising radical influence in its politics, and Egypt was working actively to escape Soviet and enter American orbit, and to engage in an exclusively American-brokered peace process with Israel. With Washington holding all the cards at Geneva, Soviet options were reduced to either being excluded or assuming a positon of symbolic importance.

As is widely recognised, the ‘elaborate façade’ of the Geneva Peace Conference facilitated Kissinger in working towards his strategic goal of cultivating Egypt as an American client power, thereby regionally marginalising the Soviet Union, even while paying lip service to détente. Prior US-Egypt-Israel collusion ensured all committees were ‘geographic’ rather than ‘functional’, ensuring that Israel would negotiate separately with the Egyptians, Jordanians, and Syrians on each of these respective fronts. This facilitated a separation of Egyptian-Israeli settlement over the Sinai from Israeli-Syrian military disengagement to the north, and from political entanglement with Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Jordanian monarchy, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), or any other Palestinian representatives.93

While it is generally accepted that Geneva was a ceremonial occasion, it was nonetheless critical in setting the diplomatic agenda. Again, Kissinger’s biographers tend to attribute this to Kissinger’s post-October War tactics rather than Sadat’s longer-term strategy. For Hanhimaki, by the time the conference had convened, ‘[t]he Middle east was working out in much the way Kissinger had planned: the Egyptians and Israelis had turned to him as peace broker and the most disruptive elements in the region – the Palestinians and the Syrians – had been marginalised’.94 But as seen in previous chapters, this framework of nominal overall Arab-Israel settlement providing a vehicle and political cover for a separate Egypt-Israel peace process was precisely what Sadat’s Advisor for National Security Affairs, Hafiz Ismail, had pitched

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directly to Kissinger in February and May 1973. As such, Geneva represented the manifestation not of Kissinger’s political architecture, but of Sadat’s.

Geneva succeeded in compartmentalising Egypt-Israeli negotiations, but, as planned, the actual disengagement negotiations took place elsewhere. Kissinger, Gromyko, Eban, and Fahmi agreed that an Egyptian-Israeli military working group should start talks on the disengagement and separation of forces under the chairmanship of the commanding officer of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), General Ensio Siilasvuo. With prior American-Egyptian-Israeli collusion ensuring all committees were ‘geographic’ rather than ‘functional’, the conference facilitated a separation of Egyptian-Israeli military disengagement in the Sinai from Israeli-Syrian disengagement to the north, and from any political entanglement with the West Bank.

The committee convened at Geneva never completed the first item on its agenda however. Instead, a disengagement of forces agreement was signed at Kilometre 101, on 18 January 1974. The Middle East Peace Conference provided the main public event capping the year’s diplomacy, but the Kilometre 101 talks and Kissinger’s Middle East tour in December 1973 had given a real foretaste of the new Egypt-Israel negotiating framework and format, as Egypt and Israel publicly moved toward political settlement under exclusively American mediation.

**Egypt-Israel Disengagement, January 1974**

**The Geneva Negotiations**

Nixon wrote personally to Sadat soon after the conference, expressing that in light of the Geneva proceedings and the most recent Kissinger-Sadat discussions, he was ‘convinced that there is opportunity for real progress towards a settlement and for a dramatic improvement in our relations’. Nixon felt that ‘between us we can point to a number of significant accomplishments’, and that bilateral relations had ‘been put on a new basis of cordiality and understanding’, but, even so, ‘[t]he ceasefire, the six-

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point agreement, important as they are, are only beginnings’. The American President assured his Egyptian counterpart that he was deeply convinced... that our two Nations stand at the threshold of a great turning point in history. We can, if we have the will, bring a new era of peace and prosperity to all the peoples of the Arab world... I pledge myself to do everything in my power to ensure my second term as President will be remembered as the period in which the United States developed a new and productive relationship with Egypt and the Arab world.97

This must have made welcome reading indeed for Sadat, who, from the beginning of his presidency had used all available channels to make persistent overtures to Washington, calling for renewed bilateral relations and a transformed regional role for the USA. After almost four years of political struggle and strategising, as well as a costly war, Sadat had finally brought Nixon around to his way of thinking.

This was not simply a love-letter however. No sooner had Geneva recessed than the Shah of Iran, (supposedly a close ally of the Nixon administration) had taken the lead in pushing for OPEC’s to double oil prices to $11.65 per barrel. The new price was posted on 23 December 1973, a development which Kissinger would later term ‘one of the pivotal events in the history of this century’.98 Two days later, in Kuwait, the Arab Oil Ministers announced a unanimous decision to increase oil production by ten percent in order to help meet European and Japanese needs, while continuing the anti-US embargo. Nixon expressed ‘dismay’ at this decision, warning Sadat that ‘to make it possible for me to move decisively... the discrimination against the United States, which the oil embargo represents, [must] be brought to an end’, and stressing that the US could not ‘await the outcome of current talks on disengagement’, and that he was ‘writing today to his majesty King Faisal in the same vein.99

Sadat’s responded promptly through Fahmy, with assurances that ‘the December 25 decision... was not meant, in any way whatsoever, to be discriminatory in relation to the US’, and claiming that ‘the direct and immediate impact of the embargo on the European countries’ was the intention, as Arab powers ‘were under the impression

98 Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 562. Algerian and Iraqi representative had pushed for a much higher price, while King Faisal had argued for a lower price before settling on supporting the Shah’s proposal as a compromise. Painter, Oil and the October War, p. 185.
that the United States, because of its resources, was not that badly affected’. Sadat was correct in asserting that the immediate impact of oil production cuts was less severe on the USA, which enjoyed access to its own oil reserves and depended on Middle Eastern oil for only 5% of its consumption, than on Europe and Japan. Nonetheless, the White House was as loath as ever be seen to act under pressure from any foreign power, whether oil-producing countries or panicked allies. 

Sadat promised that he would make ‘immediate and appropriate contacts with King Faisal’ and ‘do his best’ to see that ‘an effort will be made to ease the embargo even so far as the US is concerned’, but only ‘once the disengagement agreement is signed’. The Six-Point Agreement had alleviated the immediate crisis of Israeli POWs and the besieged Egyptian Third Army corps, but the latter but remained surrounded and trapped outside Suez, giving the lie to Sadat’s claims of military victory. Thus while maintaining warm cordiality with the Nixon administration, Sadat refused to sheath the oil weapon before disengagement was secured, closing his missive with an expression of ‘hope that you for your part will be able to guarantee that Defence Minister Dayan and his government will be in a position to accept and implement forthwith the agreement on disengagement’.

The Meir Cabinet had its own pressing reasons for seeking disengagement as soon as possible. After three months of military mobilization, Israel was approaching bankruptcy, and in any case ‘Africa’ (territory west of the Suez Canal seized during the October War) was becoming more of a liability than an asset. Offering an embattled Israeli government perspective, Dayan recalls that

> We had nothing to lose. The Egyptians would not reconcile themselves to our presence west of the Canal, and if the war were renewed, the whole world, including the United States, would be against us. The world was interested in oil, not justice, and they wanted the oil-producing states to lift the embargo... Our strategic political aim should now be to dampen the panic and hysteria that had seized the governments of Europe and countries like Japan.

101 Painter, Oil and the October War, p. 178; Quandt, Peace Process, pp. 185-187.  
102 Telegram US Interests Section Cairo - Department of State Washington, 30 December 1973, 1411Z.  
104 Dayan, Story of My Life, p. 559.
The first round of Egypt-Israel disengagement negotiations consisted of six bilateral military-level meetings in closed sessions at Geneva, running from 26 December 1973 – 9 January 1974, mediated by a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) Commander General Ensio Siilasvuo. In essence, the negotiations took up where the Kilometre 101 talks had left off. In the first session, Egypt posited five principles: Israeli forces must move east of the Suez canal; that this move must be of sufficient distance for Egypt to secure the entire Canal zone; that forces must be separated sufficiently to be out of artillery range; with intervening ‘security zones with lightly armed troops must be established’; in a ‘buffer zone wide enough to allow the UNEF to operate freely’. Israel assented, but posited two more principals, that ‘neither side should gain political benefit’ from the new lines, and a principal of ‘reciprocity or mutual contribution, i.e. that if Israel were to withdraw there should be must be some Egyptian withdrawal as well’. Egypt rejected reciprocity as ‘illogical’, on grounds that ‘the disengagement, in Sadat’s eyes, is all taking place on Egyptian sovereign territory’. He therefore found it ‘very difficult to accept any limitations in the territory west of the Suez Canal’. Drawing the meeting to a close, Siilasvuo suggested that Israel pose an alternative form of reciprocity to present at the next session.

This initial exchange set the parameters for the subsequent Geneva disengagement negotiations, which ended inconclusively. With little progress in the second meeting on 28 December, in the third session, on 3 January, Egypt claimed that Israel’s principles were unacceptable as ‘they injected “political” and psychological” factors into military talks’. Israel was unwilling to accept Egypt’s five principles without its own two principles being included, but developed the ‘reciprocity’ concept as encompassing a ‘thinning out’ of Egyptian forces east of the Suez Canal, indicating that the depth of Israeli withdrawal to the east should be linked to Egyptian force reductions to the west bank of Suez, including ‘numbers, level of armament, kind of

105 Memo Kissinger - Nixon Washington, 6 January 1974. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 136, Dinitz, 1/1–7/1, 1974, (2). Secret; Nodis. On 14 January Fahmy insisted to Kissinger that ‘Reciprocity is illogical... Their tanks aren’t defending anything, and they are on Egyptian territory’. Memcon Sadat, Fahmi, Gamasy, Kissinger, Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Ambassador-at-Large, Head of US Delegation to Geneva Peace Conference, Sisco, Rodman, Aswan, 14 January 1974, 10:30 am–2 pm. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 136, Middle East, Dinitz, 1/1–7/1, 1974, (2). Secret; Nodis.

equipment, numbers of forces to be allowed in the lightly armed zones, etc. as in the KM 101 talks’. In the next session, on 4 January, Israel presented Egypt with two ‘models’, one involving mutual withdrawal, and the second, a ‘modified Gamasy plan’ based on Gamasy’s proposals of 22 November at Kilometre 101. This involved a 35 kilometre Israeli withdrawal from the east bank, leaving room for 15 km wide UNEF buffer zone flanked by 10km Egyptian and Israeli ‘security zones’ of lightly armed forces (with no tanks or artillery), and artillery on both sides positioned out of firing range.\textsuperscript{107}

Egypt requested that Israeli firm up its ‘models’ as formal proposals for the next meeting, but the disengagement talks began to unravel in the fifth and sixth sessions. Israel, which, like the United States, had no intention of legitimating Soviet involvement in any capacity, rejected outright Egypt’s suggestion that if new disengagement proposals could not be agreed, then both sides should return to the 22 October lines and allow their ‘co-sponsors’ to get involved in negotiations. Egypt insisted that without acceptance of its five principles, there was ‘nothing left to discuss’ besides the 22 October lines (when the first ceasefire resolution was adopted), and was frustrated by Israel’s insistence that its ‘models’ were not specific proposals. Although Meir had achieved re-election, her parliamentary majority was substantially reduced, and Israel continued to await the findings of the Agranat Commission. Jerusalem therefore protested that Israel’s ‘domestic situation was still unclear’ and so the government was ‘not ready to present specific plans’. Egypt was unimpressed, complaining that there was public remarks from Dayan indicated that a specific plan was forthcoming’ and there was ‘no utility in discussing theories’.\textsuperscript{108}

Dayan had got a plan, but the Meir Cabinet remained unwilling to present formal proposals at Geneva. Instead he visited Kissinger in Washington on 4 January 1974, to present his informal ‘ideas’ on the form of settlement. Dayan set out what was in effect a second ‘model’ which had been introduced at Geneva on the same day, based on Israeli withdrawal to some thirty kilometres from Suez, to western edges of the Giddi and Mitla passes which dominated the Sinai strategic landscape, establishment

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
of a UNEF buffer zone and lightly armed Egyptian and Israeli zones and removal of artillery from firing range. Kissinger reported that the ‘plan means that they [the Israelis] have now come 85 percent of the way to the Egyptian position on disengagement, and this without any demands for reciprocity’, and that the Israelis had ‘urged’ him ‘to take the plan to Cairo immediately’. Egypt-Israel negotiations had departed from their cradle in Geneva, never to return.

THE ASWAN-JERUSALEM SHUTTLE

Both Cairo and Washington now felt that American intervention was urgently needed. At the beginning of January 1974, Kissinger identified ‘a critical timing problem’, warning that ‘matters could get out of control’ without prompt disengagement, and raising the spectre that ‘if the resolution of differences is put in the Geneva forum, the Egyptians are likely to have to prove their manhood, regardless of the proximity of the Israeli plan to their own proposals’. But rather than seek confrontation at Geneva, Sadat contacted Kissinger instead, inviting the secretary of state to visit him at his winter residence in Aswan immediately.

Although Kissinger had not planned on visiting the Middle East again so soon, he and Sadat enjoyed productive meetings on 11-12 January. Not only was Sadat was receptive to the ‘Dayan Plan’, he made it clear that he was ‘anxious that an agreement on disengagement be accomplished within one week’. To facilitate early agreement, Sadat suggested that they ‘finish it now so it won’t get bogged down’, and ‘urged that... [Kissinger] personally engage... in developing an agreement that can be signed at kilometre 101, rather than sending the negotiations back to Geneva, with the inevitable delays that would entail’. Sadat also called for ‘a detailed agreement, leaving as little to the military representative to work out later as possible’.

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110 Ibid.
111 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 804.
From Aswan, Kissinger embarked on his first round of shuttle diplomacy, making a total of four trips ferrying proposal and counter-proposal back and forth from Jerusalem. With a substantial media entourage in tow, Kissinger's ‘flying circus’ enjoyed a high profile, making plain the exclusion of the Soviets and other third parties from the American-brokered negotiations and putting paid to Geneva’s short-lived multilateralist facade. Sadat agreed to Israel’s refined terms on January 16, and President Nixon announced the disengagement agreement at the White House on the following day before it was signed at Kilometre 101.113

There is a consensus in the literature that, as Isaacson succinctly puts it, ‘[s]huttle diplomacy was born unplanned’.114 While this is certainly true on the American side, there is every indication that employing Kissinger as middleman to produce a disengagement agreement, while avoiding direct political level contacts with Israel, is precisely what Sadat had in mind when inviting Kissinger to Aswan. Sadat had planned for an early agreement brokered by Kissinger, even if Kissinger had not realised in advance what the Egyptian president had in store for him. During first 1974 meeting with Kissinger at Aswan, Sadat took firm control of the Egyptian side of negotiations, moving decisively away from the facade of multilateralism at Geneva and military level talks at Kilometre 101, to establish bilateral political exchanges with Israel, with Kissinger acting as intermediary.

The Aswan-Jerusalem shuttle notwithstanding, the American contribution to the disengagement agreement signed in January 1974 was tactical rather than strategic, assisting in hammering out substantive details within an already-agreed conceptual framework, and in providing assurances to both sides that the terms of the agreement would be upheld. Quandt notes that the two main gaps between the sides, regarding forces levels within the zones and when Israel would give up the Giddi and Mitla passes (during the first disengagement phase or later), were quantitative rather than


qualitative, allowing space for bargaining and agreement facilitated by Kissinger’s shuttling.\textsuperscript{115}

Sadat personally dominated the Egyptian side of negotiations, overruling stiff resistance from Fahmy and Gamasy, and proved willing to accept force reductions so far-reaching as to effectively remove any future military option for retaking the Sinai as the price of disengagement. A major preoccupation, however, was finding ways to implement these redeployments without appearing to concede Egyptian sovereignty over its territory, particularly west of Suez. To the Israelis, Kissinger stressed that Sadat’s ‘problem is what orders he has to give to his military and how he will look to his military. And that is going to be quite a problem’.\textsuperscript{116} For example, ‘as a sign of... good faith’ Sadat offered to retain ‘no tanks on the East Bank’ on condition that Israel keep this in confidence. If, however, Israel was to ‘say anything about it’ he would ‘send them across’, otherwise, Egypt would ‘keep thirty there until the disengagement is completed, then remove them’.\textsuperscript{117}

Sadat objected to publicly accepting force reductions in the Sinai on the grounds that this implied a diminution of Egyptian sovereignty, and even in private was reluctant to discuss an Israeli proposal. Kissinger, Sisco, Sadat, Fahmy and Gamasy drew up a (very similar) alternative ‘American’ proposal and ‘American map’ on January 14, which Sadat was more comfortable in considering.\textsuperscript{118} On the last day of negotiations, Kissinger joked with the Israeli cabinet that ‘[e]very time you give me proposals which I consider totally outrageous, they accept them’ and that it was ‘a great victory, to get Israel to accept its own proposal’.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{115} Quandt Decade of Decisions, p. 198-199; Touval, The Peace Brokers, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{116} Memcon Allon, Eban, Dayan, Dinitz, Elazar, Gazit, Kidron, Evron, Zaïra, Elazar, Bar-On, Kissinger, Bunker, Sisco, Maw, Atherton, Rodman, Jerusalem, 13 January 1974, noon–1:15 pm. NPLM, NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 140, Secretary Kissinger’s Middle East Trip, 11-20 January 1974, Memcons and Reports.
\textsuperscript{117} Memcon Allon, Dayan, Dinitz, Gazit, Kidron, Evron, Elazar, Bar-On, Kissinger, Bunker, Sisco, Maw, Atherton, Rodman, Jerusalem, 17 January 1974, 9:30 am–12:30 pm. NPLM NSC Files, HAK, Box 140, CF/ME, Secretary Kissinger’s Middle East Trip, 11-20 January 1974, Memcons and Reports.
\textsuperscript{118} Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 548; Kalb and Kalb, Kissinger, p. 535
\textsuperscript{119} Memcon Allon, Eban, Dayan, Dinitz, Elazar, Kidron, Evron, Gazit, Bar-On, Kissinger, Sisco, Ellsworth Bunker, Keating, Carlyle E. Maw, Legal Advisor, Dept. of State, Atherton, Saunders, Rodman, Jerusalem, 15 January 1974, 2–3:50 pm. NPLM NSC Files, HAK/ME, Box 140, Secretary Kissinger’s Middle East Trip, 11-20 January 1974, Memcons and Reports.
Although the public agreement and map indicated only three zones (an Egyptian zone to the west, an Israeli zone to the east, and a UNEF-occupied buffer zone in between) secret accords actually sub-divided the Egyptian and Israeli zones into two along the lines on Dayan’s ‘five zone concept’, placing both sides’ artillery (including Egyptian SAMs) out of striking range in the ‘outer’ zones further from the canal. As ‘the most creative of the Israeli leaders’, Dayan has been lauded as the disengagement agreement’s ‘secret father’, as has been seen, the ‘Dayan Plan’ was itself based on a refined version of the Gamasy Plan of 22 November.\(^\text{120}\) Gamasy himself, however, was ‘furious’ with the final product, refusing to sign the agreement and walking out of what was an ‘emotional meeting’.\(^\text{121}\) Gamasy’s basic principle when conducting the Kilometre 101 negotiations was that neither side should gain military advantage, but the disengagement agreement weakened Egypt’s forward deployments to such an extent as to effectively remove any future military option. The minimal forces Egypt retained, seven thousand infantrymen without anti-aircraft, artillery, or tank support ‘produced an absolute uproar from Gamasy’ who saw the terms as ‘humiliating’ and ‘demoralizing for his soldiers’.\(^\text{122}\) Mohammed Heikal claims that, although accepting his duty of deference to the president, Gamasy wept when he learned of the extent of force restrictions agreed to the east of Suez.\(^\text{123}\)

The extent of force reductions imposed on Egypt provoked deep misgivings within the Egyptian military. Many high-ranking officers who resisted the agreement, including General Saad el-Shazly, the Egyptian chief of staff and mastermind of the Suez crossing were relieved of their posts in late 1973 or early 1974.\(^\text{124}\) A similar political fate befell Mohammed Heikal, a long-time confidant and close advisor to Sadat who ‘protested that the agreement would freeze the situation to Israel’s advantage... quickly fell from favour with the president who dismissed from the editorship of as editor Al-Ahram’.\(^\text{125}\)

\(^\text{120}\) This is Sheehan’s phrase. Sheehan, The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger, pp. 108-111.

\(^\text{121}\) Memcon Allon, Eban, Dayan, Dinitz, Elazar, Kidron, Evron, Gazit, Bar-On, Kissinger, Sisco, Ellsworth Bunker, Keating, Carlyle E. Maw, Legal Advisor, Dept. of State, Atherton, Saunders, Rodman, Jerusalem, 17 January 1974, 9:30 am—12:30 pm Kissinger-Meir. NPLM NSC Files, HAK, Box 140, CF/ME, Secretary Kissinger’s Middle East Trip, 11-20 January 1974, Memcons and Reports.

\(^\text{122}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{123}\) Heikal, Secret Channels, p. 232.

\(^\text{124}\) Dayan, Story of My Life, p. 568; Meital, The October War and Egypt’s Multiple Crossings, p. 64.

\(^\text{125}\) Sheehan, The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger, 112. Al Ahram was a popular daily newspaper widely recognised as the Cairo’s mouthpiece.
This marked a turning point in Heikal’s career, as he moved from semi-official chronicler to trenchant critic of Sadat’s presidency. Fahmy was similarly unimpressed, putting up a ‘tremendous fight’ against specific mention of Israeli shipping in Bab El-Mandeb rather than merely general ‘free passage’.

Fahmy would later complain that while Sadat viewed Kissinger as ‘a prophet’, in his view, Kissinger pretended to act ‘as a peacemaker and go-between’ but ‘was in fact always acting on behalf of Israel’.

Agreed force levels were omitted from the disengagement agreement, and were instead detailed in private letters from Nixon to Meir and Sadat (although the details were immediately leaked by the Israelis). Israel’s demands regarding the rebuilding of Sinai cities and free navigation in surrounding waterways were included in a ten point secret American-Israeli memorandum of understanding extending American assurances that Egypt would abide by the agreed terms. This document also stated that the UNEF would not be withdrawn without mutual Egyptian-Israeli consent, and that ‘the United States would try to be responsive to Israel’s defence needs on a continuing and long term basis’. These American assurances proved sufficient for Meir to drop her demand for a public statement of Egyptian non-belligerency, despite her acute awareness that Likud would attack any agreement based on unwritten understandings.

Disengagement nevertheless heralded a noticeable (if temporary) improvement in strained American-Israeli relations. Recalling his mission to Washington and his later satisfaction with the disengagement agreement, Dayan recalls:

> I believed that the key to an arrangement with every Arab state, and particularly Egypt, was the creation of conditions which reduced the Arab motivation for war and promoted the normalization of life... On the whole I was satisfied with this agreement with the Egyptians... From the territorial point of view, the new line, the Mitla and Gidi passes and the hills in front of them, was the best possible, one we had pulled back from the canal beyond artillery range.

And under the reduction-of-forces clause, the military strength which the Egyptians would be maintaining east of the canal was indeed minimal. The disengagement agreement also embodied political content of great importance. Certain undertakings were given, and if carried out – and I hoped they would be – they would contribute much to normalisation of life in the area and serve to defuse war tensions.131

Interestingly, Heikal’s analysis coincides closely with Dayan’s:

From a military viewpoint, the first disengagement agreement left Egypt in worse position than it had been before 6 October, in that resumption of war of attrition became impossible. This was precisely Sadat’s intention. He wanted to create an irreversible peace process which would eventually lead to full Israel withdrawal from all occupied territories.132

While Sadat may have hoped for eventual withdrawal from all occupied territories, he saw his own political responsibility as restricted to recovering Egypt’s territories, leaving Syria, Gaza, Jordan and the Palestinians to their own devices. His vision bore its first fruit in early 1974, creating a shared strategic bond between Egypt, Israel, and the United States, and a shared momentum towards peaceful settlement, leaving fellow-Arabs by the wayside.

**CONCLUSION**

The twelve week period between the end of the October War and first Egypt-Israel disengagement saw tectonic shifts in Middle East politics. It is universally acknowledged that the October War, despite ending in Israeli military victory, caused a fundamental shift in attitudes, restoring Arab pride and puncturing Israel’s sense of invincibility, thus creating the necessary conditions for the ensuing Egypt-Israel military disengagement and eventual peace process.133 However, this and the previous chapter have shown that the effects on American thinking were equally important. Egypt and Israel’s roles vis-a-vis the US were temporarily reversed in the immediate aftermath of the October War, with American and Egyptian priorities in alignment, and Israel under pressure to conform.

Whatever their later claims, Nixon and Kissinger’s own accounts of their policies at the time illustrate that Sadat’s strategy had a shaping impact on their own approach. Briefing bipartisan Congressional leaders soon after the disengagement agreement in

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January 1974, Nixon and Kissinger effusive in their praise, gushing that ‘Sadat’s wisdom... was indispensable... none of this could have been done without President Sadat. He is a wise leader. He was willing to talk with Israel at Kilometre 101 and to trust us’. But more than this, they represented his diplomatic strategy as their own.

Kissinger advised the congressmen that:

The problem with a general conference is that the Soviet Union would take an intransigent position which the Arabs would have to support and there would be a deadlock. Instead, we decided to move by stages within a comprehensive framework.\(^{135}\)

As established in previous chapters, this approach, facilitating a separate Egypt-Israel settlement process, was conceived by Sadat and his Advisor for National Security Affairs, Hafiz Ismail, rather than any American, and presented to Kissinger in February and May 1973. Geneva represented another phase in the implementation of this strategy.\(^{136}\)

Sadat had relied on the Nixon administration to secure a disengagement of forces after Geneva, but had not taken a passive a role. As the leader of the Arab world, he had also applied pressure. Nixon had requested Sadat sheath the Oil Weapon in advance of disengagement, yet Sadat politely but firmly bided his time. Sadat tended to matters according to his own order of priorities, but was careful to remain in good American favour, as ultimately, he had placed his political future in American hands.

As Kissinger advised the congressmen

The key is that the limitations remove any offensive capability — please do not reveal this — but neither can reach the other side with weapons. So, neither one can attack the other without warning, and each war in this area has started with a surprise attack.\(^{137}\)

This, in effect, enshrined the essential and historically significant element of the disengagement agreement: that Egypt renounced any future military option to retake the Sinai in favour of full commitment to an American sponsored political process.

\(^{134}\) Ibid.


\(^{136}\) Heikal offers a sceptical Arab take on this point, arguing that ‘[t]he conference enabled Egypt to publicly acknowledge that it no longer considered direct contacts with Israeli to be wrong. This weakening of the taboo was confined to Egypt, however, and specifically excluded the Palestinians and Syria’. Heikal, Secret Channels, p. 229.

This was premised on the basic concept of Resolution 242, ‘land for peace’, but throughout the disengagement negotiations (as Kissinger stressed to the Israelis), Sadat ‘never raised the 1967 borders’.138

Much, including disengagement of Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights and formal restoration of Cairo-Washington relations, was left to be resolved, but Sadat had manoeuvred Egypt, the United States, and in turn Israel into what proved to an irreversible political peace process. The conclusion of this thesis will place this achievement in context of the Meir, Nixon, and Sadat governments’ diplomacy from 1969 to 1970, and consider the long term implications for the Arab-Israel conflict, the Middle East, and the American regional role.

138 Memcon Jerusalem, 17 January 1974, 9:30 am–12:30 pm
CONCLUSION

The October War was undoubtedly a turning point in the history of the Middle East and the Arab-Israeli conflict, sweeping away ossified stances and alignments, and marking the beginning of a new, more fluid Egypt-Israel diplomatic process shepherded by the United States. Some basic changes were soon evident after the war. As is universally acknowledged, the war had rebalanced perceptions, shattering the Israeli sense of invincibility and exorcising Arab humiliation in the wake of the June 1967 war. Indeed, a remarkable anomaly of the October War is that in the enduring national consciousness and collective memory of both Egypt and Israel, there is almost exclusive focus on events of the first week of fighting, generating a ‘myth of defeat’ in Israel and mirroring ‘myth of victory’ in Egypt. Although Israel ultimately achieved military victory, the Yom Kippur war is remembered as a terrible national tragedy and trauma. But in Egypt, the Third Army being helplessly trapped at the end of hostilities is largely forgotten in favour of annual celebrations of the Ramadan War and the heroic ‘crossing’ of Suez.¹

The symbolic military crossing allowed the building of political bridges, as Sadat has intended. By the end of 1973, both Egypt and Jordan had also publicly and decisively put paid to any ‘rejectionist’ stance symbolised by the ‘three noes’ of the 1967 Arab Summit at Khartoum. Attendance at the Middle East Peace Conference in Geneva in December 1973, with Israel also present, made clear to all that Egypt and Jordan were willing to recognise, negotiate with, and, eventually to make peace with Israel (Jordanian Prime Minister Zaid Rafai’s fiery rhetoric notwithstanding). Syria’s refusal to attend, leaving its seats at the Geneva conference table vacant, only served to underline this departure.

The Egyptian and Jordanian governments finally felt able to publicly engage in negotiations with Israel from late 1973, but this was a change on the surface, representing a deeper long-standing desire. Both had long sought some form of peace agreement, but felt unable to break the Arab taboo against recognising Israel, only to

¹ De Martino, ‘Clashing Narratives of the October War’, esp. p. 243; Meital, ”The Origins of Sadat’s Volte Face”, p. 35.
negotiate with a truculent Israeli government from a position of apparent abject military weakness. The likely reaction, both from restive domestic constituencies and from fellow Arab powers, was judged to preclude direct engagement. But with circumstances in flux after the war, both governments, and Egypt in particular, seized the opportunity to pursue their long-sought goal. Within two weeks of the ceasefire, in the effort to achieve a disengagement of forces, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat accepted both direct negotiations with Israel at the military-level and indirect political negotiations under exclusive American mediation, and agreed to restore formal diplomatic relations with Washington once disengagement was achieved. The Egypt-Israel peace process and the US-Egypt reconciliation which Sadat had been pitching to Washington from the earliest days of his presidency were irrevocably underway. Sadat had staked everything on his limited war catalysing a political process, and had succeeded not just in this, but in convincing the Nixon administration to subscribe to his concepts and stake its prestige on the process, securing commitment to implementing his strategy over and above Israeli protestations.

In fact, Sadat did not merely seize the opportunities created by the October War, but had actually waged war to create those opportunities. This thesis has sought to trace the origins of the Egypt-Israel peace process, with an emphasis on conceptual and strategic thinking, and to demonstrate that apparent post-war changes in Egyptian orientation were not premised on any fundamental or conceptual departure, but manifested continuity in, and implementation of, Sadat’s strategic approach towards the US and Israel from the beginning of his presidency. The October War did, however, represent a turning point for American regional strategy, with a knock-on effect for Israel, which was forced to adopt a new approach. This has been obfuscated not just by complex post-war circumstances, but also by subsequent American-centric analyses, which present Egypt’s post war direction as guided by, rather than leading, the Nixon Administration, and in particular Henry Kissinger, who, with the weakening of President Nixon himself, by late 1973 had achieved the status of US foreign policy czar.

2 The ‘Arab taboo’ is Mohammed Heikal’s phrase. Heikal, Secret Channels, p. 223.
Sadat’s diplomacy introduced an element of Egypt-Israel competition for American favour, forming a new, critical element of Mideast diplomacy. Even Sadat’s predecessor, Gamal Abdul Nasser, who after effort to court the US as a friend faltered, cast himself as an anti-American firebrand in the late 1960s, recognised the impossibility of achieving his goal of recovering Arab territories seized by Israel in 1967 without American support, but was powerless to compete with Israel for American favour. Israel’s support base in the United States was rooted both in an effective domestic lobby within the US, capable of marshalling considerable congressional, media, and public interest, and in strategic alignment with the western Cold War bloc. These tangible political assets were buttressed by close personal ties between senior American and Israeli and Jewish American figures, and the mutual cultural affinity and admiration felt between the two peoples.

Under Nasser, Egypt was in an almost opposite position to Israel vis-à-vis the United States by 1969. Egypt had no domestic purchase within the US, and was aligned with the Soviet Union, evincing pretentions to leadership of a ‘radical’ anti-western Arab bloc. While the United States had an important stake in the Arab world, the Nixon administration had little interest in Nasser, beyond regarding him as a dangerous nuisance. Sadat realised that in order to win American help it was necessary to make cooperation with Egypt far more attractive to the United States. The oil weapon could exert some pressure, but was not directly or unilaterally under Egyptian control, and for the oil producers represented a dangerous double edged sword, which could not be deployed indefinitely.

Sadat made his appeal to America on strategic grounds. As Egyptian president, Sadat could offer defection of Egypt, the leader of the Arab world, from east to west. He presented this prospect repeatedly from October 1970, but was only taken seriously in October 1973, ushering in a new era of friendly relations. By contrast, despite a more long-standing and established friendship and Israel’s supposed status as a ‘strategic asset’ to the US, American-Israeli relations during the period between the October


4 US-Israel relations in the Nixon era are discussed in detail using both American and Israeli archival materials in Kochavi, *Nixon and Israel: Forging a Conservative Partnership*. 
War and Egypt-Israel peace treaty were characterised by frequent disagreement, occasional public confrontation, and sometime personal acrimony between leaders. Negotiations between the two powers tended to be lengthy and difficult, and were not always successful. This relationship had known previous turbulence, but comparing Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir’s blissful visit to the White House in early March 1973, when she enthused that Israel had ‘never had it so good’ from its American patron (or indeed her visit in December 1971 when she all but dictated key terms of US Middle East policy to Nixon himself) to her visit in early November 1973, when she was bitterly disappointed and angered at being ‘deprived of victory’, presents a striking contrast, indicative of a qualitative change. The post-October War period can be seen as one of difficult adjustment in US-Israeli relations, to a significant extent brought about by the new US-Egypt strategic relationship.

Kissinger denies partisanship, but this does not sit comfortably with his recognition that Sadat’s strategy of creating incentives for US cooperation with Egypt had yielded results. Acknowledgement of Sadat’s influence on his policy is packaged in a not entirely convincing anecdote from November 1973:

Several years earlier, I had told Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin that so long as the American policy was simply to frustrate Arab reliance on Soviet support, American and Israeli policies would be identical. But once Arab disillusionment was complete, and once Arab states began to turn to us in a spirit of cooperation, differences in perspective or tactics might well emerge. That moment was now approaching, as least as far as Egypt was concerned. All this produced an almost elemental fear in Israel that the United States might become so committed to a new relationship with the Arab world that its support would become less certain and Israel would lose its only friend.5

This passage provides another example of Kissinger’s persistent efforts to reframe the October War as representing the vindication rather than the collapse of the stonewalling policy he followed between 1969 and 1973. Here, Kissinger repeats this misrepresentation in attempting to account for the strain in American-Israeli relations immediately after the war by drawing contrast between emotional Israeli reactions and his own superior strategic foresight. But at the same time, he acknowledges, albeit in roundabout fashion, that Sadat’s wartime efforts to drive a wedge into the American-Israeli axis had not been entirely wasted, and that this was reflected in Washington’s post-war diplomacy and policies. Although he later insisted that the

5 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, p. 620.
‘the issue, of course, was not even remotely of imposing Egyptian preferences on Israel’, when briefing congressional leaders on his tough late-night sessions with Meir in early November 1973, Kissinger cracked lewd jokes about sex with the septuagenarian, shingles-ridden Prime Minister, and how he had ‘told Sadat that we wanted to get major movement with the consent of Israel, not by raping her… we needed time to convert Israel’.7

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy’s account of proceedings is more convincing:

The October War… had come as a considerable surprise and forced the Nixon Administration to take the Middle East seriously. In fact it was a turning point in the history of the Middle East crisis; after 1973 all American administrations played an active role in the peace process…. It was clear that the October War had drastically changed the US position towards Egypt… As a result US interests were no longer identical with those of Israel. Washington saw that Egypt had a critical role to play in the peace process.8

Fahmy is justified in asserting that the Nixon administration had failed to take Sadat seriously before the October War, and inexplicably, this is a mistake that has been reproduced in the English-language historiography of the period, which also neglects Sadat’s antebellum and wartime diplomacy. When this distortion is carried forward into the post-war period, it casts a particular light on America’s repositioning in the Egypt-Israel dispute. This can be seen in interpretations of the first Kissinger-Sadat meeting on 7 November 1973, framing the questionable thesis that the decisions taken represented an overnight reversal of Egyptian policy in favour of a spontaneous acceptance of Kissinger’s ideas. Even if this thesis was valid, these were hardly Sadat’s first unexpected ‘bold strokes’.9 Sadat had already surprised Washington, Jerusalem, and the world in 1971 with his ‘peace initiative’, in 1972 by expelling Soviet personnel from Egypt, and in 1973 with the October War itself. And these were just the major publicised gestures. Throughout the 1970 to 1973 period he had worked to maintain private diplomatic channels with Washington and to develop mutually beneficial solutions to the Egypt-Israel impasse. Accounts such as those by Hanhimaki, Isaacson, and numerous others, which portray Sadat’s post-war cooperation with Washington

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6 Ibid., p. 621. Original emphasis.
8 Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, pp. 37-38, 51.
9 Isaacson’s phrase, as quoted in the thesis introduction, p. 2.
as a sudden radical departure from his previous approach to Israel and the United States, betray a fundamental misunderstanding of Sadat’s war and its place not just in the Egypt-Israel peace process which developed throughout the 1970s, but also in the Cold War. This oversight is symptomatic of a deeper problem in much work on American-Egyptian relations during this period, that of overlooking American-Egyptian diplomacy throughout 1973, paying any real attention to this critical dimension only in connection with the American-Soviet standoff at the war’s end, and then only in a Cold War context.

Given the centrality of renewed American-Egyptian relations to the post-war peace process (and indeed to the outcome of the war itself) these oversights have left a gap in our understanding. This problem is compounded by the fact that Kissinger, by virtue of authoring the only major contribution extensively engaging with American-Egyptian diplomacy, holds the commanding voice in the area. Some of his claims must be treated with scepticism, if for no other reason than that they contradict what he has said elsewhere. For example, in explaining his immediate rejection of Brezhnev’s suggestion of joint superpower intervention in the late stages of the October War, Kissinger claims that if it had been carried out, the ‘strategy we had laboriously pursued in four years of diplomacy and two weeks of crisis would disintegrate’.\textsuperscript{10} The tension between this statement and his effusive remarks about the hitherto unrecognised strategic vistas opened by Sadat’s messages during the first weeks of war is evident. Whatever credit he may deserve for his diplomatic performance during and after the October War, any claims that this represented a continuation of his simplistic ‘stonewalling’ prior to the war are difficult to take seriously.

In terms of Cold War rivalry with the Soviet Union and the impulse to establish an American-led global order, the Nixon administration had enjoyed an advantageous strategic position in the Middle East from the beginning. The region’s most militarily powerful states, Israel and Iran, were aligned with the US and dependent on America as the source of their military power. Along with Iran, other oil-producing monarchies including Saudi Arabia, the wealthiest and most important, were also aligned with the west and reliant on US protection.

\textsuperscript{10} Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, p. 584.
Middle East headaches for the Nixon administration grew from existing divisions, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the monarchical-republican divide in the Arab world. The radical republics, including Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (but not Colonel Gadhafi’s Libya after his overthrow of King Idris in August 1969) relied on the Soviet Union for political and military support. The Middle East thus seemed to map broadly onto a global Cold War framework, arraying conservative powers within an American sphere of influence against radical powers within a Soviet sphere of influence, and the Nixon White House was initially content to view the region in these terms.

Outsourcing the Middle East to the State Department was essentially a holding action. Nixon hoped that that the Middle East and the State Department could keep one another occupied until such time as he saw fit to engage with the region. In the meantime, maintaining the military balance of power in Israel’s favour, ensuring dominance over Soviet-supplied Egypt and Syria, was a bottom-line policy. But as proud scholars of the ‘realist’ tradition in international relations, Nixon and Kissinger were vulnerable to the seductions of military power, believing that time was on their side as long as the military edge was maintained and that those dissatisfied with the status quo could complain, but other than capitulation to their negotiating demands, had few other options. Kissinger emphasises that his policy was to wait until some Arab power realised that relying on a Soviet-supported military solution to the problem of recovering the occupied territories was futile, as only with American political support could the Arab hope to recover their territory, but seems to have given the Arab-Israeli conflict little thought beyond this prior to October 1973.

Sadat, however, had given the matter considerable thought before ascending to the Egyptian premiership and had recognised that partnership with the US was necessary to recover Egyptian territory. But where Sadat differed from Kissinger and Meir was his insistence that not just Egypt, but Israel too, would have to change its attitudes and policies. While he was willing to make peace with Israel, Israel would have to relent on its determination to annex Egyptian land. Egypt was ready for immediate *de facto* peace with Israel and *de jure* peace once Israel withdrew from all Egyptian occupied territories. This was Sadat’s take on UN Security Resolution 242’s ‘land for peace’ formula. Sadat was clear that insofar as Egyptian land was concerned,
‘territories’ meant ‘all territories’ rather ‘some territories’. But as to whether Israel would return some or all territories under its control in the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the West Bank, and what security arrangements would pertain there in the future, this was for negotiation between Israel and Syrian and Palestinian representatives. Under Sadat, Egypt took only a spectator’s interest, and, beyond making clear that it was not Cairo, was indifferent to the question of who spoke for Palestinians, whether it be the PLO, the Jordanian crown, or some other body.

This is not to say that Sadat was the exclusive author of the concepts which guided the peace process. ‘Land for peace’ had been enshrined in UN Resolution 242 since November 1967, and the idea of staged withdrawal had been forwarded, at the latest, in Soviet proposals presented to the United States in late 1968, and thus preceded the premierships of Nixon, Sadat, and Meir. But Sadat was the leader who drew existent ideas together with his own to present a coherent and mutually beneficial strategy that Egypt, Israel, and the United States could collaborate in implementing. Western historiography has presented the first Kissinger-Sadat meeting as a decisive turning point, as Sadat finally agreed to conform to Kissinger’s regional strategy, but as shown throughout this thesis, something close to the opposite is true.

Implementation of the next phase of Sadat’s strategy through the elaborate façade of the Geneva Peace Conference not only put official form on the outer patina of a general regional settlement he had envisaged as part of the two-tier peace process, but also secured Israeli, Jordanian, Soviet, and UN endorsement of the format, with Syrian acquiescence. Crucially from Israel’s perspective, Geneva excluded the Palestinian Organisation (PLO), and explicitly restricted the UN to a ceremonial role. Whether the Jordanians and Soviets believed all that was promised from Geneva was largely immaterial, as with Egypt and Israel coordinating with the US, Geneva was the only game in town, and for the Soviets represented the best hope of retaining relevance and re-establishing dwindling regional influence. The Egypt-Israel disengagement negotiations and agreement in January 1974, facilitated by Kissinger’s first exercise in ‘shuttle diplomacy’, launched the next stage of Sadat’s strategy, a move towards full Egypt-Israel peace, separate from the remainder of the Arab world.
With the Egypt-Israel front stabilised, the ongoing problems of the volatility on the Israel-Syria ceasefire lines, and the oil production cuts and anti-US oil embargo, demanded immediate attention. In a sustained diplomatic performance that attracted widespread acclaim for ‘Super-K’, Kissinger managed to secure the lifting of the embargo on 18 March 1974 and an Israel-Syria disengagement military disengagement on 29 May.\(^\text{11}\) Although the three-zone Sinai disengagement provided a model for agreement, and Israel and Syria had a mutual interest in disengagement, bargaining proved difficult and bitter, with both sides continuing to shell one another as Kissinger shuttled back and forth.\(^\text{12}\) Syrian president Hafiz al-Assad would not contemplate direct negotiations with Israel at any level. He refused to release Israeli POWs, and would supply release a list of prisoners and allow Red Cross access only in exchange for concessions on withdrawal distance and force limitations. Unlike Sadat, Assad had waged war with the intention of recovering territory by force alone, and showed little sign of seeing the disengagement as a step towards peace with Israel, or indeed any form of recognition or normalisation in relations. In contrast with Sadat’s continuing moves towards peace with Israel throughout the remainder of the 1970s, Assad instead engaged in a massive military build-up, attempting to achieve ‘military parity’ with Israel and to dominate Jordan, Lebanon and the PLO, and denouncing the Camp David Accords and Egypt-Israel peace treaty of 1978 and 1979.\(^\text{13}\)

Despite its limitations, the Egypt-Syria disengagement extended a winning streak of unprecedented achievements in American Middle East diplomacy, inspiring Nixon to embark on a triumphant personal tour of the region in June, just weeks before tendering his resignation on 9 August 1974. The Syrian disengagement also marked Golda Meir’s last diplomatic achievement, although the Israeli Prime Minister had offered her own resignation several weeks in advance. The interim report of the Agranat Commission, a national inquiry established to investigate failings leading up to the Yom Kippur War was published on 1 April 1974. The report had exonerated political leaders, placing blame solely on military and intelligence services commanders, but this was received with outrage in Israel, provoking mass

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\(^{12}\) Kaufman, *The Arab Middle East and the United States*, p. 90
\(^{13}\) Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, pp. 421-424.
demonstrations calling for Meir and Dayan’s resignations.\textsuperscript{14} Although re-elected only three weeks earlier, Meir resigned on 10 April, effective once disengagement on the Syrian front was achieved. She was succeeded by former Ambassador to Washington Yitzhak Rabin, who did not re-appoint Dayan. In early June, the tough Dayan-Meir team, which had long dominated Israeli foreign and security policy, was replaced by the fractious trio of Rabin, Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon, and Defence Minister Shimon Peres, a group frequently criticised for infighting and consequent indecisiveness.\textsuperscript{15} This marked the beginning of a generational shift in Israeli politics away from the dominance of an old guard Labour elite and towards more rightist politics, confirmed by the victory of Menachem Begin’s Likud party in 1977 general elections.\textsuperscript{16}

Regionally, the first Egypt-Israel disengagement agreement in January 1974 and official restoration of US-Egypt diplomatic relations on 28 February were symbolic of the newly-emergent order, with the US acting as exclusive mediator between two key regional clients. The October War realignments proved durable despite Nixon’s exit and a generational shift in Israeli leadership and would define the direction of the Middle East peace process for the remainder of the 1970s, as Egypt marched towards peace with Israel, leaving increasingly outraged erstwhile partners behind. A second Sinai disengagement agreement (Sinai II) was signed in September 1975, with Kissinger, who was among the very few of Nixon’s inner circle to retain his job after Gerald Ford took over, again acting as intermediary, and the US once more undertaking public and secret commitments to both sides in order to underwrite the agreement. Ford’s successor, Jimmy Carter, presided over the Camp David Accords in 1978 and the signing of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979.

By the end of the decade, Sadat, who, in his dealings with Washington at least, had seldom baulked at the price of separating Egypt from fellow Arabs, had implemented his strategic goals of ending his country’s conflict with Israel, ending dependence on

\textsuperscript{14} Eriksson, ‘Israel and the October War’, p. 43; De Martino, ‘Clashing Narratives of the October War’, p. 235.


the Soviet Union, and above all recovering every inch of Egyptian territory seized in 1967. The new order he had done so much to establish proved durable enough to last at least a generation, until his successor, Hosni Mubarak, was ousted in 2011, but its future remains uncertain at the time of writing. The Arab Spring has revealed the critical weakness of the post-October War Egypt-Israel settlement, namely that the Egyptian, Israeli, and US governments, then and subsequently, re-invested in a Middle East strongman system, instituting a peace between government elites rather than between peoples. Although hailed as a prophet of peace in the west, Sadat perpetuated his own populist and militarised iconography in the Arab world as the self-styled ‘hero of the crossing’ until the moment of his death while leading the annual October War victory parade in 1981, shot down by the militant organisation Islamic Jihad in protest against his separate peace with Israel and perceived abandonment of his fellow Arabs and co-religionists.\(^{17}\)

Sadat’s war is sometimes cited as an example par excellence of Clausewitz’s dictum that war is the continuation of politics by other means.\(^{18}\) Less frequently cited is Clausewitz’s conception of war as a struggle between rivals to impose their will. Yet in the struggle to impose rival visions of a future Sinai, the military defeat of his forces in October 1973 notwithstanding, Sadat emerged the clear victor over Meir and her allies, including Kissinger. While Sadat implemented his strategy for defection from east to west Cold War camps over the mid-late 1970s, in doing so it can be said that as a quid pro quo he secured American defection from Israel’s to Egypt’s cause in the struggle for mastery of the Sinai, recruiting Kissinger himself as his ‘ambassador’ to Israel.\(^{19}\) Meir had failed in her attempts to overthrow Sadat’s predecessor by means of ‘deep penetration’ bombing in early 1970, and four years later found herself unable to continue in office, feeling a burden of responsibility for Israel’s greatest national tragedy and trauma bearing too heavily on her elderly frame. Her death in 1978 spared her having to see the entire Sinai returned to Egyptian sovereignty, with no

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\(^{17}\) De Martino, ‘Clashing Narratives of the October War’, p. 245; Meital ‘The Origins of Sadat’s Volte-Face’, p. 46.


\(^{19}\) Kissinger’s successor as National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, referred to Kissinger as Sadat’s ‘ambassador’. Stein, ‘Evolving a Diplomatic Legacy From the War’, p. 213.
border changes, the prevention of which she had made a raison d’etre of her premiership.

Kissinger, with good reason, is depicted as a central figure in the Egypt-Israel peace process, and while he received many plaudits for his efforts from commentators of the day, particularly in 1974, he has also come in for a good deal of criticism from subsequent historians. Although acting largely on borrowed ideas, by the time of leaving office Kissinger had made major advances towards his aim of delivering peace to Israel and land to Egypt, succeeding where Moscow had failed and in so doing enhancing American regional influence and prestige at Soviet expense. The costs of more adversarial regional superpower relations and both Damascus and the PLO drawing closer to Moscow were predictable, but Kissinger is also accused of damaging superpower relations globally, as, according to Hanhimaki,

> while focusing so intently on the situation in the Middle East, Kissinger was undermining, in the eyes of Soviet leaders, the ground rules of détente. He would pay the price later, as the Soviets would pay scant attention to Kissinger’s protest of Soviet action in other regional conflicts... By 1975, as Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos would fall under communist rule, the price for the relegation of Indochina—an area that had formerly been so central for Kissinger’s diplomacy—to the position of a sideshow would become painfully clear.

While Kissinger did no doubt violate détente in the eyes of the Soviets, the supposed consequences of this transgression appear as speculative counterfactuals. The argument holds that if Kissinger had kept his distance from Sadat, and instead mediated US relations with Egypt through the Soviet Union and Geneva, then, respecting ‘linkage’, Moscow would have come to Washington’s aid in Indochina, helping to rescue its failed policies, and that with Russian assistance the collapse of unstable regimes in Hanoi and Saigon might have been averted. It is further argued that détente might have survived, averting the dangers of the ‘second Cold War’ in the early 1980s.

These are far-reaching claims, which are neither provable nor disprovable, and apparently pay little attention to other factors and developments leading to the onset of the second Cold War (for example the rise of the ‘Reagan Revolution’ in the United States or the declining Soviet economy from the mid 1970s). The line of argument

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21 Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect*, pp. 326, 331
also pays little regard to Egyptian agency or to ‘Third World’ self-determination in general. In addition to arguing that superpower cooperation could and would have averted North Vietnam’s victory over the south, it is apparently assumed that the same American-Soviet condominium could and should have overruled the Egyptian president’s strategic and foreign policy decisions without regard to consequences for the United States—such as the likely termination of Sadat’s presidency and likely replacement with a more ‘radical’ alternative. Overall, the existing critique of Kissinger-Sadat strategic collaboration which grounds itself in détente counterfactuals seems questionable.

A more substantial critique is that in his post-war diplomacy, Kissinger failed to tackle the wider Arab-Israeli conflict, allowing the Palestinians to be completely excluded from the peace process, and thus failing to tackle the real roots of the Arab-Israeli dispute, the strife between the two communities in Israel-Palestine.22 Another, closely related criticism is that Kissinger’s ‘step by step’ diplomacy was basically opportunististic, muddling through by taking chances to secure partial agreements as they arose, but lacking an overall guiding strategy or vision.23 Yaqub offers a conspiratorial variant (and highly flattering critique), arguing that these apparent shortcomings did not represent oversights, but rather Kissinger’s grand design, as

For the price of some modest concessions on the Sinai Peninsula, and merely a token one on the Golan Heights, he engineered Egypt’s effective removal from the Arab-Israeli conflict. This diplomatic coup would, in the years to come, permit Israel to consolidate its occupation of Syrian and Palestinian land, all but precluding a return to the 1967 borders. In the process, Kissinger lured Egypt away from its quasi alliance with the Soviet Union, depriving Moscow of a major asset in the Middle East and weakening its overall position in the Cold War.24

This claim, that Kissinger was disinterested in Middle East settlement before October 1973 but overnight masterminded both Egypt’s removal from the Arab-Israeli conflict and Soviet orbit, is difficult to accept. But nor is it the case that he merely lacked a strategy in the mid-late 1970s and simply moved successively from one disengagement opportunity to another. It is, rather, that the Nixon Administration lacked any coherent Middle East strategy from the beginning of its engagement in

1969, and was thus vulnerable to being herded in one direction or another by two key actively engaged regional players, Egypt and Israel. Kissinger was only too willing to conform to Israel’s preferred line up until October 1973, and Nixon, though periodically voicing concern, failed to impose any alternative during the first three years of his presidency, before formally committing the US to alignment behind Israel during 1972 and 1973. When this joint policy was overturned by the Egypt-Syria surprise attack, Washington was left grasping for a strategy, and soon found itself in alignment behind Egypt, as Sadat’s grand design seemed to present the best and only available way forward. The collapse of the tactically-minded US-Israeli approach in October 1973, to be replaced for the remainder of the 1970s by the strategic direction pursued by Sadat since the earliest weeks and months of his premiership offers a pointed illustration of Sun Tzu’s aphorism that strategy without tactics is the slowest road to victory, while tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.

The peace process which was implemented throughout the remainder of the 1970s, a bilateral Egypt-Israel peace rather than any form of wider peace, was defined and confined by the strategic parameters established in late 1973 and early 1974, and rooted in concepts developed years previously. Sadat’s Sinai-focused strategy ensured that, after the first Syria disengagement, further ‘step by step’ progress would be made on the Egyptian front by closing off other available options. During 1974 Kissinger repeatedly warned Rabin that he would have to negotiate with either Hussein or Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) leader Yasser Arafat over the West Bank, and to ‘For God’s sake do something with Hussein while he is still one of the players’, but on 28 October 1974, the Rabat Arab Summit endorsed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, divesting Jordan of any negotiating role on behalf of the Palestinians. Rather than forcing Israel to negotiate with the PLO, this decision effectively ended prospects of a disengagement agreement in the West Bank, as both Israel and the PLO refused to recognise or negotiate with one another. A second Sinai disengagement was the only remaining avenue for the US to continue on its set course of ‘step by step’

diplomacy, a situation which suited both Rabin and Sadat very well. Had Jordan been recognised as a legitimate representative, the prospect of negotiating away West Bank territory carried significant political risks for Rabin, while Sadat preferred to keep American peacemakers’ attentions focused on him and his goal of recovering the Sinai.  

The second Sinai disengagement agreement, achieved only after the humiliations of a failed second round of Aswan-Jerusalem in March 1975 and a very public reversal after three months of ‘reassessment’ of policy towards Israel, demonstrated how limited the Ford Administration’s options actually were in pursuing a Middle East peace process. Besides ‘step by step’, no other approach appeared feasible, and besides another step in the Sinai, no other route was open. Sadat could continue to command American attention in the Arab world, and Israel could demand the enormous price of a military aid package priced at over $2.6 billion dollars for its participation in the staged process to which the Americans committed their prestige. Sinai II had recovered 10% of the Sinai for Egypt, but in the wider Arab world had only served to increase Sadat’s isolation. Syria and the PLO were increasingly strident in their denunciation of Sadat, but also continued to reject recognition of, or negotiation with, Israel.

Jimmy Carter, a president who arrived in the Oval Office determined to make a historic contribution to peace in the Middle East, also found himself confined by strategic parameters established by Egypt and Israel in the early 1970s. Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem to address the Knesset in November 1977 revived the flagging Egypt-Israel peace process, but was seen by King Hussein of Jordan, a moderate, western oriented leader, as an act of particular treachery. This was not because Hussein had adopted the view of Al-Assad’s rejectionist Syria, railing against outrageous violation of the ‘Arab taboo’, but because Sadat had short-circuited prospects for a reconvened Geneva conference and promising possibilities for Israeli disengagement from the

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26 As Kenneth Stein observes, ‘Kissinger... perhaps did not see Sadat’s planned intention to bolt the door on any Israeli-Jordanian and Israeli-Palestinian negotiation by his advocacy... of the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people’. Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 163.
27 Aronson, Conflict & Bargaining in the Middle East, p. 242; Isaacson, Kissinger, p. 631; Lenczowski, American Presidents and the Middle East, pp. 147-150; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 243-244; Sheehan, The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger, pp. 189-190; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, p. 179.
West Bank, leaving Carter with little option but to once again focus on a bilateral Egypt-Israel Sinai deal. The King explained to Carter’s National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, why Sadat’s action was a grave affront to Jordanians in general and to him personally in the following terms:

The visit to Jerusalem under occupation had great religious significance. My grandfather is buried there. He was involved in the Arab revolt against colonial rule and he died because he would not compromise. We lost Jerusalem in 1967 under Egyptian command. We knew we would lose, but we went into that war anyway. Under Egyptian command and responsibility the West Bank was lost. The Sadat visit was a very, very big shock.

Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem, while advancing Egypt’s cause, also marked the end of hopes for a multilateral peace process. Sadat promised Carter that he would represent general Arab interests at to secure the Camp David accords in 1978, but by the time of the Egypt-Israel peace treaty in 1979, the lip service paid to a wider regional peace process had grown thin indeed.

Whatever his aspirations and whatever American hopes at the outset of the Egypt-Israel peace process, Sadat was unable to lead the Arab world behind him to peace and reconciliation with the United States and Israel, and instead became an outcast in the Arab world. Egypt was expelled from the Arab League, with nineteen of its twenty-two members enacting economic and political sanctions, and all Arab countries with the exceptions of Oman and Sudan had severed diplomatic relations with Egypt by May 1979. Israel formally annexed the Golan Heights two months after Sadat’s assassination, underlining the fact that while Egypt and Syria had fought together, Sadat’s was truly a separate peace.

Implementation of Sadat’s strategy had won Egypt back its Sinai territories, won Israel peace with Egypt, and won Egyptian clientship for the United States, but little more. Cairo’s rapprochement with Jerusalem and Washington did nothing to advance peace between Israel and the Syrians or the Palestinians, and was actually regressive to peace between Israel and Jordan. Nor did it advance general acceptance of the US role in the Arab world, or visions of American regional hegemony, however defined.

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28 Ashton, *King Hussein of Jordan*, pp. 196-197
The limits of the American strategic achievement in the Middle East during the 1970s were the limitations of Sadat’s peace, which had never been conceived as a regional pax Americana, but rather in opposition to a *faux* general settlement, a strategy focused on the parochial goal of recovering the Sinai for Egypt, regardless of the costs.
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