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THE TEST OF DÉTENTE:

SOVIET-AMERICAN RELATIONS AND THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

by

David Zierler

B.S. New York University, 2000

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

The University of Montana

2004

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Zierler, David. M.A. 2004

The Test of Détente: Soviet-American Relations and the Yom Kippur War (232 pp.)

Director: Paul Gordon Lauren, Ph.D. PL

By the early 1970s, the détente, or relaxation of tensions, between the United States and the Soviet Union had reached its apex, heralded by the summits of 1972 and 1973. The shared impetus for détente was strong. Moscow's achievement of nuclear parity during the 1960s effectively neutralized the American nuclear deterrent. Both countries agreed that the confrontational tactics of the earlier Cold War period could serve neither the interests of world peace, nor the objectives of either superpower in its drive for global supremacy. Additionally, the leaders of each country found great political value in détente, which explains why neither superpower held to a strict interpretation of the agreements each nation signed at the summits. As the first major Cold War proxy conflict to follow the détente period, the Yom Kippur War

As the first major Cold War proxy conflict to follow the detente period, the Fom Kippur War of 1973, fought between Israel (supported by the United States) and Egypt and Syria (supported by the Soviet Union), put détente to "the test." Israel's crushing victory in the June War of 1967, which resulted in the capture of surrounding Arab territories, polarized the Arab-Israeli conflict along Cold War lines. The Soviet Union attempted to consolidate its position as patron of its Arab clients through massive military support. American foreign policy moved to "freeze" Arab radicalization by guaranteeing Israeli hegemony until both sides would agree to negotiations under United States auspices. The Arabs' success in the first days of the Yom Kippur War caused a revolution in Israel's defense posture, and Washington's Middle East policy. With Israel badly battered, and Egypt planted in the Sinai and eager to shed its dependence on Moscow, the stage was thus set for Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, which resulted ultimately in a final peace between the two arch-enemies. This major American victory had détente to thank, as Kissinger took advantage of the wide diplomatic latitude created by relaxed superpower tensions. The nuclear crisis at the end of the war demonstrated both the limits and the ultimate success of détente: neither superpower proved willing to abandon passively its Cold War policies, yet each shared a fundamental belief in the inadmissability of nuclear war.

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To Aviva Akselrad

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Acknowledgments

This project was anything but a solo effort, and I would like to thank the many people who devoted their time, wisdom, advice, and patience to my work. I could not have asked for a finer thesis committee. Dr. Paul Lauren and Dr. Michael Mayer saw this project from beginning to end. I spent more hours in their offices than their busy schedules should have permitted, and the professional, academic, and "life" skills I learned from them will stay with me for the rest of my life. Dr. Forest Grieves opened to me the murky world of political science, and I hope to show him one day that I am capable of making an argument in five pages or less.

The Department of History boasts an unbelievably talented faculty, and I have benefitted greatly from seminars and classes taught by Dr. Mehrdad Kia, Dr. Frederick Skinner, Dr. Harry Fritz, and Dr. Janet Klein. Diane Rapp provided major administrative help, and her wonderful personality is the focal point of the department.

I am lucky to be surrounded by an excellent group of fellow graduate students. I would like to thank Allison Fromm and Rachel Swartz for all of their insightful comments, and it has been a pleasure to survive graduate school alongside John Kilgour, Lee Behrens, Alan Roe, Nic Mink, Annie Lamar, Zoe Ann Stoltz, Jon Wlasiuk, and Sam Bernofsky.

My (newly doubled) family has been completely supportive of my academic endeavors, and I can only repay them by coming back to the East Coast. I would like to thank my father, Norman Zierler, in particular, for teaching me to love books, and for showing me what it means to be a scholar. Finally, I want to thank my fiancé, Aviva Akselrad. Her advice – scholarly and secretarial – was crucial for every stage of this two-year project. She has an uncanny ability to keep me both grounded and full of energy. In many ways, this thesis has two authors.

Chapter I

Introduction

The Yom Kippur War occupies a special place in the bloody landscape of Cold War proxy conflicts. If the intensity of war could be measured as a ratio of firepower divided into the duration over which it was expended, then Israel's two-front battle against Syria and Egypt in October of 1973 claims the dubious distinction as the most intense conflict of the Cold War system.

Unlike so many other sub-theater wars that invariably pitted American arms versus Soviet arms with guerilla-oriented tactics, the Yom Kippur War was fought in the European (even "old fashioned") tradition of open confrontation between massive land armies. The tank war in the Sinai front alone rivaled the greatest battles between the Nazi and Soviet armies of World War II. But this Arab-Israeli confrontation came with some Cold War accouterments that were unknown to the Great Power rivalries in the European theater. The Yom Kippur War provided an environment where some of the most sophisticated weaponry in the world could be tested in battlefield conditions. Neither superpower was prepared to allow its rival to project a more impressive show of force. This explains, in part, why the fourth Arab-Israeli war saw the largest weapons airlift in the history of conflict.

But superpower "flexing" was only a symptom of the larger political ramifications of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By 1973, the northern tier of the Middle East had become split along bipolar Cold War lines. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had vied for political dominance in the Middle East since the end of World War II. Its oil riches and geo-strategic centrality would be important in the global competition. Moscow had sought, since 1955, to increase its prestige in the area by presenting itself to the Arabs as a fellow socialist, anti-Zionist, big brother of sorts. If the Arabs wanted to challenge Israel – or even threaten its existence – they would need Soviet weapons to do so. The Arab-Soviet relationship, however, was a marriage of mutual convenience, nothing more. For all of the inter-Arab rivalries in the postwar era, the Arab world found unity in anti-Communism at least as much as in anti-Zionism. The Soviets, for their part, claimed to support the Arabs on anti-imperialist grounds, although the reality of their motives rested on simple power politics. In Egypt, Moscow saw both its greatest coup with the 1955 weapons deal to Gamal Nasser, and its ignominious fall after the Yom Kippur War, when Anwar Sadat extricated Egypt's dependence on Soviet weapons by restoring diplomatic relations with the United States.

The United States never wanted to be the exclusive supporter of Israel that it had become by 1973. Like the Soviets, American Middle East policy courted Arab favor in the form of weapon transfers and economic support. Yet, in the black-and-white world of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Washington increasingly found itself backing Israel's interests. This relationship, too, found its basis in amoral political expedience far more than any ideological impetus to support a fellow democratic nation. One of the most fascinating policy debates in Washington during the Cold War focused on whether or not Israel facilitated or hindered America's anti-Soviet interests. By the end of the Yom Kippur War, the debate found a satisfactory answer. Egypt chose American diplomacy over Soviet arms as a means to achieve its goals, once Washington found that it could support Israel without necessarily alienating the Arab enemies surrounding it. A new problem that arose from the Yom Kippur War had more to do with economics than power politics. The Persian Gulf states saw in the war a convenient pretext to withhold oil from the industrialized nations, thus putting a pan-Arab face on a prudent business decision. The ensuing energy shortages quickly replaced Soviet predominance as the most threatening security issue to come from the Arab world.

The stakes, then, were extremely high for both superpowers by October 1973, and as the historical record indicates, both the United States and the Soviet Union acted decisively to prevent the other from gaining unilateral advantage. Yet, the situation was not like Cuba or Berlin of the past decade. Strategic parity, achieved by Moscow as it caught up with the American nuclear arsenal over the course of the 1960s, and the excessively tense crises that had pushed the superpowers to the brink of nuclear war, called for a new framework to mitigate the superpower competition. The Soviet-American détente did not seek to end the Cold War; it merely rested on the shared assumption that the crises that would inevitably develop in Third World zones of competition ought never to deteriorate to the point of direct nuclear confrontation.

The Yom Kippur War – the first major proxy conflict to erupt after the Soviet-American détente summits of 1972 and 1973 – thus underscored the competing, and sometimes mutually exclusive superpower impetuses of the Cold War. As a war which both Moscow and Washington correctly perceived as crucial in the ongoing global competition, the fourth Arab-Israeli confrontation brought a fundamental Cold War question to a head: how far could the superpowers go in furthering their own interests without risking nuclear war?

This thesis seeks to answer that question in as comprehensive a manner as possible. To do so requires an examination of four unique international relationships, each of which serves as the major topic of each chapter. The author is most interested in how nations balance force and diplomacy as a means to further their security interests. This interplay serves as a guide for understanding both Cold War rivalry at the global level, and client-patron relations at the regional level.

Chapter 1 broadly introduces the Soviet-American détente. It traces the shared goal of relaxed tensions from the birth of the Soviet Union through the Yom Kippur War. This chapter seeks to create a framework for how "to think" about superpower behavior in the events leading up to the Yom Kippur War. The seeming contradiction between the proclamations of the Soviet-American détente, and the actions each took in its quest for Middle East predominance, has led the author to examine détente beyond a superficial reading of the major summit documents of 1972 and 1973. Détente, or the relaxation of tensions, and its Russian equivalent, razyradka, was larger and richer than the ambivalent, and somewhat politically-driven interpretations of it in the early 1970s. If the Yom Kippur War put détente to "the test," as the title of this thesis suggests, then détente must be understood in its proper, and full, historical context. In this first chapter the author has attempted to combine his training in both political science and historical methodology, out of the belief that the two fields intersect at the subdiscipline of international relations. Chapter 1 combines analysis with historical narrative to define détente both as a creator and product of superpower relations in the middle six decades of the 20th century.

Chapters 2 and 3 (Soviet-Egyptian and American-Israeli relations, respectively) focus on the client-patron relationships of the four actors, both of which began in the early Cold War period, and culminated in the diplomatic revolutions wrought during and after the Yom Kippur War. These are "sister" chapters in more than one sense – they are organized in the same style, but the content of each chapter, examining the particularities of the two client-patron relationships, yields fascinating similarities in national behavior. Strategic self-interest emerges as the dominant consideration of each of the four nations' security policies. Likewise, each international relationship is characterized far more by conflict than harmony.

Chapter 4 examines American policy in the immediate postwar period. In this final chapter, the Soviet Union receives only passing reference for the simple fact that its Middle East standing was severely downgraded as a result of the Yom Kippur War. Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy serves to combine basic truisms of client-patron relations and the superpower détente; in a way, Kissinger's performance shatters the myths discussed throughout the first three chapters. The evolution of Soviet-Egyptian and American-Israeli relations were neither inevitable nor unbreakable. Claims made to the contrary were generally ideological in nature, and designed to obscure each nation's actual motives. In short, the United States did not "have to" become Israel's guarantor to the exclusion of the Arabs – events leading up to that situation were created either by chance or lack of choice.

Kissinger's bold shuttle diplomacy emphasizes the basic meaning of the Soviet-American détente. Contrary to the warm personal relations between the leaders of the two superpowers and the high-minded agreements made between them, détente remained what it always had been: an attempt to reduce the likelihood of nuclear war so that the political nature of the global Cold War competition could continue. This fact was realized dramatically when the Soviet Union could only watch passively as its major client in the Middle East effectively neutralized Moscow's influence of the previous twenty years.

Finally, a word of caution. This thesis avoids any grand conclusions on the larger implications of the Yom Kippur War on détente. While the war did indeed test the efficacy of détente, it did not necessarily produce a conclusive outcome by which to determine if détente "failed" or "succeeded." This is true for two reasons. First, while the Middle East was a major theater of Cold War competition, it alone would not, and could not, serve as the basis of the globally oriented Soviet-American relationship. Second, the ambivalent nature of both détente and the client-state relationships resists simple cause and effect analyses. There is no single and authoritative definition of détente which can serve as a barometer of superpower behavior, and the Arabs and Israelis only concerned themselves with détente when it was in their direct interest to do so. Neither side preferred to be agents of their superpower interests, and their actions – largely taken without the consent of their patrons – do not fit into the already imprecise nature of a détente framework.

The task of this thesis, then, is not to find conclusive answers, but, rather, to elucidate the complexity of a global and regional international framework.

Chapter II

Détente: Global Peace, Local Conflict

Saki Dockrill, a political scientist, captured perfectly the essence of détente: it is "an elusive concept, and, as it evolved during the Cold War, it was not about achieving 'peace,' if 'peace' meant resolving the conflict itself."¹ In one sentence, Dockrill identified the three major elements that constitute détente: its complexity; long history; and most important, its mitigating, as opposed to curative, approach to the Soviet-American Cold War.

In order to examine the interplay of détente and the state of Arab-Israeli relations surrounding the Yom Kippur War of 1973, it is necessary to frame the most intensive period of relaxed tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union in its proper historical context. Détente, as it existed in the Richard Nixon-Leonid Brezhnev period of 1969-1973, emerged as a moderate policy that strove to ensure that the ongoing superpower conflict would never devolve to the point of nuclear war. Rooted in profound ideological, political, and economic differences, the Cold War was a global competition that by nature could not end until the collapse of either the American or the Soviet system. Beyond the fundamental agreement that nuclear war was an inadmissable method of advancing the interests of either superpower, both nations devised their strategy as a waiting game by which an eventual erosion of power would be advanced by the accumulated global influence policies of one side over the other. Through the auspices of improved communications, summit meetings, technological exchange, and the like, détente merely codified the peaceful nature of this global waiting game.

¹Saki Dockrill, "Introduction," in Wilfried Loth, <u>Overcoming the Cold War: A History of</u> <u>Détente, 1950-1991</u> (New York: Palgrave, 2002), vii.

Extreme interpretations of détente – on one side, that Nixon and Brezhnev managed to "end" the Cold War; on the other, that détente was nothing more than a mirage cynically designed to consolidate the domestic base of both leaders – fail to explain the nature of superpower action in Third World conflicts, albeit between each other or involving their respective clients in the region.

Contrary to some contemporary opinions, the Nixon-Brezhnev détente did not, then, significantly alter the nature of the Cold War. The historian Ronald Steel, writing in 1972, exemplifies the most inflated interpretation of détente:

The Cold War is over because few serious people any longer believe that it exists. At a time when then president of the United States renders homage to the Communist rulers of China by traveling to their court in Peking, and when Washington seeks Moscow's help in the onerous, and increasingly tiresome, burden of developing the impoverished states of the Third World, it is obvious that the old faith has eroded and that the old vocabulary is obsolete.²

Steel based his argument on genuine geopolitical changes afoot in the early 1970s that would have been unthinkable in the years immediately following World War II. Indeed, Nixon's visit to China in 1972 was historic, but Steel failed to couch the meaning of the trip as a method, in part, of exploiting the Soviet fear of a possible Sino-American entente. As for the supposedly collaborative nature of dealing with the "onerous" and "tiresome" burden of the Third World, Steel presumably referred (he did not elaborate) to the Soviets' hand in two areas: mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict – which succeeded only in arming the Arabs to force levels sufficient to launch a war against an intransigent Israel – and Moscow's highly tentative offer to help end the Vietnam War by putting pressure on its North Vietnamese clients, who were also sufficiently armed with Russian weapons to continue aggression. Such actions hardly constituted a

²Ronald Steel, "Introduction," in Walter Lippmann, <u>The Cold War</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), vii.

meaningful relationship with the United States on the basis of managing a peaceful developing world. Steel had nothing to say of the Indo-Pakistani war of December 1971, and of course he may be forgiven for writing without the benefit of hindsight; whereas the Yom Kippur War of 1973 and the war in Angola of 1975-1976 challenged the viability of détente, the war in Afghanistan of 1979 collapsed the framework entirely. If the Cold War, as Steel claimed, was over *before* each of these brutal wars occurred, the question is begged: if this was not Cold War, what was?

In a similar vein, the scholars Charles Gati and Toby Trister Gati wrote, "compared to the explicit antagonisms and relative simplicity of the Cold War era, American-Soviet relations entered a somewhat relaxed and certainly more complex phase in the 1970s."³ Like Steel, Gati and Gati viewed the 1970s détente as a distinct era succeeding (as opposed to being included in) the old Cold War system. One is reminded of the critic Robert Kagan's argument against the nostalgia of alleged past simplicity. In a 1998 *New Republic* review of A *Tangled Web*, written by former Kennedy official William Bundy, Kagan wrote, "The historical fallacy that most pervades discussion of American foreign policy these days is that it was all so much simpler during the Cold War....This, of course, is nonsense."⁴ Although Gati and Gati were not romanticizing the supposedly bygone Cold War era, they were certainly guilty of the oversimplified demarcations Kagan warned against.

These "revolutionary" interpretations of détente were common among government officials as well. In congressional testimony, David E. Mark, a State Department intelligence

³Charles Gati and Toby Trister Gati, <u>The Debate Over Détente</u> (New York: Foreign Policy Association Press, 1977), 3.

⁴Robert Kagan, "Disestablishment," *The New Republic*, August 17-24, 1998. Although Kagan's review is extremely negative, he did not specifically direct this argument against Bundy.

officer, referred to "a new, if very imperfect, world order [that]...has laid the ground rules for peaceful, if not always harmonious, intercourse between the Free World and the Soviet sphere."⁵ Mark's characterization reflected an honest ambiguity inherent in the concept of détente itself. If, in 1971, détente was being hailed as a "new world order" (always a suspect phrase) this fact was more a product of a politically charged domestic atmosphere than indicative of any geopolitical reality. Furthermore, the concept of a "very imperfect" new world order defies logic; a more cautious phrasing may have illustrated the strategy of détente more clearly.

On the whole, contemporary characterizations that hailed détente as a comprehensive shift past the Cold War were exceptions rather than the norm. Marshall Shulman, a scholar of the Cold War, addressed what he called a "confusion" due to the

ambiguities over the word détente. Some had taken it to mean a qualitative change from the kind of relationship which existed over the Cold War—a rapprochement; a common approach to international problems based upon common values, interests, and objectives. My view is that this is too broad a use of the word, and that it does not bear any realistic resemblance to the relationship that exists. I believe a more restricted definition is required, and that it might make matters clearer to use the term 'limited Détente.' The essential characteristic of the present Soviet policy, wether we call it 'limited détente' or 'peaceful coexistence,' is that it offers the possibility of a partial codification of the terms of competition between the two countries.⁶

If, somehow, the global superpower competition had indeed moved beyond the early Cold War, as Shulman argued, then the qualitative change in East-West relations must be interpreted in the most limited of terms. In this sense, détente did not usher in an end to the basis of an ongoing Soviet-American conflict; it simply recognized that this conflict would continue without resorting to nuclear force.

⁵David E. Mark, as cited in United States, Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: The Cold War: Origins and Developments</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 56-57.

⁶Marshall Shulman, as cited in United States, Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Détente</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 3.

The emphasis on avoiding nuclear war during the Nixon-Brezhnev era owed its existence to a long history of advocates warning against the ghastly nature of such a conflict. If the basis of characterizing the Cold War as past history by the early 1970s rested on shared nuclear fears, it is a blurry one indeed. The real transition lay in a growing urgency to establish nuclear-free tensions as a result of the Soviet-American nuclear parity which did not exist in the years immediately following World War II, and the balance remained extremely lopsided in America's favor until the late 1960s. In the Western perspective, the Nixon-Brezhnev détente formed as the realization of a Soviet nuclear capability transformed from a hypothetical possibility to reality. This long-standing fear was most powerfully enunciated by Winston S. Churchill in his famous "Iron Curtain" speech delivered in Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946. He declared,

It would nevertheless be wrong and imprudent to entrust the secret knowledge or experience of the atomic bomb, which the United States, Great Britain, and Canada now share, to the world organization, while it is still in its infancy. It would be criminal madness to cast it adrift in this still agitated and un-united world. No one in any country has slept less well in their beds because this knowledge and the method and the raw materials to apply it are at present largely retained in American hands. I do not believe we should all have slept so soundly had the positions reversed and some Communist or neo-Fascist state monopolized, for the time being, those dread agencies.⁷

If the intensity of the Nixon-Brezhnev détente, as measured by summitry and issuance of joint Soviet-American communiques and agreements, somehow indicated a clear transition from the earlier Cold War period, the backdrop of this entire framework must be measured in terms of the urgent need to normalize relations between two roughly equal nuclear powers. Détente, then, was the Nixon administration's pragmatic response to the traditional concerns as expressed by Churchill. The fact that Moscow became a major nuclear power did not diminish the real

⁷Winston Churchill, "The Iron Curtain Dropped by Russia." Speech reprinted in Thomas G. Paterson, <u>The Origins of the Cold War</u>, 2d ed. (London: D.C. Heath and Company, 1974), 12-13.

concerns of Western leaders as compared to the imagined concerns of the first generation of Cold War warriors – it simply necessitated a relaxation of tensions.

The détente period of the early 1970s made apparent the shared revulsion toward the prospect of nuclear war, but it could not lay claim to monopolizing an anti-war atmosphere. Even NSC-68, the classic American Cold War document, deemed a "preventative" war – irrespective of the likelihood of military victory – as "morally corrosive," which "would [bring] us little if at all closer to victory in the fundamental ideological conflict.^{#8} The Soviet American summits of 1972 and 1973 produced no more eloquent renunciation of war, nor did the leaders of either country lay any claim that the ideological basis of their differences had abated in any form. And of course, the very concept of desiring peace did not originate in the Nixon-Brezhnev détente. The historian John Lewis Gaddis concluded in his classic study, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War*, that both Soviet and American leaders genuinely desired a peace, but that proved to be incompatible with external situations "beyond the control of either power" and internal situations that created the hostile character of the burgeoning Cold War.⁹ The same case can be made for the Cold War as it existed by the early 1970s – especially in the areas of arms control negotiations, the most significant area of détente.

Based on aspirations toward peace throughout the Cold War, both nations had to grapple, on one hand, with the external and uncontrollable reality of the opposing country's military; on the other, with the internal impetus to refuse conceding any meaningful offensive capability. To the extent that the 1970s détente leaders were charting new waters, they were

⁸NSC-68: <u>United States Objectives and Programs of National Security</u>, 14 April 1950. http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsc-hst/nsc-68.htm (20 January 2004).

⁹John Lewis Gaddis, <u>The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 361.

dogged by the same basic contradiction that defined the whole of Soviet-American relations in the post-war era. And, like the leaders of the late 1940s and early 1950s, eliminating the atmosphere of hostility between the two nations was neither possible, nor particularly desirable. The Soviet Union and the United States both operated on the premise of waiting out the other's eventual demise, but an imminent national collapse in the détente period struck neither side as likely. Beyond continuing measures to ensure the avoidance of nuclear war, the United States and the Soviet Union perceived détente as essentially a tool of self-interest; a framework to be exploited and challenged, and, a means ultimately to further the conflict until one side collapsed after the burden of the others' preponderance became too much to bear. What the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, concluded of the Nixon/Kissinger strategy was true of his own bosses as well: "Essentially, neither the president nor his closest aide proved able (or wanted) to break out of the orbit of the Cold War...."¹⁰

Détente, Peaceful Coexistence: American and Soviet Perceptions

A policy of relaxed tensions, dictated largely by self-interest, and a combination of both domestic and foreign objectives, was bound to result in highly divergent approaches among the superpowers. As the theorist G. Warren Nutter observed, Kissinger's détente strategy aimed to create a "web of mutual involvement and vested interest," albeit in the economic or political sphere.¹¹ Although Kissinger recognized the Soviet Union as the only nation capable of threatening America's global position, he regarded the leading Communist country as essentially

¹⁰Anatoly Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence: The Memoirs of Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six</u> <u>Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)</u> (New York: Random House, 1995), 195.

¹¹G. Warren Nutter, <u>Kissinger's Grand Design</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1975), 13.

a pariah among the community of nations. His plan was to afford the Soviet Union more in the way of economic and political integration (but never to the extent that might challenge the United States) so that Moscow would have more to lose, and, in turn, become less likely to take adventurous risks. Richard Nixon recalled his strategy at the 1972 Summit in Moscow:

The first stage of détente [was] to involve Soviet interests in ways that would increase their stake in international stability and the status quo. There was no thought that such commercial, technical, and scientific relationships could by themselves prevent confrontations or wars, but at least they would have to be counted in a balance sheet of gains and losses whenever the Soviets were tempted to indulge in international adventurism.¹²

In a conflict between ideological adversaries, Kissinger and Nixon sought victory over the Soviet Union by making it more like the United States. John Kenneth Galbraith, a prominent scholar, identified this strategy as "convergence," a policy that assumed the inherent rightness of the industrialized democratic system, which would eventually compel the Soviet Union to abandon its ideological pretensions in favor of the more comfortable trappings of capitalism.¹³

If Soviet leaders were receptive to this strategy, they certainly hid it from public view.

At the 24th Congress of the CPSU, of March 1971, General Secretary Brezhnev introduced his

summary report of the Soviet Union's foreign policy activity, with the following declaration:

Socialism, which is firmly established in the states now constituting the world socialist system, has proved its great viability in the historical contest with capitalism....The world socialist system has been making a great contribution to the fulfillment of a task of such vital importance for all the peoples as the prevention of another world war. It is safe to say that many of the imperialist aggressors' plans were frustrated thanks to the existence of the world socialist system and its firm action.¹⁴

¹²Richard M. Nixon, <u>RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon</u>, 2d ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 618.

¹³Robert Conquest referring to John Kenneth Galbraith, as cited in United States, Congress, Senate Committee on Government Operations, <u>Hearings: International Negotiation</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 19.

¹⁴Leonid I. Brezhnev, speech reprinted in Soviet Union, <u>Documents of the 24th Congress of the</u> <u>Communist Party of the Soviet Union</u> (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing House, 1971), 9.

Brezhnev's statement, if taken at face value, offered little in the way of varying interpretations. Moscow's view of itself at the helm of a global, rising Communist movement left slight, if any, room for convergence of Western interests, insofar as having the effect of dampening the Soviet ideological position.

In a clearly divergent view from the Americans, the Soviets interpreted the economic aspect of détente (and, for that matter, détente as a whole) as a gamble. As the political scientist Lawrence T. Caldwell characterized Moscow's perspective, détente "implies that peaceful competition between socialism and pluralist democracies will be resolved in favor of the former."¹⁵ Although the Brezhnev regime generally repudiated the bluster of the Khrushchev era in favor of more businesslike relations with the West, there is little evidence to suggest that Moscow in the détente period lost sight of the fact that the Soviet Union was, as Seweryn Bialer, an academic specialist of Soviet domestic issues, observed, "Created to fulfill a mission...to be a refuge, a bastion, a base of revolution for the whole world."¹⁶ This Soviet mission necessitated a dynamic interpretation of global events whereby change toward Marxism-Leninism was the norm. Such a framework stood starkly in contrast to the American status quo vision, in which nations were to be prevented from "falling" into the Communist orbit. The oppositional character of Soviet and American foreign policy conceptions was most profoundly exemplified in the area of arms limitation. The fact of nuclear parity left the Americans to advocate "sufficiency," or the maintenance of equal force levels sufficient to ensure mutually assured destruction, beyond which excess capabilities were considered pointless. The Soviets, in

¹⁵Lawrence T. Caldwell, <u>Soviet-American Relations: One Half Decade of Détente Problems and</u> <u>Issues</u> (Paris: Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, 1976), 56.

¹⁶Seweryn Bialer, "Soviet Foreign Policy: Sources, Perceptions, Trends," in Seweryn Bialer, ed., <u>The Domestic Context of Soviet Foreign Policy</u> (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 418-19.

contrast, exhibited little interest in a static nuclear relationship. As one group of experts argued, "Soviet leaders conceive of national power, including of course military power, mainly in terms of class struggle, i.e. in terms of the dialectics of political competition and conflict between social-political ideologies and systems which are fundamentally and irreconcilably opposed to each other."¹⁷

The Soviet Union's self-perception as the leading custodian and exporter of Communist ideology was not limited to its relations with the non-aligned Third World. Vladimir Petrov, a political scientist, observed that whereas the United States maintained one détente with the Soviet Union, Moscow managed several détentes concurrently with America's main allies, including Germany, Canada, Iran, and Japan. Petrov identified this as a dual strategy, to "accentuate the positive in bilateral relations and benefit from them economically and politically, while taking full advantage of what they see as the existing and developing 'contradictions in the imperialist camp."¹⁸ For a country that assumed an inevitable decay of Canadian-American relations, belief in the efficacy of convergence required a leap of faith, indeed. After the fanfare of the American-Soviet Summit of June 1973 had quieted, *Pravda* emphasized Moscow's ongoing foreign policy: "Peaceful coexistence between states with different social systems by no means signifies a recognition of the immutability of capitalism."¹⁹ In a study of Soviet propaganda techniques, scholars Richard H. Schultz and Roy Godson conclude that "negative and defamatory" characterizations of the United States were consistently disseminated, regardless

¹⁷Leon Gouré, Foy D. Kohler, and Mose L. Harvey, <u>The Role of Nuclear Forces in Current Soviet</u> <u>Strategy</u> (Miami: Center for Advanced International Studies, 1974), 40.

¹⁸Vladimir Petrov, <u>U.S.–Soviet Détente: Past and Future</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise for Public Policy Research, 1975), 26-27.

¹⁹Cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 85.

of "whether the Western allies have perceived East-West relations to be in a period of Cold War or a period of 'détente."²⁰

In sum, there is little ground for the argument that the Nixon-Brezhnev détente "ended" the Cold War in a sense that a period of summitry and production of joint agreements resolved the basis of the conflict itself. To be sure, the cooperative framework of this era indicates a transition from the more confrontational atmosphere in earlier Cold War periods. At most, this fact is rooted in an ongoing willingness between the superpowers to manage their differences without resorting to nuclear war – the transition did not attempt to solve the differences themselves. As a matter of simple pragmatism, the basic opposition of a status quo verses revolutionary ideology was largely unresolvable. Each superpower's détente strategy reinforced this fact.

Détente in Historical Perspective

Soviet and American leaders in the early 1970s did not invent détente; it had existed in one form or another since then birth of the Soviet state. A brief review of the long East-West tradition of relaxed tensions emphasizes the importance of interpreting détente in limited terms – it would be difficult to assess Soviet and American actions, and the Middle East conflict leading to the Yom Kippur War, on the assumption that détente was somehow a repudiation of past conflict in favor of a peaceful "new world order". The historical record suggests a continuation of, rather than revolution from, the pattern of Soviet-Western relations from the October Revolution through the early 1970s.

²⁰Richard H. Shultz and Roy Godson, <u>Dezinformatsia: Active Measures in Soviet Strategy</u> (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon Press, 1984), 188.

A State Department document, published in 1974, identified the current U.S. policy of détente, aiming to reduce the risk of war with the Soviet Union, as a "a central foreign policy for over twenty years," thus dating the movement to normalize Soviet-American tensions from the death of Josef Stalin onward.²¹ But détente, in policy if not in name, must be traced back to V.I. Lenin's foreign policy, which served (or was at least claimed to have served) as the foundation for all successive regimes.

Lenin treated the prospect of war with the bourgeois democracies – what he called "a series of frightful collisions" – as a matter-of-fact historical inevitability. In a report to the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party in March 1918, Lenin declared:

International imperialism, with the entire might of its capital, with its highly organized military technique...could not under any circumstances, or any condition, live side by side with the Soviet Republic...it could not do so because of commercial connections of international financial relations. In this sphere a conflict is inevitable.²²

But Lenin, like his successors, was a pragmatist as well as an ideologue. After the Bolshevik Revolution failed to spark similar proletarian revolutionary upheavals across Europe, Lenin clarified that an inevitable war was not necessarily an imminent one.²³ According the Soviet writers Henry Trofimenko and Pavel Podlesny, Lenin, who understood English, was the first leader to use the word "coexistence" in a September 1919 interview with the *Christian Science Monitor*. The following year, the Kremlin declared,

²¹United States, Department of State, <u>The Meaning of Détente</u>, Publication No. 8766, 1974, 5.

²²V.I. Lenin, "Report on War and Peace." Speech delivered to the Seventh Congress of the Communist Party on 7 March, 1918. Reprinted in Robert C. Tucker, <u>The Lenin Anthology</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), 542.

²³Graham D. Vernon, "Controlled Conflict: Soviet Perceptions of Peaceful Coexistence," in Graham D. Vernon, ed., <u>Soviet Perceptions of War and Peace</u> (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1981), 114.

Our slogan has been and remains the same: peaceful coexistence with other governments, no matter what they are. Reality itself has led us and other states to find it necessary to establish lasting relations between the worker-and-peasant government and capitalist governments.²⁴

Stephen White, an historian, identified the Genoa Conference of 1922 as the first attempt to normalize Western-Soviet relations. Western opinion generally interpreted the Soviets' New Economic Policy, launched in 1921, as a sign "that a more moderate and acceptable form of politics would gradually emerge in its place."²⁵ British Prime Minister David Lloyd George predicted that the Russians would follow the course of the French Revolution. Like the French, Lloyd George assumed that internal stability and a relaxation of tensions with other nations would eventually replace the revolutionary fervor of a five-year-old government. The United States, which would not establish diplomatic relations with Moscow until 1933, sent Ambassador to Rome R.W. Child only as an unofficial observer. Georgy Vassilievich Chicherin, the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, advocated industrial and agricultural cooperation between Russian and other Great Powers.²⁶ Such cooperation was not a matter of choice for the Soviets, but a necessity. By 1922, world wide socialist revolution was proving to be a more difficult process than the Bolsheviks had anticipated. Peaceful coexistence with the West not only offset the "series of frightful collisions" that Lenin had predicted – it was also used as an essential prop to the Communist government, which had to worry about its own survival before directing liberation movements elsewhere.

²⁴V.I. Lenin, as cited in Henry Trofimenko and Pavel Podlesny, <u>USSR–USA: Lessons of Peaceful</u> <u>Coexistence: Fifty-Five Years of Soviet-American Diplomatic Relations</u> (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing, 1988), 11.

²⁵Stephen White, <u>The Origins of Détente: The Genoa Conference and Soviet-Western Relations</u>, <u>1921-1922</u> (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 97.

²⁶Evgeny Chossudovsky, "Genoa Revisited: Russia and Coexistence," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 50, April 1972, 557.

Eugene V. Rostow, an Undersecretary of State in the Lyndon Johnson administration, characterized President Franklin D. Roosevelt's diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union as the first détente between the two nations,²⁷ although the years preceding the outbreak of World War II failed to produce any significant normalization of relations which in fact became strained to the point of collapse after the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of 1939. The American-Soviet alliance, a result of Hitler's attack on Russia and his declaration of war on the United States following the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, clearly spoke to the ability of a common enemy to bring adversaries together. The shared Nazi menace was responsible for what was arguably the warmest American-Soviet dialogue of the entire history of relations between the two countries.

Wendell Willkie, special representative to President Roosevelt during World War II, issued a report on Soviet affairs, titled "Our Ally, Russia," which he included in his wartime travelogue, *One World*. He wrote admiringly of both the Soviet war machine and the Russian character. He commented that all the authorities offered him full access to inspect schools, farms, and factories, and allowed private interviews with randomly selected citizens. Willkie empathized with the courageous plight of the Red Army, the survival instincts of the peasants, and the efficiency of the collective farms. Stalin, whom Wilkie met on two occasions, struck him as "a hard man, perhaps even a cruel man, but a very able one." Willkie concluded of the Soviet leader, "There is no reason to be cautious. He is one of the significant men of this generation." Willkie was genuinely moved by his experiences in Russia. Perhaps sensing a likely hostile relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union in the future, Willkie ended his

²⁷Eugene V. Rostow, as cited in American Bar Association, <u>Détente: A Law Professor Workshop</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Bar Association Press, 1976), 3-4.

report: "No, we do not need to fear Russia. We need to learn to work with her against our common enemy: Hitler. We need to learn to work with her in the world after the war. For Russia is a dynamic country, a vital new society, a force that cannot be bypassed in any future world."²⁸

The National Council of American-Soviet Friendship echoed Willkie's sentiments at the popular level. Two "friendship rallies," held at a crowded Madison Square Garden in 1944 and 1945, hosted many speakers who delivered "peace speeches," including one titled "No Third World War" from Soviet Ambassador to the United States (and future Foreign Minister) Andrei Gromyko. Gromyko characterized wartime Soviet-American relations as only a starting point for future "durable bonds... in the interests of the preservation of general peace and prosperity of the peoples."²⁹ Joseph E. Davies, former Ambassador to the Soviet Union, warned that peace with Russia must be preserved, otherwise "civilization would be set back hundreds of years, if it survived at all."³⁰ Then Under-Secretary of State Dean Acheson called for increased understanding and communication between the two countries, whose differences must be mitigated by the "overwhelming desire for mutual understanding."³¹

Of course, a lasting momentum of Soviet-American friendship was contingent upon ongoing German and Japanese aggression, whose actions had temporarily eclipsed the preexisting animosity between the United States and the Soviet Union. As the presidential historian Robert Dallek pointed out, "The Soviet regime of 1939 that outraged us by signing the

³⁰Joseph E. Davies, "Mutual Confidence for Security." Speech reprinted in ibid., 22.

²⁸Wendell L Willkie, <u>One World</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1943), 50-87.

²⁹Andrei Gromyko, "No Third World War." Speech reprinted in <u>U.S.A.–U.S.S.R., Nations</u> <u>United for Victory, Peace and Prosperity</u> (New York: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, 1945), 25.

³¹Dean Acheson, "Problems of Security and Understanding." Speech reprinted in ibid., 15.

Nazi-Soviet pact was precisely the same as that in which we came to discern so many virtues during the war."³² John Lewis Gaddis observed, "Through a curious kind of illogic the Russians' vigorously successful resistence to Hitler purified them ideologically in the eyes of the Americans."³³

Yet détente never suffered a total collapse. From 1947 until Stalin's death in 1953 – what is generally considered the height of the Cold War – détente was on hiatus just as the Soviet-American entente during World War II greatly shadowed the two nations' mutual hostility. The historian William Taubman identified the period of January 1946 to April 1947 (at least as far as Stalin was concerned) as a détente in transition. In early 1946, the United States and the Soviet Union remained allies, but growing tensions in this year and a half period were clearly intensifying toward Cold War. Taubman referred to Soviet-American relations during this time as demonstrating the basic characteristics of détente: "A moderate amount of tension plus a good deal of negotiation, all within the context of what the Soviets, at least, regarded as inevitable, ongoing competition."³⁴ Taubman emphasized his description of this détente period by noting the intensity of its negotiations as compared to the later détente: "Richard Nixon would hail détente as a transition from confrontation to renegotiation. But the 1970s had nothing on 1946 when it came to time spent at the negotiating table."³⁵

By early 1947, U.S. foreign policy, as embodied in the Truman Doctrine, enacted major increases in military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey. As the Cold War scholar

³²Robert Dallek, "How We See the Soviets," in Mark Garrison and Abbot Gleason, eds., <u>Shared</u> <u>Destiny: Fifty Years of Soviet-American Relations</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 85.

³³Gaddis, <u>The United States and the Origins of the Cold War</u>, 33.

³⁴William Taubman, <u>Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War</u> (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 128.

³⁵Ibid., 159.

Thomas G. Paterson observed, "The doctrine assumed that eastern Europe was already lost to the Soviet Union," and that the major countries on Russia's southwest flank – Iran, Greece and Turkey – "were to be drawn into the United States' sphere of influence."³⁶ The strategy of Containment helped to move American-Soviet relations from a shaky period of postwar détente to one of Cold War. If Stalin's February 9, 1946, election speech, in which he called on the Soviet Union to militarize in preparation for another global conflict, heralded the Cold War, the Truman Doctrine made it operational.³⁷ Soviet and American leaders made no significant efforts to return to détente until 1953, after Stalin's death and the armistice in Korea.

In a speech delivered in 1969 to the American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, international relations expert William E. Griffith characterized the whole of East-West relations: "International détente has often been interrupted but has basically continued since 1953."³⁸ Once freed from the terror and cult of Stalin's personality, the new Soviet leaders wasted little time in making overtures to the United States. On March 9, 1953, four days after Stalin's death, Soviet Prime Minister Georgii Malenkov called for the "possibility of a lasting coexistence and peaceful competition between the two different systems."³⁹ Malenkov also advocated increased domestic production of consumer goods, and significantly muffled the Soviet Union's traditional call for proletarian revolutions abroad. The Soviets' successful test of a hydrogen bomb, announced on August 8, 1953, undoubtedly supplied Malenkov, and First

³⁶Thomas G. Paterson, <u>Soviet-American Confrontation: Postwar Reconstruction and the Origins</u> of the Cold War (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 174.

³⁷Walter LaFeber, <u>America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1966</u> (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), 30.

³⁸William E. Griffith and Walt W. Rostow, <u>East-West Relations: Is Détente Possible?</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1969), 1.

³⁹Loth, <u>Overcoming the Cold War</u>, 19.

Party Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, with the confidence necessary to enact these significant reforms.⁴⁰

The Geneva Conference of July, 1955, represented the first significant step toward détente for the United States, both at the popular and political level. Joseph McCarthy's Communist witch-hunt had subsided by the end of 1954, and U.S. policy toward Moscow became more flexible as a result. Richard W. Stevenson, an historian, explained Eisenhower's response: "While the frenzy of McCarthyism had blinded Americans to the changes that had been occurring since 1953, it was the excesses of McCartyhism that forced Americans to reassess their views in 1955. It was this reassessment that persuaded Eisenhower to explore alternatives to the stalemate in the Cold War and helped him politically to do so."⁴¹ Although the "spirit of Geneva," as the conference came to be known, failed to produce any significant changes in the Cold War system, both the American and Soviet delegations concluded talks by affirming their commitment to peace. A White House statement on the Geneva Conference declared, "The President expressed the belief that the outstanding feature of the meeting was apparently sincere desire expressed by the Soviet delegation to discuss world problems in the future in an atmosphere of friendliness and a willingness to sit down together to work out differences....⁷⁴²

By 1956, Khrushchev's de-Stalinization program was well underway. The General Secretary believed that the potential of thermonuclear war necessitated a fundamental reorientation of Lenin's foreign policy. Whereas early Soviet doctrine regarded war with the

⁴⁰LaFeber, <u>America, Russia, and the Cold War</u>, 148-149.

⁴¹Richard W. Stevenson, <u>The Rise and Fall of Détente: Relaxations of Tension in U.S.–Soviet</u> <u>Relations, 1953-1984</u> (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 37.

⁴²Dwight D. Eisenhower, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of</u> <u>the United States: Dwight D. Eisenhower</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1956), 728.

bourgeois industrial nations as inevitable (if not necessarily imminent), the idea of global nuclear holocaust dictated that such a conflict was unacceptable. Yet the Marxism-Leninism ideological component – always central to Soviet détente policies toward the United States – remained intact. As the scholar Fred Warner Neal theorized, the new Soviet policy held:

The thermonuclear nature of modern was such that no society would escape destruction; and communism could not possible be built on the ruins of what, if anything, would be left. Therefore, avoidance of thermonuclear was not only possible, but in order to insure the final triumph of communism, essential.⁴³

Although anything approaching Soviet-American nuclear parity would not be achieved until the late 1960s, Khrushchev's characteristic embellishment of Soviet capabilities held that Western aggression had become deterable, and, as a result, the Soviet Union could continue its support of Socialist revolutions around the globe.⁴⁴ Thus was created the Soviet policy of peaceful coexistence in its modern form.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, by far the most tense episode of the Cold War, actually proved to be a boon to the détente process. As the Kennedy Administration enjoyed its "victory" after the Soviets backed down from the naval blockade standoff, Moscow demonstrated, as far as the Americans were concerned, that it could act rationally during crisis situations. Additionally, Kennedy's hardline strategy during the showdown furnished him with the domestic credentials necessary to pursue détente – a policy at once urgently needed and seemingly attainable, due to the intensity of the crisis, and its peaceful conclusion, respectively.⁴⁵

The Limited Test Ban Treaty, certified between the United States, Britain and the

⁴³Fred Warner Neal, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>The Cold War: Origins and</u> <u>Developments</u>, 1971, 175.

⁴⁴David Holloway, <u>The Soviet Union and the Arms Race</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 84.

⁴⁵Stevenson, <u>The Rise and Fall of Détente</u>, 138-139.

Soviet Union on October 10, 1963, represented the first significant step by the nuclear powers to avoid a repeat of anything like the Cuban crisis. Like the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty, signed in 1972, the earlier Test Ban Treaty aimed to reduce tensions through indirect means. In an April 12, 1963, interview with the *Saturday Review*, Khrushchev reasoned, "After Cuba, there was a real chance for both the Soviet Union and then United States to take measures together that would advance the peace by easing tensions. The one area on which I thought we were closest to agreement was nuclear testing...."⁴⁶

Kennedy's famous commencement address at American University on June 10 aimed to break the deadlock on the test ban negotiations. The President declared: "Today, should total war ever break out again – no matter how – our two countries would become the primary targets. It is an ironical but accurate fact that the two strongest powers are the two in the most danger of devastation." Kennedy agreed with Khrushchev – a test ban on nuclear weapons was the one feasible area of arms control that would help relax tensions between the superpowers. "The conclusion of such a treaty," Kennedy said, "so near and yet so far – would check the spiraling arms race in one of its most dangerous areas."⁴⁷ Kennedy's speech, especially his mention of the grievous losses sustained by Russia during World War II, elicited a positive response from Khrushchev, who offered a limited ban on nuclear testing in outer space and under water in a speech delivered in East Berlin on July 2, 1963.⁴⁸ Intense negotiations, with W. Averell Harriman leading the American team, produced the document titled "Treaty: Banning

⁴⁶Glenn T. Seaborg, <u>Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 180.

⁴⁷John F. Kennedy, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> <u>United States: John F. Kennedy</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1964), 462.

⁴⁸Harland B. Moulton, <u>From Superiority to Parity: The United States and the Strategic Arms</u> <u>Race, 1961-1971</u> (London: Greenwood Press, 1973), 129.

Nuclear Weapon Tests in Atmosphere, in Outer Space and Underwater" signed in Moscow on August 5, 1963. The Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) agreements of the following decade could not claim a loftier goal than that offered by the Test Ban Treaty. The second paragraph read,

Proclaiming as their [U.S., U.K., and U.S.S.R. governments] principal aim the speediest possible achievement of an agreement on general and complete disarmament under strict international control in accordance with the objectives of the United Nations which would put an end to the armaments race and eliminate the incentive to the production and testing of all kinds of weapons, including nuclear weapons....⁴⁹

Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was able to convince a skeptical Senate that the treaty in no way represented a softening of U.S. nuclear strategy and superiority. McNamara declared, "We are determined to maintain that superiority. In order to achieve it, we maintain a total number of nuclear warheads, tactical as well as strategic, in the tens of thousands."⁵⁰ As McNamara's testimony makes clear, the Test Ban Treaty would not actually impede global nuclear proliferation. Underground testing was not included in the agreement; France and China refused to sign the treaty; and, as the German historian Wilfried Loth observed, advances in nuclear technology would find increasingly novel methods of testing weapons.⁵¹

In 1964, the Soviets began development for an ABM shield around Moscow and Russia's western border. McNamara immediately recognized that the missile shield would create another arms race – largely what the Test Ban Treaty, if only in name, was designed to curtail. The only concrete success that came as a result of the treaty's enforcement was environmental – after

⁴⁹The Test Ban Treaty is reprinted in United States, <u>Arms Control and Disarmament Agency</u>, <u>Third Annual Report to Congress</u>, January 1, 1963–December 31, 1963, 33.

⁵⁰Robert McNamara, as cited in United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, <u>Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations</u>, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, 97.

⁵¹Loth, <u>Overcoming the Cold War</u>, 77.

October, 1963, the level of radioactive pollutants in the atmosphere decreased. Nonetheless, the treaty was an important first step in the history of nuclear diplomacy, and in conjunction with the June 20 memorandum establishing a direct communications link between Moscow and Washington, D.C., the summer before Kennedy's assassination demonstrated a shared resolve of both superpowers to improve their crisis management capabilities. Both Kennedy and British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan considered the Test Ban Treaty a great achievement of their respective terms.⁵²

Kennedy's assassination effectively ended the tacit détente that had been building since the Cuban Missile Crisis. Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, directed his efforts toward the Great Society reforms and the American military engagement in the Vietnam conflict, which was quickly transforming from "Containment in action" to fiasco. Stanley Hoffmann characterized Soviet-American relations between 1964-1968 as "years of rather muted Containment of Moscow and limited accommodation. One could perhaps speak of a de facto détente, a détente more improvised than thought through."⁵³ This fact was best exemplified by the impromptu Glassboro, New Jersey summit of 1967, where Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin and Johnson met on cordial, if shallow, terms. Ambassador Dobrynin concluded of the summit, "The fact that the Glassboro Summit seemed to yield no concrete results can…be explained by its sudden genesis; having been arranged with so little preparation it could hardly be expected to make significant advances."⁵⁴ Johnson framed the goals of his presidency in domestic terms,

⁵²Seaborg, <u>Kennedy, Khrushchev and the Test Ban</u>, 282.

⁵³Stanley Hoffmann, "Détente," in Joseph S. Nye, Jr., ed., <u>The Making of America's Soviet Policy</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 234-235.

⁵⁴Anatoly Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence: The Memoirs of Moscow's Ambassador to America's Six</u> <u>Cold War Presidents (1962-1986)</u> (New York: Random House, 1995), 167.

and he intended that he would continue the policies of his hero, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in the form of the Great Society. But that "bitch of a war," Johnson's telling nickname for the Vietnam conflict, sapped American resources and his domestic credibility alike.⁵⁵ To the extent that Johnson's administration kept a wary eye on Communist expansion, American officials looked to China and the rising tide of the Cultural Revolution. It was not until two years after Richard Nixon's election that he and Henry Kissinger linked Moscow, Beijing, and Vietnam, thus shifting a linked Soviet-American détente to the forefront of international affairs.

New Leaders, New Détente

The fall of Nikita Khrushchev in October 1964, and subsequent accession to power by Leonid Brenzhnev and Alexsei Kosygin – First Secretary of the Central Committee and Chairman of the Council of Ministers, respectively – did not result in any significant foreign policy changes of the Soviet Union. While Khrushchev's ouster resulted principally from his failed brinkmanship in Cuba, the new leaders in Moscow emphasized that the "palace coup" would not be accompanied by reinvigorated hardline policies. Ambassador Dobrynin was dispatched to the White House on October 16 to inform President Johnson of the planned continuation of Moscow's policy toward the United States.⁵⁶ In that early juncture, the Soviet Union was totally unprepared for change – both Brezhnev and Kosygin were amateurs in the foreign policy realm, which remained in the hands of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. In 1966, Gromyko issued a foreign policy report to the Politburo which reiterated the basic détente policy that had been

⁵⁵Bruce J. Schulman, <u>Lyndon B. Johnson and American Liberalism: A Brief Biography with</u> <u>Documents</u> (Boston: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 125-152. Schulman's chapter on Vietnam offers a good explanation as to why Johnson was distracted from other concerns.

⁵⁶Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 128.

in place since 1956. He called for a "much greater scope" in the "Soviet-American dialogue" and for socialism's peaceful victory in the long run: "The concentration of our main efforts on the domestic purposes is fully in line with Lenin's statement that the final victory of socialism over capitalism will be ensured by the creation of a new, much higher level of labor productivity."⁵⁷

As the Cold War expert Foy Kohler argued, Brezhnev's conception of peaceful coexistence, as influenced at the beginning of his tenure by Gromyko, was a continuation of Lenin's own proclamation of peaceful coexistence, with the noted emphasis on economic, rather than military, measures to achieve Moscow's final goal.⁵⁸ Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny's toast to Nixon during the 1972 Moscow Summit exemplified this longstanding approach:

As far back as in the early years of the young Soviet states, its founder V.I. Lenin substantiated the objective needed for and possibility of peaceful coexistence of countries with different social systems. Today, as before, the Soviet Union is prepared to develop and deepen relations of business cooperation and mutually beneficial ties with states of a different social system.⁵⁹

In a more candid moment, Podgorny might have added, "in order to observe their eventual destruction."

The State Department under Nixon also emphasized America's long history of détente, noting that any substantive changes in détente policy in the early 1970s were of an operational, as opposed to strategic or ideological, nature. Arthur A. Hartman, the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, noted that from 1933 to 1974 the American and Soviet governments signed a total of 105 agreements, of which 58 took place since 1969, and of those, 41 since

⁵⁷Andrei Gromyko, as cited in Loth, <u>Overcoming the Cold War</u>, 84.

⁵⁸Foy Kohler, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 70.

⁵⁹Nikolai Podgorny, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> <u>United States: Richard M. Nixon</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 168.

1972.⁶⁰ Walter Laqueur characterized this trend as the latest – and clearly the most comprehensive – period of détente, which nonetheless had yet to achieve a cohesive policy.⁶¹ As the scholars Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George observed, the intensity of the early 1970s détente must be understood in light of Nixon and Kissinger's highly ambitious goal of developing a new international system. Nixon and Kissinger believed that the Soviet Union would remain the principal threat to the United States, but the growing rift between Moscow and Beijing could be exploited by pursuing détente with both Communist nations over an extended period of time.⁶² The implications of the Nixon-Kissinger strategy – especially in the context of understanding Soviet and American actions in the Yom Kippur War – are twofold. First, the "new international system" assured an ongoing conflict with the Soviet Union; second, the benefits to be derived from the expanded conception of détente would be apparent only in the long term. In other words, the new international system was still in its infancy by October 1973, and the peace the United States sought to achieve remained very much a hypothetical possibility up to that time.

In 1972, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird emphasized this point: Soviet and American differences, he said, "are rooted in a conflict of world interest and differing perceptions of how those interests should be protected and forwarded. We cannot eliminate these differences overnight. We probably cannot eliminate them in your lifetime or mine."⁶³ By 1977, détente

⁶⁰Arthur A. Hartman, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 48.

⁶¹Walter Laqueur, as cited in United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, <u>Hearings: Negotiation and Statecraft</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 2.

⁶²Gordon A. Craig and Alexander L. George, <u>Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our</u> <u>Time</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 132-133.

⁶³Melvin R. Laird, <u>The Nixon Doctrine</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), 6.

had lost most of the luster attached to it during the Nixon administration, and an American Bar Association pamphlet aptly reflected the prevailing mood: "Détente, stripped down to its coexistence essence, is hardly a notch above an undertaking to attempt to adjust superpower differences through negotiation."⁶⁴

A limited interpretation of détente is thus necessitated by the fact of an ambiguity inherent to the Nixon-Kissinger strategy. Whatever their long term goals, Soviet-American relations in the early 1970s remained steeped in a Cold War setting, what Fred Warner Neal described as a mutual goal toward "negative coexistence," or the process by which both countries could "reach an agreement about what not to do. This is the primary task of statesmanship for the moment – not to produce an ideal world but to insure as far as possible that there will be a world."⁶⁵ In light of this most basic determinant, détente inhibited superpower competition in the Third World only insofar as it threatened to create a crisis situation that could potentially become nuclear. In less tense circumstances, détente actually encouraged the competition. As Roger E. Kanet, a scholar, interpreted the Soviet objective, détente

provides an environment in which the forces of reaction, both in the West and the Third World, will gradually weaken. Détente is not viewed by the Soviet leadership as a prelude to a period in which cooperation, rather than conflict, will characterize the basic relations between the two superpowers and their allies.⁶⁶

In other words, the Soviets rejected the American détente strategy aimed at forcing Moscow to abandon its interests in the Third World in favor of de facto acceptance of the existing world order. As Raymond Garthoff, a former arms control expert, noted, the Soviet counter-strategy

⁶⁴American Bar Association, <u>Détente: A Law Professor Workshop</u>, 38.

⁶⁵Fred Warner Neal, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>The Cold War</u>, 1971, 171.

⁶⁶Roger E. Kanet, <u>Soviet Foreign Policy and East-West Relations</u> (New York: Pergamon Press, 1982), 42.

of détente was essentially the same as the Nixon-Kissinger model, only in "reverse mirror reflection," whereby Moscow aimed to prod Washington into acceptance of a new world no longer under American global predominance.

In the Soviet framework, the fact of strategic parity with the United States shattered the status quo, and by extension, furthered the legitimacy of Marxism-Leninism on a global scale.⁶⁷ Because the Soviet Union and United States based their détente strategies on these highly divergent assumptions, Helmut Sonnenfeldt, a member of the National Security Council in the Nixon administration, argued for the word "détente" to be banished from the American political lexicon in favor of the phrase "management of the emergence of Soviet power." For political purposes, the phrase was much clumsier than "détente," but Sonnenfeldt believed that it would more accurately reflect the ongoing American-Soviet conflict, and emphasize the importance of crisis management when the Soviets decided to demonstrate their power.⁶⁸

These interpretive differences of détente at the politico-strategic level in no way negated real gains in détente in other areas. As Marshall Shulman argued, détente was a "multi-level relationship, and the movements on the various planes on which the two nations now interact are not always in the same direction." Along with the politico-strategic level, Shulman identified the plane of "functional cooperation" as a major component of détente.⁶⁹ The Soviet writers Henry Trofimenko and Pavel Podlesny echoed Shulman's point: "The discords stemming from the differences between the two countries' interdependence is just as important, and so are the

⁶⁷Raymond L. Garthoff, <u>Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations From Nixon to</u> <u>Reagan</u> (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 33-38.

⁶⁸Helmut Sonnenfeldt, as cited in American Bar Association, <u>Confrontation in the US-USSR</u> <u>Relationship: Can It Be Managed? A Law Professor Workshop</u> (New York: American Bar Association Press, 1978), 2

⁶⁹Marshall D. Shulman, "Toward a Western Philosophy of Coexistence," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 52 (October 1973) 36.

factors that make it indispensable to promote contacts and cooperation between the two powers and the two peoples."⁷⁰ The idea was that détente was not a monolith, and there was no necessary contradiction between important gains made in cooperation in non-strategic areas, and deadlock over arms limitation treaties and competition in the Third World.

The Nixon-Brezhnev détente secured concrete gains in several areas in the plane of functional cooperation. In the business realm, the Congressional removal of the "Most Favored Nation" ban on the Soviet Union was a necessary condition for several agreements, including settlement of the Lend-Lease debt, left over from World War II, increased trade between the two nations, and Soviet access to low-interest Export-Import bank credits.⁷¹ In July, 1969, Apollo 8 Commander Colonel Frank Borman took a nine-day tour of the Soviet Union and exchanged pleasantries with many Soviet officials. President Podgorny remarked that a "blip had appeared on the U.S.-Soviet friendship screen" – clearly the American anxiety caused by the launching of *Sputnik* was a thing of the past.⁷² A report commissioned in 1989 by the United States Institute of Peace concluded that Soviet-American cooperation in areas including health research, technological exchange, space exploration, and environmental protection, all contributed to a very real détente that served as a moderating influence on the Cold War.⁷³

Shulman's term of functional cooperation is especially apt; for the non-strategic aspect of détente, namely peaceful exchange, reflected the mutual desire for cooperation between two

⁷⁰Henry Trofimenko and Pavel Podlesny, <u>USSR–USA: Lessons of Peaceful Coexistence: Fifty-</u> <u>Five Years of Soviet-American Diplomatic Relations</u> (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency Publishing, 1988), 36.

⁷¹Petrov, <u>U.S.–Soviet Détente</u>, 16.

⁷²Albert L Weeks, <u>The Other Side of Coexistence: An Analysis of Russian Foreign Policy</u> (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1970), 270.

⁷³United States Institute of Peace, "In Brief" Series, <u>U.S. and U.S.S.R.: Partners During the Cold</u> <u>War? Superpowers Cooperated in Several Fields Despite Differences, New Study Says</u>, No. 13, December 1989.

powerful nations irrespective of the ongoing Cold War. The shortcomings of both superpowers in their attempts to relax tensions in the areas of arms proliferation and global political influence, i.e. the real issues of the Cold War, do not contradict the success of détente in the functional realm – these areas were not necessarily interdependent. Finally, even if the whole of détente can be judged as only partially successful, alternative policies were not necessarily viable. Henry Kissinger characterized the détente policies he and Nixon had established: "The quest for peaceful coexistence clearly had its perils, it did not follow that a crusading policy of confrontation would prove more successful."⁷⁴ The former Secretary of State was answering the many critics of the United States policy of détente. His reasoning could have served the Soviet architects of coexistence as well.

Détente and Adventure

Henry Kissinger explained in his memoirs the necessity of his hardline policy against the Soviet Union: "If Moscow is prevented by a firm Western policy from deflecting its internal tensions into international crises, it is likely to find only disillusionment in the boast that history is on its side."⁷⁵ Moscow's human rights record serves as a useful gauge for measuring domestic tensions. In Kissinger's conception, fomenting crises abroad was a release valve for that tension, and the impetus to divert attention away from domestic problems was strong indeed. One of the major communiques issued in the détente era, the "Basic Principles of Mutual Relations Between the United States of America and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics," signed in Moscow on May 29, 1972 (henceforth referred to as the BPA, which will be further examined later in this

 ⁷⁴Henry A, Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 1256.
 ⁷⁵Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 244.

chapter), affirmed:

The USA and USSR have a special responsibility, as do other countries, with the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, to do everything in their power so that conflicts or situations will not arise which would serve to increase international tensions. Accordingly, they will seek to promote conditions in which all countries will live in peace and security and will not be subject to outside interference in their internal affairs.⁷⁶

The simple calculus of this statement holds that the superpowers had a mutual and overriding interest and responsibility in maintaining global stability, which itself was a crucial determinant in avoiding nuclear war. In other words, détente precluded whatever benefits either superpower stood to gain by aiding or creating regional instability. A broad interpretation of this principle would effectively condemn arms proliferation in superpower-client relations and political meddling in sovereign states. Thus, the BPA, viewed in this light, expressed the mutual desire to eliminate the competitive nature of the Cold War.

The actual policies of the Soviet Union exposed the hollow meaning of the BPA for two reasons. First, a central tenet of Marxism-Leninism required destruction of the status-quo; indeed, there would have been little operational value of the ideology without its disruptive component. Second, as Kissinger argued, Moscow also exploited international crises for the decidedly non-ideological purpose of deflecting attention from its own internal problems. These factors explain how, contrary to a literal interpretation of the BPA, Moscow saw in détente an opportunity to pursue a very different policy. The fact of the Soviets' growing nuclear power since the time of Khrushchev created mutual deterrence, out of which grew détente. In the Soviet view, nuclear power was the master of détente – not the other way around. As the scholar Albert Weeks observed,

⁷⁶The BPA is reprinted in Richard P. Stebbins, and Elaine P. Adams, eds., <u>American Foreign</u> <u>Relations, 1972: A Documentary Record</u> (New York: New York University Press, 1975), 76.

Deterrence opened up new avenues for revolutionary agitation and for exporting revolution to Third World 'nations' bourgeoisies struggling against colonialism.' Precisely because of the fear of an outbreak of thermonuclear war, 'wars of national liberation' (local wars) have become feasible because the superpowers would be loath to escalate such wars into world conflicts.⁷⁷

Adam Ulam, an historian, identified Soviet support for "wars of national liberation" as the theater in which Moscow attempted to gather global prestige and eventually emerge victorious in the Cold War:

Although they are determined to prevent the outbreak of a major war, Soviet leaders seem as yet insufficiently aware of the need to evolve techniques for preventing small crises from escalating into major ones. On the contrary, they see such small crises as offering opportunities for the Soviet Union to improve its diplomatic power and position.⁷⁸

As the political scientist Walter Laqueur noted, "wars of national liberation are not covered...by the Soviet concept of peaceful coexistence, for they are considered progressive wars which ought to be supported."⁷⁹ Professor Laqueur's statement raises two major implications: 1)Marxism-Leninism and détente were in some ways incompatible, and 2) the Soviets cosigned a major détente agreement that included principles which ran counter to Moscow's basic foreign policy. Brezhnev himself outlined the paradox of détente and national self-interest in his Foreign Policy Report of the 24th Party Congress:

We declare that while consistently pursuing its policy of peace and friendship among nations, the Soviet Union will continue to conduct a resolute struggle against imperialism, and firmly to rebuff the evil designs and subversions of aggressors. As in the past, we shall give undeviating support to the people's struggle for democracy, national liberation and socialism.⁸⁰

As Moscow's "undeviating support" was in fact checked before tensions reached a point that

⁷⁹Walter Laqueur, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>Negotiation and Statecraft</u>, 1973, 7.

⁷⁷Weeks, <u>The Other Side of Coexistence</u>, 241.

⁷⁸Adam Ulam, as cited in United States, Congress, Senate, Committee on Government Operations, <u>Hearings: International Negotiation: Communist Doctrine and Soviet Diplomacy: Some</u> <u>Observations</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 12.

⁸⁰Brezhnev, speech cited in <u>Documents of the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet</u> <u>Union</u>, 39.

would risk an American response. As Stanley Hoffmann, a scholar of international relations, argued, the period of relaxed tensions allowed the Soviets increased latitude for provocation.⁸¹ With the possible exception of Southeast Asia, no region in the world received greater amounts of Soviet weaponry than the Northern Arab states. In public, Moscow couched this support in terms of fraternal socialism, but privately based its decisions in terms of enhanced self-interest. (This topic will be further discussed in chapter 3).

Fred Schulman, a nuclear scientist, asserted that détente "permitted the Soviet Union to incite the October War."⁶² This was perhaps oversimplified, but nonetheless gets at the heart of the very different modes of détente principles and practices. To be sure, the United States did not sacrifice international interests for détente, either – the events of 1973, in Chile, speak to this fact. And, in the Middle East, the United States supported its client Israel no less enthusiastically than Moscow's influence policies attempted to maintain sway over the Arabs. Nixon declared as much in his 1972 Foreign Policy report to Congress, "The Emerging Structure of Peace": "We stand at the head of a group of countries whose association we value and are not prepared to sacrifice to an improvement in Soviet-American relations."⁶³ In sum, Moscow's revolutionary policies exhibited more dramatically the divide between ideals and geopolitical reality, but this fact applied to both superpowers. Détente cannot be judged only in the vacuum of imprecise communique wording. The refusal of both the United States and the Soviet Union to adhere to the lofty principles set forth in détente proceedings underscores the ongoing Cold War conflict, which had at its roots continued avoidance of nuclear war. For the United States,

⁸¹Hoffmann, "Détente," in Nye, ed., <u>The Making of America's Soviet Policy</u>, 243.

⁸²Fred Schulman, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 208.

⁸³Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: The Emerging Structure of Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), 1972, 18.

these preventative measures would be accomplished through the strategy of the Nixon Doctrine.

Détente and the Nixon Doctrine

The Nixon Doctrine provided an operational link between détente and the Yom Kippur War. As part repudiation, and part continuation of the Truman Doctrine, the basic foreign policy strategy of the United States during the Nixon Administration reflected the need to manage an evolving Cold War. The United States would continue to support democracy and its allies against Communist expansion, but the real catastrophe of Vietnam and the realistic possibility of nuclear holocaust – made all the more frightening toward the end of the 1960s as Soviet nuclear stockpiles reached comparable levels with those of the United States – necessitated indirect support of its allies in the form of military and economic assistance. Nixon's Foreign Policy Report to Congress of 1970, "A New Strategy for Peace," defined the Nixon Doctrine, first the president announced by in 1969:

Its central thesis is that the United States will participate in the defense and development of allies and friends, but that America cannot – and will not – conceive all the plans, design all the programs, execute all the decisions and undertake all the defense of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a real difference and is considered in our interest.⁸⁴

In other words: no more Vietnams, and no more potential for direct confrontation of Soviet and American forces. Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird categorized the four major components of the Nixon Doctrine, all of which relied on the longstanding American strategy of deterrence and containment. The first, "deterring strategic nuclear warfare," emphasized the continuation of American policy since Washington was first confronted with Soviet nuclear

⁸⁴Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 6.

capabilities in the years following World War II. The second, and third components, "deterring theater nuclear warfare," and "deterring theater conventional warfare," respectively, reflected the growing strength of American allies in Europe and their consequent responsibility in deterring localized nuclear war and/or conventional aggression by China or the Soviet Union. The Nixon Administration introduced the fourth component, "deterring subtheater or localized warfare," in the form of Vietnamization, which was expressed most fully with American support to Israel during the Yom Kippur War.⁸⁵ The Department of Defense referred to this fourth component as a "strategy of realistic deterrence," which recognized the inadmissibility of massive retaliation as a means to deter Communist aggression in non-strategic regions; i.e., the Third World.

By the early 1970s, the United States had lost a clear nuclear advantage over the Soviets. As the American homeland became more or less equally vulnerable to Soviet attack, Washington could no longer credibly threaten "massive retaliation" in defense of "subtheater" allies.⁸⁶ Nixon defined the alternative, which was designed to take the potential of nuclear attack on American cities out of the equation: "In cases involving [subtheater] aggression we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defense."⁸⁷

As Nixon noted in his 1973 Foreign Policy Report to Congress, "Shaping a Durable

⁸⁵Laird, <u>The Nixon Doctrine</u>, 9-10.

⁸⁶Melvin Laird, as cited in United States, Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, <u>Department of Defense Appropriations for 1972</u>. <u>Hearings before a subcommittee of the committee on</u> <u>Appropriations</u>, 92d Cong., 1st sess., 1972, 19-20.

⁸⁷Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Building for Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 14.

Peace," the superpowers could not assume that their policies would be obeyed by client countries, which had their own agendas. This fact intensified the need to keep U.S. and Soviet forces out of situations that they could no longer control.⁸⁸ The course of the Yom Kippur War (to be fully discussed in chapters two and three) dramatically exemplified Nixon's concerns. As Edward B. Atkenson, a military expert, noted,

The October 1973 experience marked the first occasion of the exercise of real power by member states of the Third World. Never before have former colonial territories or non-aligned countries been able to dictate political and economic terms to industrialized nations on such a scale or with such effectiveness.⁸⁹

Thus, the Nixon Doctrine attempted to synthesize old and new policies in order to meet the challenges of a Cold War comprising old and new elements. The political scientists Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke aptly characterize the Nixon Doctrine as essentially "an odd mixture of Containment (thought not referred to as such) and hints of a successor to that policy."⁹⁰ Because the Nixon Doctrine emphasized above all else the necessity to avoid crisis situations and nuclear war, it must be viewed at the center of the overall U.S. détente policy. As a strategy, it illustrated an attempt to confront the Soviet Union both firmly and rationally. As Henry Kissinger argued, "To be sure, détente is dangerous if it does not include a strategy of Containment. But Containment is unsustainable unless coupled with a notion of peace."⁹¹

Kissinger's observation emphasized the moderate character of the Nixon Doctrine in

⁸⁸Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Shaping a Durable Peace" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 136.

⁸⁹Edward B. Atkeson, "The Impact of Crises on the Evolution of Strategy and Forces in an Era of Détente," in General Andrew J. Goodpaster, et al. <u>National Security and Détente</u> (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 43.

⁹⁰Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, <u>Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and</u> <u>Practice</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 593.

⁹¹Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 241-242.

particular and détente as a whole. Although both superpowers had augmented their strategic forces many times over since the beginning of the nuclear arms race, neither country enjoyed greater security as compared to the early 1950s. The fact of nuclear parity alone accounted for this state of affairs, but a number of factors also contributed to each superpower's compromised security, and consequently, their desire to maintain a détente.

By the early 1970s, the industrial nations of the world had recovered from the devastation of World War II. West Germany and Japan enjoyed robust trade surpluses while the United States suffered a trade deficit that had nearly tripled between 1971 and 1972. As Richard Thornton observed, the United States was "gradually losing its leading position and was experiencing a declining share of world economic product."⁹² Kissinger, of course, was not an economist, but he understood the close connection between geo-strategy and economics. Citing the shrinking percentage of the American contribution to the global Gross National Product (it had dropped from 52 to 30 percent between 1950 and 1970), Kissinger reasoned: "Still the strongest nation but no longer preeminent, we would have to take seriously the world balance of power, for if it tilted against us, it might prove irreversible."⁹³

These economic concerns were not lost on the Soviets. Leonid Brezhnev declared at the 24th Party Congress: "The ruling circles of the capitalist countries are afraid more than they have ever been of the class struggle developing into a massive revolutionary movement...capitalism has not stabilized as a system. The general crisis of capitalism has continued to deepen."⁹⁴ The Soviet Union, however, had serious international economic woes of its own. The growing

⁹²Richard C. Thornton, <u>The Nixon-Kissinger Years: Reshaping America's Foreign Policy</u> (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 142.

⁹³Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 238.

⁹⁴Leonid Brezhnev, as cited in Soviet Union, <u>Documents of the 24th Congress of the Communist</u> <u>Party of the Soviet Union</u>, 28.

economic power of Western Europe's Common Market underscored the irrelevancy of Moscow's opposition to it – and consequently reduced Soviet political influence throughout Europe.⁹⁵ And as Morris Bernstein noted, the beginning of the 1970s saw a decline in the value of Soviet petroleum exports – what he called "the USSR's principal earner of convertible currency" – thus inhibiting Moscow's access to technology and equipment exports from the industrial countries.⁹⁶

The evolving Cold War thus found two superpowers with growing nuclear arsenals but diminishing political and economic global influence. Both the United States and the Soviet Union recognized each other's vulnerabilities. Before the Cold War could end in an ultimate victory of one side over the other, détente would implicitly maintain the military power of each nation for the time being.

Summit I: SALT

No event signaled the Soviet achievement of nuclear parity with the United States more dramatically than SALT. Negotiations began in November, 1969 at Helsinki, as the United States began to recognize Soviet nuclear capabilities that had been long in the making. In 1963, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara testified before Congress that U.S. nuclear superiority would not guarantee victory in the event of a nuclear war – at least not in the conventional sense. The United States would "win" insofar as its nuclear arsenal would destroy more of the Soviet Union than the Soviets would destroy the United States. McNamara reasoned, "I do not believe we can, not in the normal sense of the word, 'win,' because in my opinion there would

⁹⁵Caldwell, <u>Soviet-American Relations</u>, 25.

⁹⁶Morris Bernstein, "Soviet Economic Growth and Foreign Policy," in Bialer, ed., <u>The Domestic</u> <u>Context of Soviet Foreign Policy</u>, 248.

be so much severe damage done to this country that our way of life would change, and change in an undesirable direction."⁹⁷ McNamara's response, which would not have been out of place in the movie "Dr. Strangelove," essentially heralded the age of nuclear parity of Soviet and American forces, realized by the early 1970s, and codified by SALT.

Serious diplomatic efforts to control the arms race dated back at least as far as the Kennedy Administration, but Nixon was the first American president to conduct arms negotiations from a position of parity. As the historian Harland B. Moulton summarized, Nixon's objective in SALT was to produce "a verifiable agreement in which stable strategic equilibrium is achieved."⁹⁸ For the first time, U.S. policy was aimed not at staying ahead of the Soviets, but in maintaining rough parity.

Paul H. Nitze, an arms negotiator and scholar, identified crisis management as the other major component of SALT. He reasoned that the American SALT strategy attempted to formalize the essential equivalence of each superpower's nuclear arsenal, so "that both sides would be willing to downgrade the nuclear arms relationship between them as a factor in the world political balance."⁹⁹ The ultimate goal of the superpowers' de-emphasis on nuclear power would in turn help to maintain nuclear-free crisis situations. As Laurence W. Martin, a political scientist, argued, the SALT agreements were "major landmarks by any standards. The mere achievement of agreement on such critical and complicated issues goes far beyond what many observers believed possible between major adversaries."¹⁰⁰ Martin was referring to the freeze on

⁹⁷Robert McNamara, United States, Congress, House, Committee on Appropriations, <u>Department</u> of Defense Appropriations for 1964. Hearings before a subcommittee of the committee on Appropriations, 88th Cong., 1st sess., 1963, 340.

⁹⁸Moulton, <u>From Superiority to Parity</u>, 302.

⁹⁹Paul H. Nitze, as cited in American Bar Association, <u>Détente: A Law Professor Workshop</u>, 16. ¹⁰⁰Laurence W. Martin, "Military Issues: Strategic Parity and Its Implications," in Osgood, et al., <u>Retreat from Empire?</u>, 144.

ABM shields at two for each side – one each for the national capital and a missile launching area. Like the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the ABM Treaty, signed on May 26, 1972, at the Moscow summit, sought to curb the nuclear arms race by indirect means. Paragraph three of the treaty read, "Considering that effective measures to limit anti-ballistic missile systems would be a substantial factor in curbing the race in strategic offensive arms...."¹⁰¹ The rationale behind the ABM Treaty held that an unchecked proliferation of nuclear defensive shields (assuming that ABMs could indeed adequately defend regions from nuclear attack) would in turn spur a new arms race in intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The ABM Treaty sought to avoid arms proliferation that would invariably result from the fact of a new, and mutual, superpower vulnerability. Each superpower would have to increase its offensive capabilities so that its strategic deterrent effect would not be neutralized by the opposing superpower's augmented defense structure.

This line of reasoning had its limits. By the early 1970s, ABM technology was still in its experimental stage, and older defense strategies had by no means lost their appeal. Secretary of Defense Laird noted in 1972: "We continue to believe that an effective defense of our population against a major Soviet attack is not now feasible. Thus we must continue to rely on our strategic offensive forces to deter a Soviet nuclear attack on our cities."¹⁰² In 1972, McNamara would no longer have been able to qualify the likelihood of U.S. "victory" in the event of a nuclear conflict. By this point, the Soviet Union had the capability to inflict approximately an equal magnitude of destruction as it would sustain. Admiral of the Navy and

¹⁰¹The ABM Treaty is reprinted in United States, <u>Arms Control and Disarmament Agency</u>, 12th <u>Annual Report to Congress</u>, January 1, 1972–December 31, 1972, 44.

¹⁰²Melvin Laird, as cited in United States, Department of Defense, <u>Toward a National Security</u> <u>Strategy of Realistic Deterrence</u>, 1971, 63.

Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Thomas H. Moorer testified in 1972 that a general nuclear war between Soviet and American forces would kill in the short term approximately 100 million citizens of each country.¹⁰³ The magnitude of such a conflict, which would have quickly claimed the lives of four times as many humans who died in all of World War II, defied comprehension. Jurii Pankov has observed that superpower parity created a "nuclear stalemate" which effectively negated the famous Clausewitzean principle, that war is a continuation of policy by other means, "because nuclear war cannot lead to the achievement of political goals...at this point there is no sensible alternative to peaceful coexistence and détente."¹⁰⁴

The particularities of the complicated SALT process must be understood in the context of what Henry Kissinger recognized in the nuclear age as a fundamental change in the meaning of national power:

It would have been inconceivable even a generation ago that such power once gained could not be translated directly into advantage over one's opponent. But now both we and the Soviet Union have begun to find that each increment of power does not necessarily represent an increment of usable political strength.¹⁰⁵

Thus, like détente as a whole, SALT in the Nixon-Brezhnev years did not seek a fundamental change in the political relationship of the United States and the Soviet Union. Neither country entertained the notion of substantially reducing their nuclear capabilities already in existence, and each exploited SALT as a platform to emphasize the continued importance of military power. Nuclear parity may have negated the political utility of nuclear weapons as a means of

¹⁰³Thomas H. Moorer, United States, Congress, <u>Department of Defense Appropriations</u>, 1972, 203-204.

¹⁰⁴Jurii Pankov, "Definitions and Dimensions of Détente: A Soviet Viewpoint," in Daniel Frei, ed., <u>Definitions and Measurement of Détente: East and West Perspectives</u> (Cambridge: Oelgeschlager, Gunn & Hain Publishers, 1981), 59.

¹⁰⁵Henry A. Kissinger, <u>American Foreign Policy</u>, Expanded Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974) 141.

gaining leverage over the other, but SALT never aimed to put a real halt on the arms race, due to the prestige that American and Soviet leaders continued to associate with nuclear preeminence. Richard Pipes has argued against the idea "that in the nuclear age numbers of weapons do not matter once a certain quantity has been attained."¹⁰⁶ The record of SALT clearly supports his claim. During the Moscow Summit – the high point of SALT in the three years after its inauguration – Brezhnev informed Nixon that the Soviet Union intended to continue its nuclear arms buildup in any way not expressly prohibited by SALT. One group of experts observed that immediately after the Moscow summit, the Kremlin began "a public campaign for the further overall strengthening of Soviet armed forces on the stated ground that, despite the present effectiveness of Soviet deterrent capabilities, the danger of war will persist as long as imperialism survives...."¹⁰⁷

Détente had not changed Moscow's basic equation of nuclear might and international prestige. This fact was clearly demonstrated by Brezhnev's declaration at the 24th Party Congress: "Let no one, for his part, try to talk to us in terms of ultimatums and strength."¹⁰⁸ Moscow had repeatedly rejected the American notion of sufficiency, which Secretary of Defense Laird defined as "an effort to avoid major war increases in strategic force expenditures,"¹⁰⁹ for two reasons, one ideological, and the other a simple matter of power politics. First, the static nature of strategic sufficiency was incompatible with the revolutionary, forward-momentum ethos of

¹⁰⁶Pipes, <u>U.S.-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente</u>, 160.

¹⁰⁷Gouré, Kohler, and Harvey, <u>The Role of Nuclear Forces in Current Soviet Strategy</u>, 14.

¹⁰⁸Brezhnev, speech cited in <u>Documents of the 24th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet</u> <u>Union</u>, 36.

¹⁰⁹Melvin Laird, as cited in United States, Department of Defense, <u>Toward a National Security</u> <u>Strategy of Realistic Deterrence</u>, 1971, 16.

Soviet foreign policy.¹¹⁰ Second, Moscow saw little reason to inhibit future enhancement of the prestige it had already gained as a result of a rigorous arms buildup. As far as the Soviets were concerned, SALT evidenced America's recognition of its own limits; Moscow did not see a mere coincidence in the fact of the United States struggle in Vietnam and its willingness to begin the SALT process in 1969.¹¹¹ In the Soviet view, as the world's "correlation of forces" continued to tip in favor of Moscow, at the expense of America's deteriorating global position, the impetus to augment socialist power at its epicenter was strong indeed.

The United States, for its part, was no more interested than the Soviets in allowing SALT to compromise its nuclear strength. Secretary of Defense Laird emphasized in a speech delivered after the SALT I agreement that the United States would never abandon its nuclear deterrent, which depended on offensive nuclear weapons that remained unaffected by the first round of SALT: "Actual reductions in weapons can come later, after more patient negotiation from a position of adequate strength."¹¹² A 1974 State Department publication affirmed: "We are not dealing with the Soviet Union out of a position of weakness. On the contrary, the preservation of our military strength is a prerequisite for détente, and military strength inferior to none is the only national defense posture which can ever be acceptable to the United States."¹¹³ Unsurprisingly, Senator Henry Jackson denounced SALT as a framework that put more stringent limits on American strategic forces as compared to their Soviet counterparts, thus leaving the United States vulnerable to "inferior" strategic force levels in an ongoing arms race.

¹¹⁰A good example of the revolutionary aspect of Soviet foreign policy can be found in a speech delivered by L.I. Brezhnev, <u>Lenin's Cause Lives on and Triumphs: Report at a Joint Celebration Meeting of the CPSU CC</u> (Moscow: Novosti Press Agency, 1970), 44.

¹¹¹Shultz and Roy Godson, <u>Dezinformatsia</u>, 70.

¹¹²Laird, Melvin R. <u>The Nixon Doctrine</u>, 11.

¹¹³United States, Department of State, <u>The Meaning of Détente</u>, 1974, 13.

Jackson never elaborated on his interpretation of inferiority, but, as William Bundy observed, he needed a strategy to deflate Nixon's post-summit prestige in the summer of 1972 – arguably the high point of Nixon's presidency.¹¹⁴

Gerard Smith's memoir, *Doubletalk*, recounted the frustrations of the U.S. SALT negotiating team, which Smith headed in the Nixon Administration as Director of the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency. He argued that Nixon's use of the "back channel" for nuclear diplomacy effectively surrendered expert control of the negotiations to politicians like Kissinger and Nixon – to the detriment of both superpowers. The ABM Treaty earned Nixon an enormous amount of political capital, but Smith noted that the treaty compromised U.S. strategic interests particularly and that of both nations generally. First, the U.S. delegation originally pushed for a numerical advantage of ABM sites but consented to an equal number of two for both sides in the final agreement. This loss, although major, was dwarfed by a larger blown opportunity for both superpowers. Smith bitterly noted: "There was a chance to outlaw ABMs entirely. We pulled away when this prospect seemed to brighten."¹¹⁵

The impressive, yet strictly limited, success of the ABM treaty serves as a microcosm for Nixon and Kissinger's overselling of the entire détente policy. Gerard Smith characterized Nixon's eagerness to complete the treaty as reflecting "the natural tendency of a politician approaching an election to magnify the significance of his accomplishments."¹¹⁶ For Kissinger, the SALT agreements satisfied his enormous appetite for combining geo-strategic policy with personal prestige. As Kissinger's biographer Walter Isaacson noted, the Moscow Summit

¹¹⁴Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 354.

¹¹⁵Smith, <u>Doubletalk</u>, 456.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 453.

"completed Kissinger's transition into a global superstar, the first and thus far only celebrity diplomat of the media age."¹¹⁷ It is illustrative of détente politics as a whole that the main SALT experts, Raymond Garthoff, Paul Nitze, and Gerard Smith – all of whom possessed a technical command of nuclear diplomacy far beyond that of their politician bosses – were largely excluded from the summit negotiations. Nuclear parity may have rendered meaningless marginal gains of one Great Power over another – but its utility for gaining domestic political clout remained.

In addition to the overselling of détente, SALT also exemplified the ongoing fact of the Cold War arms race. SALT evolved out of four years of intense diplomacy and two summit meetings without any permanent reduction in either superpower's strategic offensive capabilities. An Interim Agreement, attached to the end of the ABM Treaty, placed a five-year freeze on ICBM launchers and submarine-based ballistic missile (SLBM) launchers. As if to underscore the title, "Interim Agreement," Article VIII, paragraph three, read: "Each party shall, in exercising its national sovereignty, have the right to withdraw from this Interim Agreement have jeopardized its supreme interests."¹¹⁸ Gerard Smith testified before the Senate Committee on Armed Services that the Interim Agreement "does not provide long term comprehensive limitation on strategic offensive weapons systems."¹¹⁹ And Nixon could only offer at an ABM signing ceremony that limitations for the "vitally important" area of offensive nuclear weapons.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷Walter Issacson, <u>Kissinger: A Biography</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 433.

¹¹⁸The Limited Agreement is reprinted in United States, <u>Arms Control and Disarmament Agency</u>, <u>12th Annual Report to Congress</u>, January 1, 1972–December 31, 1972, 48-49.

 ¹¹⁹Gerard Smith, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1727 (1972), 149.
 ¹²⁰Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> United States: Richard M. Nixon, 1972, 947.

If the success of the ABM treaty is to be judged by its potential in limiting offensive weapons, it was indeed a muted success.

As Stanley Hoffmann observed, SALT I produced a "sausage effect," which succeeded in "inciting both sides to produce whatever weapons had not been limited."¹²¹ In the beginning of the 1970s, the U.S. Air Force had successfully tested and deployed its first generation of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicle (MIRV) Poseidon and Minuteman III missiles, allowing several warheads each aimed at a different target to be fired from a single launcher. The Americans justified the development of these enormously lethal weapons on the grounds that as of 1970, there existed no guarantee that Moscow would agree to limit their ABM program, which could have eroded the credibility of the U.S. nuclear deterrent.

In May of 1972, Soviet MIRV technology was still in its testing stage. Understandably, Moscow refused to include MIRVs as part of SALT, for doing so would have put the Soviets in a permanently inferior nuclear position. In what Richard Smoke calls a "tragedy of timing" the omission of MIRVs from SALT meant that "the number of separate nuclear warheads that each side could rain down on the other increased from between one and two thousand as SALT was getting underway to approximately ten thousand in the 1980s."¹²²

In Moscow's view, the checkered success of SALT represented the contradictory impulses of maintaining – or even surpassing – American nuclear capabilities. On the other hand, the Soviets wanted to avoid an intense arms race which threatened to rupture the entire détente framework.¹²³ The Soviets perceived the benefits of détente in a more complicated light

¹²¹Hoffmann, "Détente," in Nye, ed., <u>The Making of America's Soviet Policy</u>, 249.

¹²²Richard Smoke, <u>National Security and the Nuclear Dilemma: An Introduction to the</u> <u>American Experience in the Cold War</u>, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993), 159.

¹²³Gouré, Kohler, and Harvey, <u>The Role of Nuclear Forces in Current Soviet Strategy</u>, 99.

than the United States. Whereas Washington formulated one basic détente strategy *vis-á-vis* Moscow, the Soviet Union managed an independent détente with several U.S. allies. Moscow saw enemies in all directions (not to mention its arch-nemesis China), and therefore refused to concede any grounds during SALT that they interpreted as limiting their strategic forces.¹²⁴ Richard Pipes explained Moscow's anti-equivalence nuclear strategy: "Essentially, the Soviet Union hopes to neutralize the damage to its interests implied in the balance-of-power principle by establishing its physical (military) presence in every major strategic area of the globe and demanding a senior voice in all regional politico-military arrangements."¹²⁵

Through a combination of political and strategic factors, SALT as it existed up to the Yom Kippur War did not curb the arms race. The second Soviet-American Summit held in the United States during June 1973, did not produce any significant breakthroughs in arms negotiations, and détente, as it related to the control of a nuclear buildup, had clearly demonstrated its limits. As the historian David Holloway concluded, "The Soviet leaders did not see a contradiction between growing military power and détente. On the contrary, the one was seen to provide the basis for the other."¹²⁶ This contradiction was not unique to the Soviets. In a bizarre defense of détente, aimed at policy makers who charged that relaxed tensions with Moscow would translate into reduced U.S. security as a result of cutbacks in defense expenditures, Henry Kissinger noted that the Pentagon's research and development efforts flourished only after the signature of SALT I – as if the point of SALT was geared for the benefit of defense contractors.¹²⁷

¹²⁴Petrov, <u>U.S.–Soviet Détente</u>, 8 and 11.

¹²⁵Pipes, <u>U.S.-Soviet Relations in the Era of Détente</u>, 58.

¹²⁶Holloway, <u>The Soviet Union and the Arms Race</u>, 88.

¹²⁷Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 237.

In sum, SALT I succeeded mainly in formalizing the rough parity of Soviet and American nuclear force levels. The Soviet MIRV program did not become operational until 1975; therefore, the Interim Agreement left the number of American nuclear warheads at twice the Soviet level. In turn, Moscow enjoyed a three-to-two advantage of total missiles and three times more mega-tonnage than that possessed by the United States.¹²⁸ As Richard Thornton, a political scientist, observed, "SALT established a common basis for evaluating the complex power shift underway," meaning the transition from U.S. superiority to parity with the Soviet Union.¹²⁹ Neither superpower demonstrated any inclination toward permanent, genuine nuclear disarmament, and in some ways, the Cold War arms race became reinvigorated as a result of détente. As Stanley Hoffmann remarked, "Nuclear weapons have not abolished war, they have displaced it."¹³⁰ His observation speaks directly to the fact that the looming threat of nuclear holocaust necessitated a superpower détente in which general war could never become "a continuation of politics by other means." But superpower behavior throughout SALT I speaks to a "non-violent" nuclear war by other means as well.

Because of the absolute inadmissability of such a conflict, both the Soviet Union and the United States sought to enhance their nuclear power – without any particular desire to unleash it – as a means of furthering the Cold War to its ultimate and peaceful conclusion. The nuclear theoretician Robert Jervis succinctly captured the contradictory nature of the political component to the nuclear arms race: "Much of the history of nuclear strategy has been a series of attempts to find a way out of this predicament and return to the simpler, more comforting pre-

¹²⁸Figures cited in John Newhouse, <u>Cold Dawn: The Story of SALT</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973), 263.

¹²⁹Thornton, <u>The Nixon-Kissinger Years</u>, 141.

¹³⁰Stanley Hoffmann, "Weighing the Balance of Power," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 50 (July 1972), 625.

nuclear world in which safety did not depend on the adversary's restraint.^{*131} Direct Great Power conflict may have ended with the advent of nuclear weapons, but Great Power politics continued in the Cold War as vigorously as ever.

Summit I: The Basic Principles Agreement (BPA)

Along with the ABM Treaty, the other major document signed during the May 1972 summit in Moscow dealt with political relations between the superpowers. "The Basic Principles of Mutual Relations between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" attempted to link the spirit of a responsible policy in arms control with responsible political exchanges as necessitated by the danger of nuclear conflict. Henry Kissinger framed the American strategy as a component of linkage between SALT and the BPA: "The two elements reinforced each other; they symbolized our conviction that a relaxation of tensions could not be based exclusively on arms control; the ultimate test would be restrained international behavior."¹³² Like the ABM Treaty, the BPA signaled an important first step toward normalized relations between the superpowers. Adam Ulam, a scholar who did not romanticize the potentials of détente, characterized the BPA in positive terms: "For the first time in a generation the two superpowers were able to survey the whole realm of international relations, and to do so without resorting to mutual vituperations and accusations.¹³³

Moscow initiated the BPA, which, as Ambassador Dobrynin noted, received far more attention in the Soviet Union than in the United States.¹³⁴ In hindsight, this disparity seems

¹³¹Robert Jervis, <u>The Illogic of American Nuclear Strategy</u> (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 19.

¹³²Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u>, 1254.

¹³³Ulam, <u>Dangerous Relations</u>, 82.

¹³⁴Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 251-252.

logical – the fundamental theme of the BPA assumed that all political relations between the superpowers flow from the basis of equality, of which nuclear parity was a primary component.¹³⁵ Thus, Moscow viewed the BPA as a victory for Soviet prestige on the world stage, and as such, it figured prominently in the Soviets' self-image as leader of the world's revolutionary socialist movements. One document released after the Moscow summit by the Council of Ministers of the USSR emphasized the great importance that Moscow attached to America's recognition of Soviet legitimacy, as embodied by the BPA: "The results of the Soviet-American talks showed once again that in modern circumstances controversial international questions cannot be solved by methods of the policy from 'a position of strength.' They can and must be settled through negotiations based on observing the principal of parity and equal security of [both] sides...."¹³⁶

Richard Nixon, for his part, reinforced the spirit of equality during the opening toasts of the Moscow Summit. He declared at the state dinner of May 22: "Because we are both prepared to proceed on the basis of equality and mutual respect, we meet at a moment when we can make peaceful cooperation between our two countries a reality."¹³⁷ Nixon, always a shrewd politician, told the Soviets exactly what they wanted to hear. A firm American declaration of equality, noted Dobrynin, "Created the impression among the Soviet population that its government at last had prevailed over the United States on this principle [of equality], which had long been reluctant to accept it even though we had presented it as a fundamental issue of war or peace."¹³⁸

American officials did not ascribe nearly as much importance to the BPA as their Soviet

¹³⁵Garthoff, <u>Détente and Confrontation</u>, 297.

¹³⁶Cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 68.

¹³⁷Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> <u>United States: Richard M. Nixon</u>, 1972, 620.

¹³⁸Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 252.

counterparts. They generally found little reason to revel in the principle, or fact, of Soviet equality. Between Vietnam and impressive economic growth in Western Europe and Japan, the condition of global U.S. preeminence was damaged enough – adding to that list nuclear parity, and, by implication, de facto acceptance of Moscow's political strength, did not strike American leaders as deserving of great publicity. Article I of the BPA addressed the issue of political equality most directly: "Differences in ideology and in the social system of the USA and USSR are not obstacles to the bilateral development of normal relations based on the principles of sovereignty, equality, non-interference in international affairs and mutual advantage."¹³⁹

Where the Soviets tended to see the BPA as a meaningful and overdue recognition of their country's viability and seriousness, American leaders dismissed the document as a function of diplomatic pleasantries. Among Kissinger's objectives during his secret pre-summit trip to Moscow in April 1972 was to hammer out the details of the BPA so that it could be signed without incident at the upcoming summit. Kissinger was unmoved by Brezhnev's promise of "the accolades of history" if he agreed to accept an essentially Soviet-constructed document, which Kissinger considered to be "flavored with *Pravda*-like rhetoric." Kissinger dryly commented: "I did not believe that history would remember a set of principles so watered down as to be equally acceptable to the principal capitalist and strongest Communist state."¹⁴⁰ Kissinger biographer Walter Isaacson observed that Nixon and the State Department "tended to dismiss [the BPA] as a boilerplate, with good reason: the document sought to enshrine a nebulous and unworkable code of conduct...."¹⁴¹ Indeed, the principal document of the Moscow Summit, as far as the

 ¹³⁹The BPA, in Stebbins and Adams, eds., <u>American Foreign Relations, 1972</u>, 76.
 ¹⁴⁰Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u>, 1150.

¹⁴¹Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 427.

Americans were concerned, was the ABM Treaty; their concern for the BPA was remarkably more muted than that of the Soviets, who valued it more than other summit agreements.¹⁴²

If American officials were skeptical of the viability of the BPA in the short term, their solution was to "free" the United States by interpreting the document as a vague set of objectives to be met over a long period of time. Nixon's foreign policy report to Congress of 1973, "Shaping a Durable Peace," interpreted the BPA as such: "What we have agreed upon are principles that acknowledge differences, but express a code of conduct which, if observed, can only contribute to mold peace and to an international system based on mutual respect and self-restraint. These principles are a guide for future action."¹⁴³ This interpretation was consistent with Nixon's statement before a joint session of Congress following his return from the Moscow Summit: "The principles to which we have agreed in Moscow are like a roadmap. Now that the map has been laid out, it is up to each country to follow it."¹⁴⁴

Soviet leaders, of course, did not publicly degrade the immediate significance of the BPA, although the evidence suggests that they were content with its emphasis on superpower equality. Beyond that, there is little reason to assume that Moscow attached any more operational weight to the document than the Americans, insofar as they intended to truly refrain from instigating crisis situations. As previously quoted, Article I of the BPA identified peaceful coexistence as the basis by which the two superpowers would conduct their relations. In the Soviet political lexicon, peaceful coexistence referred to a framework of superpower relations far different from

¹⁴²Soviet Union, <u>Soviet Foreign Policy, Volume II, 1945-1980</u> (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1980), 465.

¹⁴³Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Shaping a Durable Peace," 1973, 37.

¹⁴⁴Richard Nixon, as cited United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1722 (1972), 858.

the American conception of détente. During Kissinger's pre-summit negotiations in Moscow, Foreign Minister Gromyko and General Secretary Brezhnev insisted on including the phrase "peaceful coexistence" in the document. William Bundy characterized the term as a "code phrase meaning that the relationship with the United States would still be intensely competitive. The USSR would not abandon any form of pressure, threats or covert action by intelligence agencies; it merely implied that it would not engage in the outright use of force against the United States."¹⁴⁵

Kissinger was entirely aware of the Soviet interpretation of peaceful coexistence; Article II of the BPA represented his attempt to neutralize whatever "free pass" the Soviets believed they gained to pursue international adventurism. The key sentences in Article II essentially served as a rebuttal to Article I: both nations "will always exercise restraint in their mutual relations and will be prepared to negotiate and settle differences by peaceful means....Both sides recognize that efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other, directly or indirectly, are inconsistent with these objectives."¹⁴⁶ Because the Soviets interpreted peaceful coexistence in far more precise terms than the Americans framed their rebuttal against obtaining unilateral advantage, Moscow saw the BPA above all as a legitimization of their interpretation of peaceful coexistence. Alexander L. George concluded his brilliant analysis of the BPA by referring to the document as a "pseudoagreement." He noted: "It gave an erroneous impression that the United States and the Soviets were in substantial agreement on the rules of the game and the restraints to be observed in their competition of third areas."¹⁴⁷ As John Lewis Gaddis

¹⁴⁵Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 323.

¹⁴⁶The BPA, in Stebbins and Adams, eds., <u>American Foreign Relations, 1972</u>, 76.

¹⁴⁷Alexander L. George, "The Basic Principles Agreement of 1972: Origins and Expectations," in Alexander L. George, ed., <u>Managing U.S.-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention</u> (Boulder:

observed, not only did the Soviets have "no intention of giving up support for Third World 'national liberation' movements," but, as with any international agreement, the BPA was not self-enforcing, hence "there was no way for Washington to monitor Moscow's compliance."¹⁴⁸

Senator Stephen J. Solarz of New York, in raising the fact that détente "did not prevent the outbreak of the [October] 1973 war," rhetorically asked: "If nobody had ever thought of the word détente, that both sides, recognizing the real possibility that a continuation of the conflict would lead to a confrontation between our two countries, would have recognized the mutual interest in bringing it, at that particular point, to a halt."¹⁴⁹ Solarz's counterfactual question is, of course, impossible to answer, but it raises an important point: if the BPA was intended to capture on paper the essence of relaxed tensions between the superpowers, but instead negated itself through its internal contradictions, then the efficacy of détente as it related to preventing tensions in Third World conflicts is questionable. Helmut Sonnenfeldt emphasized that the BPA "and subsequent agreements with the Soviets in 1973 regarding international political conduct never were intended to be self-enforcing."¹⁵⁰

Given these circumstances, it is fair to ask why the document was created in the first place. The answer must reflect the détente framework as a whole. Two superpowers were competing in an ongoing Cold War and exploited détente in the interests of their own national power and political prestige within a system which aimed to minimize the potential of a nuclear

Westview Press, 1983), 110.

¹⁴⁸John Lewis Gaddis, "The First Fifty Years," in Mark Garrison and Abbot Gleason, eds., <u>Shared</u> <u>Destiny: Fifty Years of Soviet-American Relations</u> (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), 28.

¹⁴⁹Stephen J. Solarz, as cited in United States, Congress, House, Committee on International Relations, <u>Hearings: U.S.–U.S.S.R. Relations and Strategic Balance</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), 13.

¹⁵⁰Helmut Sonnenfeldt, as cited in <u>Confrontation in the US-USSR Relationship</u>, 107.

war. Neither side viewed détente, or the documents that gave it expression, as a hallowed set of laws to be meticulously followed. That is the meaning of Moscow's insistence on including the phrase "peaceful coexistence" in the BPA, and the Americans' subsequent dismissal of the document as a "roadmap." Superpower actions surrounding the Yom Kippur War certainly "violated" détente principles in many forms (each of which will be discussed in detail in the following chapters): Moscow's decision not to warn the United States of an imminent surprise Arab attack; the huge weapons airlift undertaken by each superpower during the war; and the caustic Soviet-American exchange that took place during the ceasefire violations.

But a larger question needs to be addressed before détente can be evaluated in a simple cause and effect analysis. If, indeed, détente was pushed and prodded in the Middle East in the interests of national power over mutual accommodation, it is clear that neither side assumed that the agreements which had defined détente were designed for strict adherence beyond the ongoing avoidance of nuclear war. This view does not condone the decisions that helped to produce one of the most destructive wars of the modern era – it merely seeks to interpret détente in the terms understood by the Soviet Union and the United States. The second Soviet-American summit, held in the United States in June, 1973, three months before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, reinforced each superpower's prevailing notion of a limited détente. At the global level, peace would be maintained in the form of avoiding nuclear war, yet local conflict in the Middle East would erupt yet again.

Summit II: The Midnight Harangue and the Nuclear Agreement

Two major situations affected the Soviet-American détente in the eleven months between the Moscow and Washington/San Clemente summits. In the United States, the Watergate affair,

sparked by a break-in of the offices of political opponents, was transforming from a domestic nuisance into a full-blown scandal that was threatening to erode Nixon's ability to perform his presidential duties. Nixon had always thought that his greatest legacy would be in the foreign policy realm. Just as Nixon tied much of his reelection hopes in 1972 to a successful (if oversold) record of détente with the Soviets, the president became determined to demonstrate his ongoing command of U.S. foreign policy. The Soviets, unsurprisingly, could not quite understand how the leader of the United States allowed himself to get mixed up in the mounting Watergate crisis. But they did respond favorably to Nixon's détente overtures, although with reservations about the president's ability to retain the credibility necessary to make commitments. If the Watergate scandal never occurred, Nixon likely would have found Kissinger's growing fame unbearable. But Kissinger was left unscathed by the Watergate shakeup, and as a result, saw his own powers increase dramatically. The trend culminated in Kissinger replacing William Rogers as Secretary of State (he remained National Security Adviser) in late August, 1973.

On the Soviet end, by the spring of 1973, Moscow had armed its Arab clients in Egypt and Syria to levels sufficient to launch a war against Israel. The Soviets had put themselves in the curious position of neutralizing their authority in the region by transferring sufficient amounts of weapons so that the Arabs could effectively ignore Moscow's wishes. (This clientpatron relationship is discussed in Chapter 3.) For much of 1973, the Soviet Union tried to balance the impossible – continuing influence in the Arab world without damaging its relations with the United States.

As the war in Vietnam was coming to an end, and no major breakthroughs occurred in the area of SALT, the American Summit of 1973 began with fairly singular objectives for both sides: Nixon wanted to push détente forward, and Brezhnev wanted to warn the Americans of the possibility of another war in the Middle East without being too explicit about it. The General Secretary first brought up the matter of a looming crisis with Kissinger during the presummit negotiations. The Arab-Israeli conflict was still deadlocked under the unworkable United Nations Resolution 242 rubric, which called for full Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied since the June 1967 War, in exchange for political normalization and Arab pledges of security. Brezhnev ominously hinted to Kissinger: "Nothing in the world is eternal - similarly the present military advantage enjoyed by Israel is not eternal either."¹⁵¹ His warning fell on deaf ears; the Americans (and Israelis, for that matter) assumed that an Arab attack was unlikely because it would end in another catastrophic defeat similar to the outcome of the June War of 1967. Kissinger informed the Soviets that they were inflating Washington's ability to exert any meaningful influence over the Israelis. It was only with the beginning of the Yom Kippur War that Kissinger became interested in a comprehensive Arab-Israel settlement. Before the war, he considered all third-party efforts to impose a peace on the region futile, as evidenced by what he called a "meaningless" paragraph in the BPA affirming mutual superpower commitment to a territorial and political agreement as envisioned by United Nations Resolution 242.¹⁵² The thorny Middle East issue was not raised at the June 1973 summit until the last day of Brezhnev's trip.

At a lavish dinner party hosted by the Soviets in their Washington embassy, Nixon delivered a speech in which he emphasized that détente would not cure the fundamental differences that comprised the Cold War: "I would not for one moment suggest to this audience,

¹⁵¹Leonid Brezhnev, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 296.

¹⁵²Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u>, 1247.

or to those who may be listening on television or radio, that one meeting or two meetings at the summit brings instant peace, instant relaxation of tensions, and instant reduction or limitations of arms."¹⁵³ It is noteworthy that Nixon characterized détente in such cautious terms. Beginning with the Yom Kippur War, détente suffered a precipitous decline through the 1970s, and collapsed entirely at the end of the decade.

On the following day, the superpowers signed the "Agreement for the Prevention of Nuclear War" (henceforth referred to as the PNW). In its final draft, the document was a rather bland reiteration of the superpowers' mutual, if non-committal, desire for global peace. Moscow had originally pushed for an agreement to ban the use of nuclear weapons. Nixon and Kissinger steadfastly rejected the proposal on the grounds that such an agreement would deny Western Europe a nuclear shield against Soviet attack – an especially dark scenario given the overwhelming superiority of Soviet conventional forces – and afford Moscow maximum latitude in a potential war with China. The United States refused to shelve its nuclear arsenal for the simple reason that doing so would increase the likelihood of war, thus illustrating continued U.S. emphasis on nuclear deterrence.¹⁵⁴

The PNW did not depart from the conditions of the BPA except in the area of crisis management. Article IV stated that if a situation arose that ran the risk of erupting into nuclear war as a result of direct tensions or third party conflict, the United States and Soviet Union "shall immediately enter into urgent consultations with each other and make every effort to

¹⁵³Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> <u>United States: Richard M. Nixon</u>, 1973, 603-604.

¹⁵⁴Nixon, <u>RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon</u>, 881.

avert this risk."¹⁵⁵ On its own accord, the language of Article IV was unambiguous, but Article VI managed to negate much of the document's viability – especially if the overall aim of the PNW set out to codify a set of norms during crisis situations. It read: "Nothing in this Agreement shall impair...the obligations undertaken in treaties, agreements, and other appropriate documents."¹⁵⁶

The nuclear imbroglio that would occur at the end of the Yom Kippur War became the first such crisis situation to test Soviet and American intentions. The behavior of both countries (to be discussed in detail in Chapters 2 and 3) in that tense period reflected the ambiguity expressed in the PNW: Neither side wanted nuclear war, but neither side demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice its clients' interest, either.

As if to demonstrate that the summit was an inappropriate forum to discuss unpleasant issues, the Middle East received no official mention except one passing reference in a joint communique. This document broadly covered all détente issues raised during the summit, from ongoing negotiations in arms control to cultural exchanges. Only the topic of transportation received fewer words than the Arab-Israeli conflict. The relevant passage read: "Both parties agreed to continue to exert their efforts to promote the quickest possible settlement in the Middle East."¹⁵⁷ The statement could not have been further removed from reality. The Americans were doing nothing to push the Israelis toward accepting the provisions set forth under United Nations Resolution 242 on the mistaken assumption that Israel's military

¹⁵⁵The "Agreement for the Prevention of Nuclear War" is reprinted in Richard P. Stebbins and Elaine P. Adams, eds., <u>American Foreign Relations, 1973: A Documentary Record</u> (New York: New York University Press, 1976), 268.

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

¹⁵⁷Cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Richard</u> <u>M. Nixon</u>, 1973, 611.

hegemony would indefinitely maintain regional stability. The Soviets, meanwhile, were in the process of arming their Egyptian and Syrian clients with enormous amounts of materiél, including advanced surface-to-air-missile technology.

Brezhnev clearly sensed that conditions were ripe for a major war in the Middle East. He decided that the summit could not end without a concerted attempt to impose peace on the region – on Arab terms. On June 23, at Nixon's "Casa Pacifica" residence in San Clemente, the Soviet and American delegations had retired for the evening at 7:15 p.m., only to resume talks three hours later when Secret Service agents informed Kissinger that Brezhnev was demanding an immediate meeting with the president. It was a gross breach of diplomatic protocol, but Nixon consented, and at 10:45 p.m. the leaders of the world's superpowers met, in their pajamas, in Nixon's study accompanied by Kissinger and Ambassador Dobrynin. Brezhnev proceeded to launch into a rambling diatribe about the Middle East. He demanded Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territories, and intimated that if the United States failed to coerce Israel to do so, Moscow would be compelled to blame the Americans if and when a war should erupt.¹⁵⁸

As Dobrynin observed – and the events in early October clearly proved – the Americans should not have discounted Brezhnev's insinuations, no matter how bizarrely he chose to present them.¹⁵⁹ Given that Brezhnev himself was not sure of the Arabs' intentions (Egyptian President Anwar Sadat refused to inform Moscow of his exact plans until the last possible moment), it is unlikely that the General Secretary could have been any more explicit. On the other hand, Brezhnev did not deliver another such warning in the weeks preceding the war. He would have enjoyed more credibility as American and Israeli intelligence reports were tracking large-scale

¹⁵⁸Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 412.

¹⁵⁹Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 282.

Egyptian and Syrian deployments throughout September. Furthermore, Brezhnev's harangue – unconventional as it was – did not depart from the UN Resolution 242 framework that had failed to break the six-year deadlock. Aside from Brezhnev's insistence on giving himself a place to air out Moscow's frustrations, it is unclear if he believed that Israel would throw away its entire defense posture based simply on the vehemence of the Soviet leader's demand. In the twilight hours of the meeting, a bleary eyed and unimpressed Nixon did his best to reject politely Brezhnev's plan, and the summit ended on one of the weirder notes in the history of Soviet-American relations.

A Limited Détente: Toward the Yom Kippur War

The Nixon-Brezhnev years were characterized by a basic paradox: the superpower détente blossomed while the Arab world coalesced as never before toward another war with Israel. It must be left to imagination regarding the path of Soviet-American relations had the Yom Kippur War never occurred. It cannot be known what the Cold War would have looked like, but it is clear that October, 1973, marked the beginning of a downward turn in superpower relations. If one fact emerges from the ambiguous and sometimes inconsistent record of détente, it is that the inadmissability of nuclear war, and the moral imperative of effective crisis management, transcended the ideological nature of the Cold War. The Yom Kippur War was the first major third-party conflict to demonstrate that détente was fair game in furthering superpower selfinterest, so long as the avoidance of direct engagement of Soviet and American forces remained at the fore of each nation's policies.

Even though Nixon and Kissinger assumed that another Arab-Israeli war was unlikely in the short term, the Middle East had long been recognized by many Americans as the region which posed the greatest threat to a superpower confrontation. As such, the Arab-Israeli conflict provided a barometer for measuring the "push and pull" imperatives of détente and the Cold War. In 1969, William E. Griffith commented on the potential for catastrophe in the Middle East, where neither superpower had demonstrated much success in controlling its clients, but had nonetheless supplied them each with the ability to wage a massive war.¹⁶⁰ George Mahon, Chairman of the House subcommittee on Department of Defense Appropriations, aptly summed up a major American foreign policy concern in 1972: "I think the feeling in this country, certainly my feeling, is that the greatest threat to World War III lies not in Vietnam or Western Europe as such, but in the Middle East."¹⁶¹ The Yom Kippur War would thus test the competing factors of superpower restraint and the desire for regional prestige.

At the outbreak of the war, both the United States and the Soviet Union exonerated their own actions by accusing the other as the instigator of hostilities. Moscow blamed the United States for not heeding their warning of a looming war; while the United States countered that the warnings were too vague, and delivered too early, to be taken seriously. At the Pacem in Terris conference on October 8, two days after the beginning of the war, Kissinger warned: "We will resist any attempt to exploit a policy of détente to weaken our alliances, we will react if a relaxation of tensions is read as a cover to exacerbate conflicts in international trouble spots." And most pointedly: "The Soviet Union cannot disregard these principles in any area of the world without imperiling its entire relationship with the United States."¹⁶² For all of Kissinger's dismissals of the BPA – the document that most directly prohibited superpower instigation – the

¹⁶⁰Griffith and Rostow, <u>East-West Relations</u>, 19.

¹⁶¹United States, Congress, <u>Department of Defense Appropriations for 1972</u>, 725.

¹⁶²Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1792 (1973), 528.

Secretary of State and other American officials were clearly surprised that Moscow had chosen not to inform the Americans of an imminent attack in early October and believed that this choice threatened the entire détente framework.¹⁶³ A State Department publication released in June 1974 made clear that the passage of time did not mellow Washington's heated reaction at the start of the war: "We will react if a relaxation of tensions is used a cover to exacerbate conflicts in international trouble spots."¹⁶⁴

With the Watergate scandal occupying a majority of Nixon's time, Kissinger became the de facto head of U.S. foreign policy. Although Kissinger interpreted Soviet policy as essentially discarding détente in favor of other interests, the Secretary of State decided with Nixon on the morning of October 6 that détente should still guide U.S. policy:

Our strategy was to use the then prevailing policy of détente to seek a joint approach with the Soviet Union from emerging as the spokesman for the Arab side, isolating us in the Islamic world, and dividing us from Europe. Above all, it would also gain time to permit the military situation to clarify, since we were still convinced that we would soon have to deal with the political consequences of a rapid Israeli victory.¹⁶⁵

Kissinger's strategy was emblematic of superpower behavior as a whole. Détente was many things for many reasons: a tool of national self-interest; a means of expressing one's intentions to allies and enemies alike; and perhaps, most importantly, détente was seen as an essential component of crisis management in that it could buy time so that a local crisis would be understood before it erupted into nuclear war.

Ambassador Dobrynin observed that improved superpower communication – one of the fundamental goals of détente – was instrumental in the maintenance of superpower tension

¹⁶³Marshall Shulman, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>Détente</u>, 1974, 39.

¹⁶⁴United States, Department of State, <u>The Meaning of Détente</u>, 2.

¹⁶⁵Henry A. Kissinger, <u>Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 38.

during crisis situations.¹⁶⁶ Indeed, Soviet-American communication throughout the war was on the whole constructive and crucial in keeping a bloody proxy war at the local level. (Chapters 2 and 3 will elaborate on how each superpower, over the course of the conflict, challenged the details of détente but did not break its basic purpose in avoiding a nuclear conflict.) After the war, Brezhnev declared in a speech: "If the current conflict would explode in an environment of general international tension and the sharpening of relations between...the United States and the Soviet Union, the confrontation in the Middle East could become far more dangerous and be on a scale threatening general peace."¹⁶⁷

Brezhnev was right. There were many ways that both superpowers could have taken steps to minimize both the local and global tensions that arose as a result of the Yom Kippur War. That the United States and the Soviet Union chose not to in certain areas, was illustrative of the overall meaning of détente in Cold War history. Détente was not "born" in the Nixon-Brezhnev era; rather it had developed over a long history of Soviet relations with the outside world. Détente never aimed to end the Cold War – that would only come at the peaceful selfdestruction of one superpower of the course of a mutually exclusive competition. Therefore, the major components of détente – arms control and restraint in consolidating influence in the Third World – never reached a point that would hinder the ability of one of superpower in gaining leverage over the other.

An overview of the Soviet-American détente reveals a system characterized by deception and over-selling, domestic and international power politics, and even diametrically opposed

¹⁶⁶Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 201.

¹⁶⁷L.I. Brezhnev, as cited in Hoffmann, "Détente," in Nye, ed., <u>The Making of America's Soviet</u> <u>Policy</u>, 245.

interpretations of the meaning of relaxed tensions. It is certainly tempting to ascribe to the realist position as enunciated by Hans Morgenthau: "When you probe behind a term such as détente you realize that it is a typical ideology of foreign policy. That is to say, it is not a foreign policy by itself, but it is an attempt to justify on rational and moral grounds whatever policy the term détente is invoked."¹⁶⁸ As Morgenthau would have it, détente was little more than whatever Cold War leaders said it was in order to suit their interests in a particular time and place. Morgenthau was correct to a point. No amount of diplomacy could have produced a comprehensive definition of détente to be strictly followed at all points of conflict and deeds misses a larger point. It is the one that explains the major transformation of each superpower's foreign policy over the middle decades of the 20th century: in the Soviet Union, from Lenin's call for an inevitable war against the bourgeois world to Khrushchev's renunciation of thermonuclear conflict; in the United States, from Containment and massive retaliation to the Nixon Doctrine and linkage.

Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union wanted nuclear war. By any measure, détente intensified in the Nixon-Brezhnev era, as a result of nuclear parity and the dangers such destructive capacity threatened, in a newly complex and multi-polar world. What Walter Laqueur concluded of Soviet actions during the Yom Kippur War was true of the United States and its ally as well: "The Soviet dilemma was not whether to support [the Arabs in] the war but how far involvement could go without antagonizing the American architects and advocates of

¹⁶⁸Hans Morgenthau, "Détente: Reality and Illusion," George Schwab and Henry Friedlander, eds., <u>Détente in Historical Perspective</u> (New York: Cyrco Press, 1975), 71.

détente too much.^{*169} Such was the threshold of détente: local conflict would continue so long as global nuclear war could be avoided. As the Cold War played out in the Middle East, the final months of 1973 demonstrated that détente had remained what it always had been: something to be valued, but never at the expense of self-interest; and something to be denigrated, but never to the point of nuclear war. In a system that rejected both mutual destruction and mutual accommodation, there existed no alternative to the spirit of compromise created and sustained by détente.

¹⁶⁹Walter Laqueur, "Détente: What's Left of It?" New York Times Magazine, 16 December 1973,

Chapter III

Self Interest in a Client-State Relationship: Soviet-Egyptian Affairs Through the Yom Kippur War

By 1973, the Arab-Israeli conflict fully evolved from a localized border dispute to a zone of major superpower competition. Following Israel's crushing victory in the June War of 1967, the Arab border states immediately undertook a military and diplomatic program aimed at regaining Israeli-occupied territory. The Arabs' goals were decisively more limited after the Six Day War; although recognition of Israel as a legitimate political entity was unthinkable, its Americansupplied military superiority was unquestionable. The Arabs, led by Egypt, exercised their only acceptable option: increased support from, and dependence on, the Soviet Union. In public treaties and proclamations, Moscow stressed its interests in the Middle East in ideological terms. In the Soviet view (at least after Israel's birth in 1948), Zionism and imperialism were two sides of the same coin, and the Middle East was one of several regions across the globe where, in the Cold War system, the Soviet Union vowed to support socialist wars of national liberation. But the historical record, which includes Moscow's détente with the United States, reveals a considerably different and more complicated picture from the supposedly rigid dimensions of a bi-polar world.

Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar el-Sadat was staunchly anti-Communist, interested in doing business with the United States, and vigilant in preventing excessive Soviet influence in and around its borders. Egypt perceived relations with the Soviet Union, its superpower patron, therefore as a matter of default. No other nation was willing or capable of supplying Egypt with the amount of military and economic support undertaken by the Soviet Union beginning in 1955. But Moscow considered its default image in the Arab world as a manageable and minor problem in the scope of its own geo-strategic policies. The Middle East figured prominently in the Cold War system of vying for global domination. Industrialization was quickly making the oil-rich Persian Gulf region one of the world's most valuable areas; the Suez Canal was the crucial link between the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean; and Egyptian ports and airfields afforded strike and surveillance capabilities at the crossroads of Africa, Asia and nearby Europe.

The public diplomacy of problem-free Soviet-Egyptian ideological solidarity, therefore, must be couched in the Realpolitik of each nation's self interest. This trend became intensified in the period leading up to, and including, the Yom Kippur War of October 1973. Both Egypt and the Soviet Union moved toward adopting a singular, overriding foreign policy in the early 1970s. For Moscow, the era of détente ushered in a relaxation of tensions with the United States. Within the framework of armaments reduction and increased trade, the Soviet Union was determined to avoid direct superpower confrontation at the precise time that Egypt (with the support of Syria on Israel's northern border) was pressing its patron state for sufficient weapons to attack Israel – an act Moscow believed would heighten the very threat that détente was designed to prevent. Consequently, the frictions within Soviet-Egyptian relations worsened with the imminence of the planned secret attack on the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. In October 1973, the Soviets had supplied its Arab clients with enough arms for its will to be ignored. Moscow's vigorous support of Arab military aims during the Yom Kippur War can be explained, in part, by the Soviets' inability to stop its clients. Soviet condemnation of Arab hostilities could have precipitated a rejection of Soviet influence in the region. In fact, the political nature of the Yom Kippur War (that is, to force Israel to the negotiating table) culminated in the realization of one of Egypt's major foreign policy objectives: the resumption of diplomatic relations with the United States. In a conflict with no real winners, the Soviets' concern with the prospect of reduced prestige in the Middle East – some twenty years in the making–justified Moscow's longstanding support of the "no war, no peace" Arab-Israeli deadlock.

Historical Background

Russian interests in the Middle East predates the Soviet era by at least two centuries. Landlocked Muscovite Russia equated international prominence with access to a warm-water port. Peter the Great worked toward free access through the Bosporus, beyond which lay Constantinople and India – both as strategically important in the 18th century as they would be in the 20th century.¹ In 1770, the Russian Black Sea Fleet defeated the Turkish navy in concert with British forces, as the scholar Aaron Klieman observed, "For the next four years the Russian fleet dominated the Eastern Mediterranean."² Russia's tsarist regimes maintained an interest in the Middle East and surrounding waters until the revolutions of 1917.

The Soviet application of Marxism-Leninism, strictly implemented in the foreign policy of Josef Stalin, precluded Soviet interest in Middle Eastern affairs. Under Stalin's "two camps" policy, Moscow's foreign relations allowed no nuance between capitalist and Communist countries. Non-aligned nations that had recently gained their independence were generally shunned by the Soviets on the basis of their non-Communist (therefore, capitalist) status. In Nikita Khrushchev's program of de-Stalinization, the Soviet Union began to fill the power vacuum created in the wake of post-World War II colonial independence movements.

¹Aaron S. Klieman, <u>Soviet Russia in the Middle East</u> (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 27.

²Lawrence L. Whetten, <u>The Canal War: Four-Power Conflict in the Middle East</u> (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974), 18.

Khrushchev dismantled Stalin's "two camps" policy in favor of the more fluid "two zones" framework.³ The "peace zone" was comprised of both socialist and non-socialist "peace loving" nations; i.e., those countries grounded in a national/anti-imperialist movement. This new policy helped to create a major feature of the Cold War system, namely, superpower competition for influence in the non-aligned world. Along with Southeast Asia, the eastern rim of the Mediterranean became a focal point of superpower-client state relations.

Although the Soviet Union was among the first nations to recognize the state of Israel in 1948, relations between the two countries quickly soured. As historian Walter Laqueur noted, "Once the state of Israel was established, it ceased to be an agent of revolutionary ferment, and thus had no further value for the Kremlin."⁴ By 1956, Soviet policy toward Israel had completely reversed from warmer relations following World War II and Israel's birth. In the wake of the Israeli, British and French tripartite attack on Egypt following Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal, Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko denounced Israel as an "instrument in the hands of extremist imperialist powers...[whose] actions are putting a question mark on the very existence of Israel as a state."⁵

The increased friction between the Soviet Union and Israel coincided with the beginning of comprehensive agreements between Moscow and the Arab countries, led by Egypt, surrounding (and opposing) Israel. Despite the clearly emerging confluence of Soviet and Arab interests, it is important to note that the first two major initiatives of Soviet support to Egypt –

³Ben-Cion Pinchuk, "Soviet Penetration into the Middle East in Historical Perspective," in Michael Confino and Shimon Shamir, eds., <u>The USSR and the Middle East</u> (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1973), 65.

⁴Walter Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East: The Soviet Union in the Mediterranean 1958-</u> <u>1968</u> (Washington: MacMillan, 1969), 45.

⁵Andrei Gromyko, as cited in Alden Voth, <u>Moscow Abandons Israel for the Middle East: Ten</u> <u>Crucial Years in the Middle East</u> (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1980), 239-240.

the 1955 Czech arms deal and the process of funding the High Aswan Dam – were commenced by default. Nasser sought American aid first, was turned down in both cases, and only then struck a deal with the Soviets. This legacy of "second best" Soviet-Egyptian dealings would harm relations between the two countries through the Yom Kippur War.

In 1955, President Nasser sought to fortify Egypt's military capabilities in order to counter both Israel's growing strength and Iraq, which had newly acquired Western support and was threatening to replace Cairo as the most influential regime of the Arab world. Nasser was likely unsurprised when the Eisenhower Administration turned down his arms request; in effect, he was asking the United States for weapons which could potentially be used against Washington's regional allies.⁶ Nasser was attempting to prove Arab goodwill toward America by underscoring the similarities of the Egyptian president's anti-imperialist principles and Washington's post-World War II history of supporting independence movements throughout Asia and Africa – the very relationship the Soviet Union would soon claim as its own.⁷ It was Nasser's anti-imperialist focus on Israel that helped attract the Soviets to his cause. The Egyptian leader's flaring prose would not have been out of place among the statements emanating from the Soviet propaganda machine:

Imperialism is the great force that is imposing a murderous, invisible siege one hundred times more powerful and pitiless than that which was laid upon us in our trenches at Faluja, or that which encircled our individual armies and our capitals where we received our orders.⁸

The Baghdad Pact, announced on January 12, 1955, was a decisive factor in the

⁶Robert Edward Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East, Part I: Problems of Commitment," London: Institute of Strategic Studies. <u>Adelphi Papers</u>, No. 59, (September 1969), 6.

⁷George Lenczkowksi, <u>Soviet Advances in the Middle East</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Foreign Policy Research, 1971), 81.

⁸Gamal Abdul Nasser, <u>Egypt's Liberation: The Philosophy of the Revolution</u> (Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1955), 97-98.

development of Soviet-Egyptian mutual interests. The Western-supported military alliance between Iraq, Turkey and Pakistan posed two major threats to Cairo and Moscow. From the Egyptian perspective, the pact was an attempt to shift authority from the Cairo-centered collective security pact of the Arab League to Baghdad. In the Soviet view, an alliance of three Western clients flanking its lower border posed grave security threats insofar as the military could potentially be prevented from southerly thrusts toward the Middle East.⁹ On September 27, 1955, the Soviet Union (operating under the cover of Czechoslovakia) and Egypt signed their first arms agreement. Egypt received almost 300 combat aircraft, 100 tanks, heavy artillery, six submarines, and a substantial number of guns – valued at an estimated total of \$250 million.¹⁰ Although the agreement significantly augmented Egypt's military strength, the 1955 Czech deal was primarily political in nature. As Uri Ra'anan, a scholar, noted, the Soviet Union's objectives

would be to demonstrate that the Western monopoly over the supply of arms to the Near East and, consequently, over the local military and political balance had come to an end; therefore, Near Eastern rulers need no longer go along with the Western defense plans or accept the territorial status quo.¹¹

The Soviet Union fully realized its status as Egypt's patron after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal in 1956. The Soviets played their first major role in Middle Eastern international considerations when they opposed Western intervention at the London Conference on the Canal.¹² Moscow was beginning to use the Middle East as a point of leverage by which to proclaim its Great Power status. Although Moscow enjoyed credit for the restoration of the Sinai, it was United States President Dwight Eisenhower's demand for tripartite withdrawal that

⁹Uri Ra'anan, <u>The USSR Arms the Third World: Case Studies in Soviet Foreign Policy</u> (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1969), 20.

¹⁰Lenczkowksi, <u>Soviet Advances in the Middle East</u>, 146.

¹¹Ra'anan, <u>The USSR Arms the Third World</u>, 30.

¹²Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 27.

ended hostilities. Nonetheless, Egypt's army was destroyed, and the Soviets were faced with the choice of re-supplying their client or accepting a significantly downgraded role in Middle Eastern affairs. Moscow's decision to rebuild Egypt's armaments sparked a new and more intense Middle East arms race. Yigal Allon, an Israeli scholar observed, "The Soviet supply of arms to Egypt grew in scale and caliber and with it Egyptian dependence on the Soviet Union."¹³

Following Great Britain's rather pathetic expulsion from the eastern Mediterranean, the region set the Soviet Union and the United States squarely against one another (thus making the Middle East one more major point of Cold War confrontation), and Washington quickly moved to assume the position as defender of the Western world's interests in the region.¹⁴ Also, the Arab-Israeli dispute cemented the clear demarcation of United States-Israel and Soviet-Egyptian client-patron relations. The Soviets began publicly to link the ideological mutuality of its support for national liberation movements and Nasser's unique brand of anti-imperialist Arab nationalism.

In addition to military support, Egypt's major foreign policy objective was to secure sufficient economic aid to build the Aswan High Dam, a project that would greatly increase Egypt's acreage of irrigable land. The Czech arms deal of 1955 served as a "wake-up" call to Washington, which initially expressed interest in this massive undertaking. Nasser first went to the United States for aid, was rejected, and only then turned to the Soviets. Initial American opposition to financing the project came from southern cotton growers wary of abundant and

¹³Yigal Allon, "The Soviet Involvement in the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in Confino and Shamir, eds., <u>The USSR and the Middle East</u>, 150.

¹⁴United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on the Near East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Soviet Involvement in the Middle East and the Western</u> <u>Response</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), 192.

cheap Egyptian cotton on the world market; a strong pro-Israeli sentiment among the public; and a skepticism within the Eisenhower Administration regarding Egypt's economic ability to absorb a project of such magnitude. Egyptian Ambassador to the United States Ahmed Hussein was "crushed" by United States Secretary of State John Foster Dulles' statement of rejection , which concluded, "the economic situation makes [the dam] not feasible for the United States to take part. We have to withdraw our offer."¹⁵

Dulles seriously miscalculated that Moscow would back the dam, and consequently, the Egyptian people, he believed, would oust Nasser for his inability to secure funding for the project. Washington's rejection did not help America's image throughout the Arab world. The United States withdrawal was soon followed by Great Britain's own aid withdrawal, and with it the withdrawal of a \$200 million loan from the World Bank, which would not authorize grant support without United States and British backing. As Anthony Nutting, a biographer of Nasser, observed, Dulles' decision not only "collapsed the house of cards" with his decision on the Aswan High Dam; "he had pulled down the pillars of the temple on Western influence not only in Egypt, but throughout the Arab world as well."¹⁶ In October 1958, Nasser therefore accepted Moscow's \$100 million loan, but even then he took special care to demonstrate to the Americans (as well as the Soviets) that Moscow's support could in no way be interpreted as a deviation from Egypt's strict stance of non-alignment.¹⁷ The Soviet Union's prestige in the area increased as a result of Western refusal to fund the dam. Additionally, the 1958 Iraqi

¹⁵John Foster Dulles, as cited in Donald Neff, <u>Warriors at Suez: Eisenhower Takes America into</u> <u>the Middle East in 1956</u> (Brattleboro, VT: Amana Books, 1988), 261.

¹⁶Anthony Nutting, <u>Nasser</u> (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), 140-141. ¹⁷Ibid., 254.

Revolution "ruined" the Baghdad Pact – a welcome development in both Moscow and Cairo.¹⁸

By the late 1950s the Soviet position in the Middle East had evolved from exploiting weak spots in the Arab-Western relations to a tangible – and increasingly prestigious – profile among its Arab clients. Khrushchev's "Speech on the Middle East," presented to the 21st Congress of the CPSU in January 1959, declared that "differences in ideological views must not hinder the development of friendly relations between our countries and the cause of common struggle against imperialism." He went on to differentiate Soviet interests in the Middle East from those of the imperialists, who

turn their economic relations with underdeveloped countries into the object of blackmail and extortion; they impose military and political conditions on them. Our country builds its relations with all states on principles of complete equality and collaboration without any conditions of a military or political nature.¹⁹

Like most Soviet proclamations, Khrushchev's speech was deceptively pleasant. Whatever ideological solidarity that existed between Soviet and Egyptian leaders was consciously muted by Nasser, who never accepted the divisive lines drawn by the Cold War leaders. Soviet economic policy, exemplified by the Egyptian cotton trade, was in some ways also imperialist. The Soviet Union bought Egyptian raw cotton at inflated prices and returned only finished products. Anthony Nutting described this relationship: "In short, Khrushchev's policy had been to help Russia by helping Egypt to become independent of the West at the price of becoming correspondingly dependent on the Soviet bloc."²⁰ John Dornberg, a journalist, characterized most

¹⁸United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on the Near East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Soviet Involvement in the Middle East and the Western</u> <u>Response</u>, 209.

¹⁹N.S. Khrushchev, "On the Middle East—Speech to the Twenty First Congress of the CPSU," reprinted in Alvin Z. Rubinstein, ed., <u>The Foreign Policy of the Soviet Union</u> (New York: Random House, 1960), 401-402.

²⁰Nutting, <u>Nasser</u>, 359.

of the post-World War II Communist states "not as members of a commonwealth or alliance but as the satellites and buffers of a new empire"; it was becoming obvious that the Soviet Union saw the Middle East as a modified extension of its original post-war policy.²¹ In fact, Soviet influence in the Arab world grew without any parallel expansion of Communist ideology in the region.²² When Nasser began to accept large numbers of Soviet soldiers and technicians in Egypt, he frequently had to defend his policy against the general Egyptian concern of Communist influence. One of Nasser's rebuttals to this concern is telling:

We have 3,000 Soviet technicians at Aswan [military base] and as far as I know none of the Aswanis have become Communists. On the other hand all the Soviet technicians now eat lib (roasted pumpkin seeds of which Egyptians are enormously fond).²³

Anwar el-Sadat, successor to Nasser, was more rigidly anti-Communist than Nasser (this was likely one expression of his deeply religious convictions) and, in his view, the American standard of living was clearly superior to that of its Cold War adversary.²⁴

From Nasser's perspective, Communism, Israel, the arbitrary borders that Europe drew over the Arab world after World War I, and superpower competition in the region were all alien elements that exerted unwanted influence on the Egyptian way of life. Peter Woodward, an historian, observed, "It was the sense of his instinctive search for a more just political order that took him into the political maelstrom of international politics in the region."²⁵ The "maelstrom" forced Egypt to turn to the Soviet Union, patron-by-default. Nor did Moscow actively seek the expansion of communism in the Middle East, where the atheist ideology was particularly

²¹John Dornberg, <u>Brezhnev: The Masks of Power</u> (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 217.

²²Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East</u>, 181.

²³Gamal Nasser, as cited in John Waterbury, <u>The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political</u> <u>Economy of Two Regimes</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 393.

²⁴Kirk J Beattie, <u>Egypt During the Nasser Years: Ideology, Politics and Civil Society</u> (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), 36.

²⁵Peter Woodward, <u>Nasser</u> (London: Longman Publishers, 1992), 151.

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unwelcome among the leading regimes. While Marxism-Leninism was the theoretical guiding force in the Soviet military and political structure, the age of nuclear warfare challenged the efficacy of a doctrine that assumed violence of capitalist states to be the "midwife of history"; the threat of nuclear holocaust acted as a moderating influence on the Soviet Union's quest to overthrow the status quo in the Middle East.²⁶ Soviet military support to Egypt can be described as a balancing act between pleasing its client and sustaining its influence – always ensuring its self-preservation as top priority. This explains, in part, the Egyptians' almost perpetual complaint of the quantity and type of weapons they received and the speed at which they arrived. Soviet success in the Middle East, then, must be measured by the exchange of economic aid for influence in a vitally important geo-strategic area.

In 1973, Leonid Brezhnev, successor to Khrushchev as General Secretary of the CPSU, declared, "In the developing countries, as anywhere else, we are on the side of the forces of progress, democracy, and national independence; we regard them as our friends and comrades in arms."²⁷ The always-silent caveat to this and other Soviet proclamations regarding its relations with countries could be, "so long as the friendship primarily serves our own interests." Whereas the Soviet explanation of national policy sought to persuade its audience that benevolence and camaraderie were its chief exports, Eugene Rostow, former Undersecretary of State saw a quite different agenda:

The first purpose of the Soviet effort is to achieve strategic and tactical control of the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Persian Gulf area. On that footing, the next step would

²⁶Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East</u>, 145.

²⁷Leonid Brezhnev, <u>Leonid Brezhnev: Pages From His Life</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978), 197.

be to drive the United States out of Europe, and to have NATO dismantled.²⁸

Robert O. Freedman, a scholar, is even more pointed: "The overall strategic goal at this time [early 1970s] seems to have been the elimination of western military, economic and political influence in the Arab world to the greatest degree possible, while substituting Soviet influence in its place."²⁹ Of course, the tendency to focus on the niceties of foreign relations at the expense of realities is hardly a Soviet monopoly. But perhaps the most telling illustration of this divide was Egypt's constant hostility toward a nation that supplied it with billions of dollars' worth of arms.

In exchange for this aid, as Galia Golan, an Israeli historian noted, Egypt hosted the "Soviets' largest overseas presence in a non-Soviet bloc country." Moscow enjoyed "partially exclusive rights in some six or seven air bases, at least two naval ports, and several naval facilities as well as approximately 20,000 military personnel."³⁰ Lieutenant General Saad el-Shazly of the Egyptian army outlined his country's need for military strength and its dearth of options on how and where to secure it:

Without the help of the Soviet Union, our battle, [the Yom Kippur War] would have been impossible. I make no judgment for or against the Soviet Union, its ideology, power structure or social system. I state a fact. No other country or group of countries could and would have supplied Egypt with the arms in the profusion and sophistication needed to combat Israel...[p]recisely that fact led to the first of perennial problems in our relationship with the Soviet Union. As a monopoly supplier, the Soviet Union could and did control their release of arms to us: the weapons, the amounts and dates of delivery.³¹

²⁸Eugene V. Rostow, "The Middle Eastern Crisis in Perspective of World Politics," <u>International</u> <u>Affairs</u> 47, (April 1971), 275-276.

²⁹Robert O. Freedman, "Detente and United States-Soviet Relations in the Middle East During the Nixon Years," in Della W. Sheldon, ed., <u>Dimensions of Detente</u> (New York: Praeger, 1978), 83.

³⁰Galia Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis</u> (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 6-7.

³¹Saad el-Shazly, <u>The Crossing of the Suez</u> (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980), 100.

Shazly's remarks exemplify the view as seen through the clients' perspective. The Egyptians were constantly aware of the near-total lack of non-Soviet sources of aid. Their only economically feasible alternative to Moscow was politically infeasible: as the patron of Israel, the United States was satisfied with the status quo, which Secretary of State and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and President Richard Nixon believed could be maintained as long as Israel was ensured military superiority. After the Six Day War of June 1967, Egypt and its Arab allies were thus "stuck" with the Soviet Union. The Soviets, in turn, exploited their unique position by actively seeking opportunities on a case by case basis within the larger context of increasing Soviet influence at the expense of Western interests.³² The Soviet policy of opportunity was not unique to the Middle East. Alvin Rubinstein, an expert on Moscow's Middle East policy observed, "the more closely one examines Soviet diplomacy in the Third World, the more one is impressed by the flexibility and opportuneness of its responses to the potentialities of each situation."³³

The simplest way to define opportunism is to frame choices in light of ability. The Soviets chose to exert military and diplomatic influence in Egypt because they were able to do so. But the more relevant question examines matters of degree: why did the Soviet Union focus so intently on the Middle East in general and Egypt in particular? In the Cold War system, the United States and the Soviet Union competed for global dominance. The superpowers, in the era of détente, actively sought to remove the threat of nuclear warfare from the range of

³²Foy Kohler, Leon Goure, and Mose L. Harvey, <u>Soviet Strategy in the Middle East: A Special</u> <u>Report on Highlights and the Implications for United States Security Interests</u> (Coral Gables, FL: Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1975), 12.

³³Alvin Z. Rubinstein, "The Soviet Union and the Third World," in Stephen F. Cohen, Alexander Rabinowitch and Robert Sharlet, eds., <u>The Soviet Union Since Stalin</u> (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), 328.

available options by which to manage this competition. But détente did not erase the nature of the competition, and the Middle East offered two major points of leverage: geo-strategic centrality and oil.

The Soviet Navy Enters the Mediterranean

Egypt sits at the crossroads of the Mediterranean, and the Suez Canal and Red Sea allow passage to the Indian Ocean and beyond. Few countries offer access to three continents from as central a position as Egypt.³⁴ Egypt's location thus offered Moscow a unique base for its expanding naval and air forces. One Admiral of the Soviet Navy described the importance of the seas in the nuclear age:

The principal objective for the launching of the nuclear attacks from the sea against vitally important targets on enemy territory.... The oceans have lost their former significance as protective barriers, which during the two world wars effectively separated the countries of the Western hemisphere from the devastation and destruction visited upon the nations of Europe.³⁵

Soviet military doctrine held that the world's oceans are defensive in nature only in the sense that they must be controlled for a deterrent effect. Intercontinental missiles effectively neutralized the vastness of the seas; for the Soviet homeland to be protected, its navy must be in position for a nuclear strike capability, designed not only to deter any opponents from attack, but also to strengthen Soviet bargaining leverage between and after wars.³⁶ Soviet military commanders, like their political masters, espoused Marxism-Leninism as their guiding principle. This ideology, in their view, was a force of benevolence amidst an evil and capitalist world. One

³⁴Klieman, <u>Soviet Russia in the Middle East</u>, 43.

³⁵K. Stalbo, "The Significance of the Seas and Oceans in Combat Actions," in <u>Selected Readings</u> <u>from Military Thought</u>, 1963-1973, v. 5 pt. II. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1982), 77.

³⁶Kenneth R. McGruther, <u>The Evolving Soviet Navy</u> (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 1978), 58.

Soviet colonel wrote:

In contrast to the aggressive blocs of the imperialist powers, the union of the countries of the socialist commonwealth and their close military alliance have a firm objective basis for monolithic solidarity. This union was formed and is developing in accordance with the principles of Socialist internationalism, full equality of the member states, strict observance of their sovereignty, national and international interests, and unselfish fraternal mutual aid.³⁷

The Soviet record bears a considerably different picture from this portrayal of a socialist fraternal utopia.

Moscow had a strong impetus to build a large naval presence in the Mediterranean. The Soviets' retreat from the naval confrontation at Cuba was recent history, and weighed heavily in the Soviet strategy, as one writer describes "to be taken seriously as a world power."³⁸ The United States Sixth Fleet and *Polaris* submarine squadron lost its 15-year-long nuclear monopoly in the region after the Soviet Navy commenced sustained exercises in the Mediterranean in 1964. In a speech delivered in Egypt at Port Said in May 1964, Khrushchev sounded the alarm over imperialist ambitions in the area:

The colonialists now want to use the aircraft carriers and other warships against the national liberation movement of the peoples, to bring the policies of neutrality and non-alignment into range of their ships' guns and missiles....The imperialists want, with the aid of aircraft carrier diplomacy, to restore reactionary regimes in the countries of Asia and Africa.³⁹

The Soviet Union commenced its first prolonged presence in the Mediterranean one month after Khrushchev's speech. From the time Soviet Admiral Sergei Gorshkov commanded the navy to "sail upon the world's oceans" in 1964 to 1968, the Soviet Union expanded its

³⁷M.P. Skirdo, "The People, the Army, the Commander: A Soviet View," in <u>Soviet Military</u> <u>Thought</u>, published under the auspices of the United States Air Force, v. 14 (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1970), 13.

³⁸Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East," 24.

³⁹George S. Dragnich, "The Soviet Union's Quest for Access to Naval Facilities in Egypt Prior to the June War of 1967" in Ken Booth, John McDonnell and Michael MacGuire, eds. <u>Soviet Naval Policy:</u> <u>Objectives and Constraints</u> (New York: Praeger, 1975), 253.

out-of-area naval maneuvers by a factor of ten.⁴⁰ The scope of this buildup, along with other considerations, allowed for a Soviet confidence unachievable directly after the Cuban missile crisis. According to one Soviet general, the Marxist-Leninist military doctrine of the Soviet Union provides a

stable foundation [that] predetermines the stability of our government and the invincible might of the Soviet Armed Forces, their colossal combat capabilities, and the decisive character of our military doctrine and strategy in the interests of the defense of the country.⁴¹

The new Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev declared in 1965: "We are trying to make our diplomacy active and thrusting, while at the same time showing flexibility and circumspection."⁴² In this context, "diplomacy" is a euphemism for the maneuvering capabilities of the Soviet military (the adjective "thrusting" would not, of course, be appropriate for describing an embassy), which underscores the highly politicized nature of Soviet military doctrine. The United States Navy regarded the Soviet strategy as a "conventional first-strike, optimized for a preemptive attack against an opposing naval force that might be superior in overall combat capabilities."⁴³ The Soviet navy would have unquestionably lost in any head-on confrontation with the Sixth Fleet, but in a nuclear conflict, a first-strike capability did not require military superiority to serve as an effective deterrent. Steve Kime, an American naval expert, defined modern naval power as a "limited display of national will and power embodied in a ship or squadron...[that] requires visibility for local effect."⁴⁴ In the Soviet view at the time, the United

⁴⁰McGruther, <u>The Evolving Soviet Navy</u>, 36.

⁴¹S. Ivanov, "Soviet Military Doctrine and Strategy," in <u>Selected Readings from Military Thought</u>, <u>1963-1973</u>, v. 5 pt. II, 25.

⁴²Leonid Brezhnev, as cited in McGruther, <u>The Evolving Soviet Navy</u>, 32.

⁴³Cited in United States, Department of Defense, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, <u>Understanding Soviet Naval Developments</u> (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 1975), 19.

⁴⁴Steve F. Kime, <u>A Soviet Navy for the Nuclear Age: National Security Affairs Issue Paper No.</u> <u>80-1</u> (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, 1980), 14.

States had to be denied its nuclear monopoly in the Mediterranean, and as a consequence, its "natural" claim of dominance in the seas.⁴⁵ The Soviet navy was working toward a combination effect that satisfied both security-defensive interests and political objectives during times of peace. Admiral Gorshkov summarized the navy's purpose:

By a well-balanced navy we mean a navy which in composition and armament is capable of carrying out missions assigned it not only in a nuclear war, but in a way which does not make use of nuclear weapons, and is also able to support state interests at sea in peacetime.⁴⁶

These generalities of Soviet military doctrine were devised on a global scale, of which the Mediterranean/Middle East was one vital theater. The scholar Ivo Lederer observed, "a governing Soviet assumption would appear to be that a global power must exercise its power globally."⁴⁷ In the words of one journalist, the Soviet Navy's presence in the Middle East was designed to "make the Western powers step just that more gingerly in any future crisis."⁴⁸ Moscow's search for facilities to accommodate its navy forced its objectives abroad, because the European portion of the Soviet Union had strictly limited southerly access from its own ports. Robert Freedman noted that "Egypt presented the best or optimum conditions and communications facilities required by Soviet naval-military, political, and diplomatic strategy in the Middle East after 1956."⁴⁹ In the north of Egypt, airfields accommodated Soviet bombers that provided air cover to the Mediterranean squadron; in the south, the air base near Aswan

⁴⁸Economist, 18 May 1968, reprinted in Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East</u>, 155.

⁴⁵Ibid., 15.

⁴⁶John G. Hibbits, "Admiral Gorshkov's Writings: Twenty Years of Naval Thought," in <u>Naval</u> <u>Power in Soviet Policy</u>, published under the auspices of the United States Air Force, v. 2. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1982), 16.

⁴⁷Ivo J. Lederer, "Historical Introduction," in Ivo J. Lederer and Wayne S. Vucinich, eds., <u>The</u> <u>Soviet Union and the Middle East: The Post-World War II Era</u> (Palo Alto: Hoover Institution Press, 1974), 3.

⁴⁹P.J. Vatikiotis, "The Soviet Union and Egypt: The Nasser Years," in Lederer and Vucinich, eds., <u>The Soviet Union and the Middle East</u>, 131.

afforded a degree of dominance of Northeast Africa and the Indian Ocean.⁵⁰ The Egyptian airbases, as the United States Navy observed, enabled "Soviet land-based naval reconnaissance aircraft to operate over the eastern Mediterranean without overflying [NATO members] Greece and Turkey."⁵¹ Soviet docking privileges in the Egyptian harbors at Port Said and Alexandria additionally allowed the Soviet Navy a powerful and constant presence in the Mediterranean after the Six Day War of June 1967.

The Soviet Navy's major objective in the Mediterranean was to check the dominance of the United States Navy's Sixth Fleet. Egyptian airfields were the major facility for the TU-16 aircraft, which specialized in surveillance of the Sixth Fleet.⁵² The Soviet Mediterranean Fleet could boast of three advantages over its American opponent: a younger squadron; proximity to its home base in the Black Sea; and, as George Lenczkowski, an expert in the Middle East and international relations, observed, "access to facilities in the radical Arab states along most of the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean."⁵³

None of these advantages, however, could be translated into actual superiority over the United States forces. The ability to deny the United States monopoly in the Mediterranean (or any other theater, for that matter) did not require certain superiority, but did demand a well-equipped and visible presence large enough to prevent uninhibited maneuvers like the 1958 American landing in Lebanon – a move that the Soviet Union was in no position to deter at that time. However, had the United States decided to withdraw the Sixth Fleet for any reason, the

⁵⁰Freedman, "Detente and United States-Soviet Relations in the Middle East During the Nixon Years," in Sheldon, ed., <u>Dimensions of Detente</u>, 83.

⁵¹United States, Department of Defense, Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, <u>Understanding</u> <u>Soviet Naval Developments</u>, 11.

⁵²Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East," 13.

⁵³Lenczkowksi, Soviet Advances in the Middle East, 157.

Soviet Union would have remained, as one group of experts argued,

The dominant military power in the eastern Mediterranean and probably the Persian Gulf...[which] would reduce the risks of a Soviet confrontation with the United States, and it would grant the Soviet Union naval and eventual air superiority over the European NATO countries bordering on the Mediterranean.⁵⁴

Thus, the impetus to build a sizeable Mediterranean fleet was indeed strong. As one scholar notes, the Soviet Union's acquisition of port and air field facilities in order to sustain a Mediterranean fleet "alone would account for Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's persistent efforts to establish close working relations with a number of Arab states."⁵⁵ By the time of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, the Soviet squadron reached its peak with 96 ships, which outnumbered the United States Sixth Fleet.⁵⁶

The Soviet Union's interest in commanding a global reach through its navy was, as the United States Navy understood it, indicative of Moscow's policy toward "possessing a better worldwide general purpose naval capability...[that is] increasingly capable of denying such control to others."⁵⁷ It is therefore apparent why Egypt was of great value to Moscow's naval requirements. With Egypt as its major Soviet satellite base in the region, Moscow was able to project its naval power, under significant air cover, from southern Europe, northeast Africa, and the Middle East and into the Indian Ocean – a range not possible from any single domestic military base. Given Egypt's vital importance in the scope of the Soviet Union's geo-strategic considerations, there is a clear disingenuousness to the Soviets' oft-repeated tone of purely

⁵⁴Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>Soviet Strategy in the Middle East</u>, 58.

⁵⁵Oles M. Smolansky, "The Soviet Union and the Middle East," in William E. Griffith, ed., <u>The</u> <u>Soviet Empire: Expansion and Détente</u> (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1976), 260.

⁵⁶John J. Herzog, "Perspectives on Soviet Naval Development: A Navy to Match National Purposes," in <u>Naval Power in Soviet Policy</u>, published under the auspices of the United States Air Force, v. 2. (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1982), 40.

⁵⁷Thomas W. Wolfe, "Military Power and Soviet Policy," in Griffith, ed., <u>The Soviet Empire:</u> <u>Expansion and Détente</u>, 260.

socialist camaraderie with the Egyptian people. Soviet military requirements necessitated policies that contradicted Marxist-Leninist policy. An orthodox application of the doctrine would have prohibited relations with Egypt – a country with a long history of persecuting local Communist parties. The central location of Arab states along the Mediterranean rim, and the nature of their own weaknesses, can satisfactorily explain the Soviet Union's foreign aid policy.⁵⁸ But geo-strategic considerations constituted only part of Moscow's (Egypt-centered) interest in Middle Eastern influence. The concentration and amount of Arab oil factored as the other major determinant that weighed heavily on the Soviet Union's Middle East policies.

The Soviet Union and Middle Eastern Oil

Middle Eastern oil is concentrated in the relatively small Persian Gulf region, which accounted for the great majority of "free world" oil reserves. As Abraham Becker, a specialist in international oil politics, noted, the Soviet Union "could not be indifferent to Persian Gulf oil affairs if she was at all concerned with the politics of the region."⁵⁹ This statement, while certainly true, begs for elaboration. The great influence of Persian Gulf oil over Arab politics was without question, but to what end did oil directly serve Soviet interests?

Precise data on Soviet domestic oil reserves was unavailable to foreigners under the Soviet State Secret Act. However, studies showed that the oil-rich Volga-Ural region constituted much of the oil exploration conducted throughout the Soviet Union's vast

⁵⁸Klieman, <u>Soviet Russia in the Middle East</u>, 12.

⁵⁹Abraham S. Becker, "Oil and the Persian Gulf in Soviet Policy in the 1970s," in Confino and Shamir, eds., <u>The USSR and the Middle East</u>, 174.

territory.⁶⁰ In 1967, the Soviet journal International Affairs claimed:

The rationalization for United States policy in the Middle East is the alleged threat of a Soviet takeover of the area's oil. Imperialist spokesmen know, of course, that the USSR, a large oil exporter, has no need of Middle Eastern oil and does not take control of other people's resources in the imperialist manner.⁶¹

In fact, the Soviet Union was importing a relatively small amount of Middle Eastern oil by the late 1960s, mostly for consumption in the Eastern bloc countries for the purpose, as Walter Laqueur noted, "to balance trade relations and to recoup the Soviet credits that have been extended to [the Arabs]."⁶² It was clear to Western observers that, whatever the precise amount of proven oil reserves within the Soviet borders, Moscow's energy dilemma was nothing like that of Japan's or the countries of Western Europe, which all were totally dependent on foreign oil sources. Middle Eastern oil was an attractive import for Soviet policy, to the relatively minor degree that production and transportation costs of domestic oil often exceeded the price of imported Arab oil to the industrial and population centers of European Russia.⁶³

The Soviet energy situation, then, had to contend with the rather enviable problem of transporting and refining its own massive reserves. Between 1972 and 1982, as the historian Anthony Stacpoole argued, "Russian oil sales have provided the bulk of Soviet hard-currency earnings; latterly, this feature has become so marked that cynics have spoken of the USSR has a 'one-crop economy."⁶⁴ In 1973, the year of the Arab oil embargo, Soviet oil production was

⁶⁰United States, Congress. Joint Economic Committee, <u>A Compendium of Papers: Soviet</u> <u>Economic Prospects for the Seventies</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1973), 46.

⁶¹Cited in Arthur Jay Klinghoffer, <u>The Soviet Union and International Oil Politics</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 117.

⁶²Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East</u>, 135.

⁶³Leslie Dienes, "Issues in Soviet Energy Policy and Conflicts Over Fuel Costs in Regional Development," <u>Soviet Studies</u> 23, (July 1971), 46-47.

⁶⁴Anthony Stacpoole, "Energy as a Factor in Soviet Relations with the Middle East" in Adid Dawisha and Karen Dawisha, <u>The Soviet Union in the Middle East: Policies and Perspectives</u> (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1982), 91.

planned at almost 1.5 billion tons of conventional fuel, of which 32 percent of all exports was marked for consumption in six Eastern bloc countries.⁶⁵ The Soviet Union was the world's greatest crude oil producer by the early 1970s. Soviet interests in Middle Eastern oil was, like its support of Egypt and other revolutionary Arab states, primarily strategic in character. Moscow was far more interested in denying the Western and industrialized capitalist countries of Persian Gulf oil imports than they were in expropriating the valuable commodity for themselves. Moscow vigorously supported all three major Arab oil embargoes of 1956, 1967 and 1973-74 for this reason.⁶⁶ During the Cold War, there was much debate on the Soviets' ability to sustain its impressive record of oil production. Today, we know that Soviet proven oil reserve capacity was not a fluke. David Remnick, a journalist, recently noted that today "Russia is lucky, floating on a tide of profits from the oil-and-gas industry."⁶⁷ Joe Duarte, another journalist, observed, Russia is "setting itself up as the potential undisputed oil and energy market heavyweight champion of the world."⁶⁸

The Soviet Union worked to ensure the continued strength of its own robust oil trade in the Middle East. Soviet oil, which accounted for 62 percent of all fuel traveling south through the Suez Canal, was blocked from reaching its Asian markets when the Canal was closed in 1967. The eight-year closure of the Canal forced a 32 percent decrease in Soviet oil exports.⁶⁹ Moscow also actively sought to link oil to the Arab-Israeli dispute after the 1967 Six Day War.

⁶⁵United States, Congress, Joint Economic Committee, <u>A Compendium of Papers: Soviet</u> <u>Economic Prospects for the Seventies</u>, 51.

⁶⁶Arthur Jay Klinghoffer. "Oil, Politics, and United States-Soviet Relations in the Middle East," in Sheldon, ed., <u>Dimensions of Detente</u>, 83.

⁶⁷David Remnick, "Post-Imperial Blues," New Yorker, 13 October 2003.

⁶⁸Joe Duarte. "Bush's Other Energy Problem Advances: United States, Russia Move to Become Supply Giant," http://www.cbs.marketwatch.com on 20 October 2003.

⁶⁹Klinghoffer, <u>The Soviet Union and International Oil Politics</u>, 97.

One expert argues that the Soviets "maintained that because an Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories would lead to the reopening of the Canal, it was in the interest of West European states to seek an Israeli pullback to the pre-1967 borders."⁷⁰

Moscow's interest in oil was similar to Soviet military doctrine, as both followed strategic not ideological or economic considerations. West European countries and Japan were the most important allies in the American industrial alliance and heavily dependent on Middle Eastern oil. The Soviet Union sought influence – mainly through the auspices of its relationship with Egypt – throughout the Arab world in order to gain influence over the Persian Gulf oil trade and eventually force a re-orientation of West European and Japanese foreign policy away from their traditional superpower ally.⁷¹

Moscow also linked Western oil interests with imperialism on the basis of a history of friendly relations between the conservative oil sheikdoms of the Persian Gulf and Western oil corporations. Moscow saw an opportunity in the formation of OPEC, the founding principle of which espoused an anti-imperialist policy ensuring an equitable share of oil profits for the exporting countries.⁷² In the Soviet view, Arab oil interests in the 1960s and early 1970s were clearly coalescing into an anti-Western orientation – a trend that Moscow attempted to exploit. In February 1973, the Soviet newspaper *Izvestüa* called for "the very rich oil sources of the Arab world [to become] an effective weapon in the struggle against the forces of imperialism."⁷³ Two

⁷⁰Ibid., 103.

⁷¹United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on the Near East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Soviet Involvement in the Middle East and the Western</u> <u>Response</u>, 135.

⁷²"Resolution of the First OPEC Conference", in <u>OPEC Official Resolutions and Press Releases:</u> <u>1960-1983</u>, published and distributed on behalf of OPEC, Vienna (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1984), 13.

⁷³<u>Izvestia</u>, as cited in Foy Kohler, Leon Gouré, and Mose L. Harvey, <u>The Soviet Union and the</u> <u>October Middle East War: The Implications for Détente</u> (Coral Gables, FL: Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1974), 81.

months before the impending October 1973 oil embargo, Anatoly Gromyko, son of the foreign minister, wrote:

Without a solution to this [energy] problem in the next few years, the United States will be unable to maintain any significant growth rate which is fraught, for the United States, with far-reaching consequences under conditions of the acceleration of competition on the trade market and the presence of very acute social problems.⁷⁴

In other words, an oil embargo against the United States would be very good news for Moscow indeed. The Soviet Union's support of the 1973 embargo stemmed from the double benefit it would enjoy from this action. Not only would the American-led industrial alliance be weakened, but the fuel shortages would lead to an increased demand for, and consequently price of the USSR's own oil.⁷⁵ The 1973 embargo did not rupture the American economy to the extent that Moscow had hoped, but the United States was nevertheless ill prepared to brace for the Arab cutbacks. Easily accessible domestic reserves were mostly depleted, and new environmental regulations effectively halted new domestic exploration projects.⁷⁶ The posted price of a barrel of oil nearly tripled by the end of 1973 as a result of the embargo. Ian Smart, a scholar, argued that this dramatic inflation "gave the Soviet Union an ideal opportunity to raise the prices...of its own exports, and thus to increase very substantially its earnings of hard currency."⁷⁷

Soviet oil policy in the Middle East, like its naval policy and general Cold War objectives, operated under the cover of ideological principles, while the record of their actions speaks primarily to self-interested politico-strategic determinants. The increasing dependence of the

 ⁷⁴Anatoly Gromyko, as cited in Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>Soviet Strategy in the Middle East</u>, 34.
 ⁷⁵Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 8.

⁷⁶Richard H.K Vietor, <u>Energy Policy in America Since 1945</u>: A Study of Business Government <u>Relations</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 193.

 ⁷⁷Ian Smart, "Oil, the Superpowers, and the Middle East," <u>International Affairs</u>, 53 (January 1977),
 30.

industrialized world on Middle Eastern oil supplies presented the Soviet Union with an opportunity to link oil with a burgeoning anti-Western sentiment in order to harm the industrial alliance economically. Ideologically, the Soviet Union and the conservative Arab oil states responsible for the embargo were at odds; but Moscow's Middle East strategy planned for future support of anti-imperialist Persian Gulf oil diplomacy.

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The Middle East served Moscow's interests as one important region in a global, bi-polar system of East-West competition. In the Soviet view, Egypt helped to satisfy all three of its major objectives in the area. Egypt's need for weapons to combat Israel placed Moscow in an advantageous position as the only country willing and able to arm Israel's primary enemy. In return, the Soviet Union enjoyed naval and air maneuverability that projected military force from Southern Europe to India, with Egypt serving as the major base of operations. Finally, since Egypt was the leading anti-Zionist state of the Arab world, the Soviet Union's patron-state position served, as one group of experts argued, "its objectives in increasing Arab dependence on Soviet political and military support and that it facilitates the identification of the United States as being pro-Israel and thus an enemy of the Arabs."⁷⁸ The Soviet Union positioned itself, in the course of a decade, as a major power in the Middle East that did not exercise any presence there before 1955. Between 1954 and 1965 Egypt alone received almost \$13 billion dollars in economic aid from the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc countries.⁷⁹ Moscow's interest in Egypt was part of a long-term strategy of influence as motivated by self-interest.

⁷⁸Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>Soviet Strategy in the Middle East</u>, 95.

⁷⁹Klieman, <u>Soviet Russia in the Middle East</u>, 69.

Soviet Aid to Egypt After the 1967 Six Day War

Israel's rout of its Arab enemies in the Six Day War posed more than one problem for the Soviet Union. Not only did Moscow watch as Israel destroyed the billions of dollars' worth of military equipment and weapons it had invested in Egypt, Syria, and Iraq; the Soviets had to come to terms with the incompetence of the Arab officer corps on which it placed its trust, and by extension, its prestige.⁸⁰ Why, after the Arabs' total defeat, did the Soviet Union choose to re-supply its clients in a more vigorous manner than that which preceded the war?

One advantage the Arab defeat presented to the Soviets was its compatibility with the Marxist-Leninist position, that held, as George Lenczkowski observed, that "in its advanced stages, capitalism assumed the form of imperialism bent on subjugation of the less developed nations of the Third World."⁸¹ This position was a convenient way for the Soviets to "save face" and exploit the Arabs' much expanded dependence of economic and military aid from Moscow after the June War. The Soviets sensed a new Arab urgency to confront Zionism after Israel had occupied the Arab territories and believed that in the new desperate situation re-supplying the determined Arab armies would, eventually, result in a new era of Soviet prestige in the region. Former Egyptian ambassador Ashraf Ghorbal reflected on the Arab stance that refused to accept the new status quo : "Whatever length of time, of money, and of effort it would take, [the Arabs] would have to deploy every means, including resort to arms, to get back their lands and rights."⁸²

This determination could be realized only with renewed and intensified Soviet support. The Suez Canal was closed at the conclusion of the Six Day War, and Egypt faced an estimated

⁸⁰Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 43.

⁸¹Lenczkowksi, <u>Soviet Advances in the Middle East</u>, 84.

⁸²Ashraf Ghorbal, as cited in Richard B. Parker, ed., <u>The October War: A Retrospective</u> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 33.

annual revenue loss of 100 million pounds. Nasser had no money to buy more weapons to guard against further Israeli advances. The Egyptian leader's requests to Nikolai Podgorny ushered in a new era of Moscow's influence when the Soviet President traveled to Egypt two weeks after the June War cease-fire had taken effect. As Anthony Nutting observed, "Not only did he ask for arms as a free gift, but he also pressed for Russian military advisers and instructors.... Nasser insisted that Soviet advisers and technicians should be attached to every brigade, and if possible, every battalion of the Egyptian army."⁸³ After Nasser's ill-fated war in Yemen and disastrous confrontation with Israel, the Egyptian president had nowhere else to turn but Moscow. Nasser defended his decision: "In the sphere of foreign policy, I found we had no relations…with any country except the Soviet Union."⁸⁴

The 1967 war taught Egypt that any future confrontation with Israel must begin with a first-strike Arab attack. Arab military doctrine held that Israel's preemptive strike set the stage for a rout.⁸⁵ Nasser's initial requests to Moscow were predicated by his aim of acquiring a sufficient quantity of offensive weapons to enable Egypt to regain the Sinai. The Soviets initially rejected the request on the grounds that it would increase the chance of direct confrontation with the United States. But Moscow eventually changed its position, reasoning that, in the words of Anthony Nutting, "by complying with Nasser's requests, they would be able to keep Egypt's armed forces under their control, [and] they agreed to provide not only the arms, but also the advisors and technicians for which they had been asked."⁸⁶ This new agreement would

⁸³Nutting, <u>Nasser</u>, 431.

⁸⁴Gamal Nasser, as cited in Raymond William Baker, <u>Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser</u> <u>and Sadat</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 79.

⁸⁵Parker, ed. <u>The October War: A Retrospective</u>, 94.

⁸⁶Nutting, <u>Nasser</u>, 432.

afford the Soviet Union unsurpassed influence in the Middle East, and in any event, as the scholar Robert Hunter noted, "to change policy would be an admission of earlier miscalculation and a blow to Soviet prestige in the world generally."⁸⁷ Given all that Moscow had invested in Egypt up to the June War, rejecting Egypt's requests would have been folly. Walter Laqueur concluded bluntly, "in the modern world big powers had to pay a high price for political influence."⁸⁸

The resurgence of Soviet arms shipments and consequent influence after the Six Day War did not constitute a military alliance in the formal sense, but there was no doubt that by 1968 Egypt could no longer credibly claim membership to the non-aligned camp.⁸⁹ Both Egypt and the Soviets stood to gain from a mutual anti-Zionist relationship. The major Soviet presence would likely deter Israel from launching another catastrophic attack against Egypt; and in the words of Jon Glassman, an expert on arms proliferation, "a repetition of the Six Day War debacle could cause the Soviet Union to lose all credibility as a protector of those in the Arab world and elsewhere who were seeking to fight 'imperialism.'"⁹⁰ Moscow hoped that drawing Egypt closer to Soviet influence would have the "magnetic" effect of radicalizing more countries from the neutralist Third World.⁹¹

Moscow's influence increased steadily between the Six Day War and Nasser's death in 1970. As Arnold L. Horelick, of the RAND Corporation, described it, the Middle East was on

⁸⁷Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East," 11.

⁸⁸Laqueur, <u>The Struggle for the Middle East</u>, 83.

⁸⁹P.J. Vatikiotis, "The Soviet Union and Egypt: The Nasser Years," in Lederer and Vucinich, eds., <u>The Soviet Union and the Middle East</u>, 130.

⁹⁰Jon D. Glassman, <u>Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and War in the Middle East</u> (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 84.

⁹¹Campbell, "The Continuing Crisis," in Lederer and Vucinich, eds., <u>The Soviet Union and the</u> <u>Middle East</u>, 16.

its way to becoming "the first substantial Soviet sphere of influence in a non-contiguous area."⁹² The Soviets' vigorous re-supply program replaced all materiél that Egypt had lost in the June War by the end of 1968. Moscow also sent 3,000 Soviet advisors to man the new equipment.⁹³ In July 1970, the total number of combat aircraft in the Egyptian Air Force exceeded its inventory before the June War by 32.⁹⁴ Moscow's ability to procure huge quantities of weapons in a relatively short time was a project obviously meant for public consumption beyond the Middle East. In 1968, Secretary Brezhnev declared:

The balance of forces on a worldwide scale continues to tilt in favor of socialism and its allies because the might of the socialist camp is now such that the imperialists are afraid of the military rout in case of a head-on clash with the main forces of socialism.⁹⁵

In fact, avoiding a direct superpower engagement was Moscow's overriding foreign policy concern. Brezhnev's reference to "the might of the socialist camp" by no means accurately portrayed of Soviet-Egyptian relations after the June War. The Soviet Union constantly discredited American actions toward a negotiated settlement, while reminding its client that Moscow was, as Galia Golan described it, "indispensable to the Arabs as the only superpower pressing for all Arab demands."⁹⁶ This fact was not lost on Nasser, who would have preferred not to be entirely dependent on any single nation. The Egyptian President defended himself rhetorically: "So what should I have done? Should I have waited until the Americans would

⁹²Arnold Horelick, as cited in United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on the Near East of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Soviet Involvement in the</u> <u>Middle East and the Western Response</u>, 197.

⁹³Woodward, <u>Nasser</u>, 123.

⁹⁴Lenczkowksi, <u>Soviet Advances in the Middle East</u>, 89.

⁹⁵Leonid Brezhnev, as cited in Paul J. Murphy, <u>Brezhnev: Soviet Politician</u> (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co. Inc., 1981), 267-268.

⁹⁶Galia Golan, "The Arab-Israeli Conflict in Soviet-United States Relations: Is Detente Relevant?" (Jerusalem: Soviet and East European Research Center, Paper No. 24, 1977), 3-4.

send me equal quantities of food and weapons? I'd have waited for ever if I had."⁹⁷ Nasser, of course, was not complaining of the quantity of aid – only its source. Indeed, the Soviets invested approximately \$4.5 billion in the Egyptian miltiary between 1967-1970 alone. Egypt was the leading recipient of Soviet aid among all non-Communist countries during this period.⁹⁸

At the end of June 1967, Cairo was vulnerable to Israeli raids which could now be launched from the east bank of the Suez Canal – only 40 miles to the east. The Israeli occupation of the Sinai was totally unacceptable to Egypt, and no diplomatic solution would meet Nasser's goal – full Israeli withdrawal. The Egyptian army, fully supplied with Soviet offensive weapons, commenced the War of Attrition in 1969. The Egyptian Field Marshal Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy explained the reasoning behind Egypt's renewal of hostilities:

Egypt's purpose was to inflict enough damage on the Israeli forces in the Sinai in arms, equipment, and to its fortifications – in addition to losses in life – to convince it that its stay in the occupied Arab lands would be at a very high cost, not only in terms of the actual losses sustained – with all the negative psychological impact this would have on the Israeli forces and people – but also in terms of the size of the forces it would have to commit to Sinai and with the need for continuous mobilization over long periods, which would inevitably have detrimental consequences on Israeli society.⁹⁹

In sum, Nasser launched the War of Attrition to test the endurance of the Israeli military

- a force not designed for protracted conflict. Nasser hoped to convince Tel Aviv that it could not occupy Arab territories indefinitely. During this "war of attrition," Nasser was again forced to ask the Soviets for increased aid. Israeli air raids, which penetrated deep into Egypt proper, were wreaking havoc on the military and society in general. At first Moscow rejected the request because sufficient protection would require a new level of Soviet influence that could lead to a

⁹⁷Gamal Nasser, as cited in Nutting, <u>Nasser</u>, 446-447.

⁹⁸Editors, Foreign Policy Association, <u>United States Foreign Policy</u>, <u>1972-1973</u> (New York: Collier, 1972), 36-37.

⁹⁹Mohamed Abdel Ghani el-Gamasy, <u>The October War</u> (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 107.

superpower engagement. But Nasser's visit to Moscow in January 1970 successfully played on the other major Soviet concern. He declared:

I am a leader who is bombed every day in his own country, whose army is exposed and whose people are naked. I have the courage to tell our people the unfortunate truth – that whether they like it or not, the Americans are the masters of the world. I am not going to be the one who surrenders to the Americans. Someone else will come in my place who will have to do it.¹⁰⁰

The Soviets deliberated for several hours before accepting Nasser's request for aid.¹⁰¹ Moscow undertook a missile defense shield, manned by Soviet technicians, to protect Egypt from the Israeli air force. As the historian Raymond Baker put it, "The only alternative to an enlarged Soviet presence was capitulation."¹⁰²

The "war of attrition," which failed to expel Israel from the Sinai, illustrated the basic Soviet conundrum in the six-year interwar period. Moscow exercised caution with its military aid and presence so as not to provoke a direct American response in defense of its Israeli clients. The Egyptian leadership knew perfectly well that the only nation that would likely settle the Arab-Israeli conflict was the United States – a fact they continually mentioned as leverage against Moscow in protest of its cautious air defense policy.

Nasser's death (likely caused by the stress induced from Egypt's intensifying conflict with Israel) did not come as a surprise to Moscow. Soviet doctors who examined the Egyptian leader knew they were dealing with a gravely ill patient at least one year before he died. In anticipation of a new regime in Cairo, the Soviets looked to install their "key man" Ali Sabri to succeed Nasser. Nasser responded by naming the conservative and Western-leaning Anwar el-Sadat as

 ¹⁰⁰Gamal Nasser, as cited in Baker, <u>Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat</u>, 121.
 ¹⁰¹Mohamed Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u> (New York: Quadrangle Press, 1975), 88.

¹⁰²Raymond William Baker, <u>Sadat and After: Struggles for Egypt's Political Soul</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 97.

Vice President.¹⁰³

When Sadat assumed the presidency following Nasser's death in September 1970, he inherited relations with Moscow that had reached a curious, paradoxical level. The Soviet Union's massive aid package after the June War emphasized Egypt's constrained and dependent relationship with its patron, not to mention the thousands of Soviet advisers in Egypt who acted as if they were sovereigns. Yet, as a result of Moscow's support, the Egyptian military was reaching, as Peter Woodward, a biographer of Nasser, noted, a point "at which Sadat could plan secretly to cut free of his Eastern patrons."¹⁰⁴ In the colorful phrase of Robert Hunter, writing in 1969, "The Soviet Union may be acquiring more influence with individual Arab states, but at the price of appearing often to be the dog wagged by the Arab tail."¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the Soviets' abrasive style, both in regard to the members of the Politburo in Moscow and the advisors throughout Egypt, did not help the cause of socialist fraternity. Anwar Sadat summarized the situation: "We had what one could call relations only with the Soviet Union – a country that never made us feel there were advantages in having relations with it, since the Russians had practically no relations with anybody."¹⁰⁶

The Arab clients found much to complain about in nearly every aspect of . Soviet-Egyptian relations. Egyptian generals grappled with terribly translated tactical handbooks in Soviet military academies, and were often instructed by lower ranking Soviet officers.¹⁰⁷ In

¹⁰³John Waterbury, <u>The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 342-343.

¹⁰⁴Woodward, <u>Nasser</u>, 143.

¹⁰⁵Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East," 28.

¹⁰⁶Anwar el-Sadat, In Search of Identity (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 207.

¹⁰⁷Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 178.

Sadat's words, the "Soviet Union liked to see [Egypt's] hands tied,"¹⁰⁸ which resulted in an inverse relationship between Moscow's involvement in Egypt and its popularity there.¹⁰⁹ Lt. General Shazly was perhaps the most succinct in his characterization: "The Russians have many qualities, but concern for human feelings is not among them."¹¹⁰ This helps to explain the popular moniker for the 18,000 self-segregated Soviet advisors stationed in Egypt: "the unsmiling ones."¹¹¹ More importantly the rising anti-Soviet sentiment spread from the general public to the army – a trend that would bear heavily on Sadat's future dealings with Moscow.¹¹²

Soviet-Egyptian Relations from Sadat's Inauguration to the Yom Kippur War

By the early 1970s the Soviet Union's policy in the Middle East had undergone a major transformation since its introduction to the region in the 1950s and early 1960s. Arab nationalism, once a strong anti-Western movement vigorously encouraged by Moscow, had, as the historian Adeed Dawisha described it, turned "against Soviet interests in the 1970s as they had been against the West ten to twenty years earlier."¹¹³

Sadat's relations with Moscow began on a high note early in his administration. The opening ceremony of the Aswan High Dam on January 13, 1971, marked the successful completion of a structural feat comparable to the construction Great Pyramids.¹¹⁴ The dam

¹⁰⁸el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 221.

¹⁰⁹Hunter, "The Soviet Dilemma in the Middle East," 15.

¹¹⁰el-Shazly, <u>The Crossing of the Suez</u>, 101.

¹¹¹Alvin Z. Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship Since</u> <u>the June War</u> (Princeton: Princeton U Press, 1977), 153.

¹¹²Karen Dawisha, "The Correlation of Forces and Soviet Policy in the Middle East," in Dawisha and Dawisha, eds., <u>The Soviet Union in the Middle East</u>, 163.

¹¹³Adeed Dawisha, "The Soviet Union in the Arab World: The Limits to Superpower Influence," in Dawisha and Dawisha, eds., <u>The Soviet Union in the Middle East</u>, 19.

¹¹⁴Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 136.

could not have been completed without Soviet assistance, but Sadat and the Egyptian military were not content with development aid alone; Egypt needed arms. Sadat set out for Moscow in early March to state personally his complaints on the quantity and type of weapons deliveries. The meeting ended with Sadat in a rage after the Soviets stipulated that certain weapons were only to be used upon receiving prior approval from the Kremlin. "Nobody," he said, "is allowed to take a decision on Egyptian affairs except the people of Egypt itself – represented by me, the President of Egypt!"¹¹⁵ This was the basic Soviet-Egyptian source of strained relations: the Soviet Union was careful not to arm its client to a level beyond which Moscow could dictate its will, and Egypt resented the political "strings" attached to all Soviet arms shipments, which Sadat perceived as a slight to Egyptian sovereignty.

Another major source of friction was Moscow's attempted infiltration of the upper echelons of the Egyptian government, through its pro-Soviet Vice President Ali Sabri and his Communist faction. As a high-ranking government official, Sabri was a serious political liability to Sadat, who was having enough trouble building his own reputation without Sabri's repeated exaltations of Nasser's legacy. As Mohammed Heikal, an influential Egyptian journalist, put it, "They wanted the dead leader to become a fourth pyramid in Egypt and for themselves to be installed as permanent and exclusive high priests ministering to his shrine."¹¹⁶ President Sadat's name was mentioned during a private tea time with Soviet President Podgorny, to which Sabri joked, "what president?" Sadat was not amused upon hearing this story.¹¹⁷ On April 22, 1971, Sadat summoned the Soviet ambassador to notify Moscow that Ali Sabri, popularly known as

¹¹⁵el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 220.

¹¹⁶Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 123.

¹¹⁷Cited in Beattie, Egypt During the Nasser Years, 45.

the Soviet Union's "number-one" man in Egypt, would be relieved of his duty.¹¹⁸ After Sadat's purge of pro-Soviet government officials, Moscow became even less inclined to risk involvement in another Middle East war for a client government that barely disguised its hostility to the Soviets. As Raymond Hinnebusch, a political scientist, observed of Egypt's response, "Sadat and those around him became convinced that Moscow either wanted to freeze the [Egypt-Israeli] conflict for the sake of détente or to bring about a leftwing revolution in Egypt."¹¹⁹

In the wake of the considerable cooling of relations between Cairo and Moscow as a result of the Sabri purge, the May 1971 signing of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was not the warm commemoration that its title suggests. Moscow feared for its relevance in Egypt, and for good reason. The treaty was signed at the Soviets' urging, while Sadat was considering a total break with the Soviets.¹²⁰

The Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty fits the pattern of disparity between diplomatic niceties aired in public and the underlying animosities that marked the actual relations in this client-state relationship. Article I of the treaty declared,

that unbreakable friendship will always exist between the two countries and their peoples. They will continue to develop and strengthen the existing relations of friendship and all-around cooperation between them...on the basis of the principles of respect for the sovereignty territorial integrity, noninterference in the internal affairs of each other, equality and mutual benefit.¹²¹

The treaty, disingenuous as it was, marked the first time the Soviet Union clearly affirmed its commitment to the defense of a Third World non-Communist country.¹²² The Soviet Union's

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¹¹⁸Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 128.

¹¹⁹Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Jr., <u>Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development</u> of an Authoritarian-Modernizing State (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1988), 47-48.

¹²⁰Baker, <u>Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat</u>, 128.

¹²¹"Text of the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation Signed by the Soviet Union and Egypt" is reprinted in Lenczkowksi, <u>Soviet Advances in the Middle East</u>, 89.

¹²²Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 147.

major pledge, while interpreted in the West as a sign of increased Soviet prestige in Egypt, was in reality a rather desperate move to keep Sadat from seeking a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict through the diplomatic efforts of the United States. This would render the Soviet position in the Middle East largely irrelevant.¹²³ In Sadat's view, the treaty was another Soviet bullying tactic; an Egyptian refusal to sign the treaty may have deprived him of future arms shipments.¹²⁴

In July a Communist coup d'état in Sudan put another strain on Soviet-Egyptian relations. Ga'far al-Numayri regained power three days after he was deposed – only with Libyan and Egyptian support. Moscow had supported the coup, and demanded that Sadat recognize the new government.¹²⁵ On this matter, Sadat wrote, "My attitude is firm. I said we condemned it because we would not accept a Communist regime established on our doorstep – in a country sharing our borders."¹²⁶ In light of the recently signed Friendship Treaty, Sadat's position is especially striking. On the one hand, the greatest Communist power in the world had pledged its support for the defense of Egypt; on the other, its client regarded a bordering Communist state as a grave threat to Egyptian security.

Moscow was ever concerned with maintaining its influence and investment in Egypt. Sadat had repeatedly called 1971 the "year of decision," i.e., a military confrontation against Israel with the stated aim of expelling its military from the Sinai. Moscow agreed to a major arms deal in October, promising to meet Sadat's military requirements by the end of the year.¹²⁷ But

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¹²³Ibid., 148.

¹²⁴Beattie, <u>Egypt During the Nasser Years</u>, 86.

¹²⁵Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 154.

¹²⁶el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 226.

¹²⁷el-Shazly, <u>The Crossing of the Suez</u>, 117.

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the Soviet Union had concerns elsewhere. The war in Vietnam still demanded Soviet aid and attention, and in the wake of Indo-Pakistani War, which started on December 8, required that many arms shipments earmarked for Egypt be re-routed to India, Moscow's major client in South Asia. The Soviets clearly wanted to avoid managing three concurrent wars.¹²⁸ Of the arms that did reach Egypt, there was insufficient time to train properly with the new equipment.

Sadat's much heralded "year of decision" ended silently, and he was humiliated. Moreover, Egypt was furious with its clients' Indian policy. From Cairo's perspective, Soviet arms were being deployed for use against a fellow Muslim nation. Sadat could not understand why the Soviets were exercising caution against Israel – an American friend – while helping to escalate the war against Pakistan, a formal United States ally.¹²⁹ In a mid-December interview with the *New York Times*, Sadat voiced his concern that the Soviets would unilaterally pull out of Egypt, which would make Egypt's already grim military situation even worse.¹³⁰ An executive assessment meeting of military branch commanders held in the beginning of 1972 presented Sadat with a nearly total deficiency in offensive capabilities.¹³¹ The Egyptian leader may have declared war inevitable, but inevitability was no guarantee of imminence.¹³²

In late April 1972 Sadat was compelled to travel to Moscow for assurance of continued Soviet support. The mounting détente between the superpowers threatened to neutralize the Arab-Israeli conflict – a good strategy for avoiding a nuclear confrontation, but a blow, of course, to the Egyptians. The Soviets attempted to assuage Sadat's fears by ending his visit with a pledge

¹²⁸Beattie, Egypt During the Nasser Years, 123.

¹²⁹Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 208.

¹³⁰"Sadat Says Soviets Will Retain Use of Bases in Egypt: Cairo Leader in Interview Cites Reliance on Russian Aides for Modern War," *New York Times*, 13 December 1971.

¹³¹el-Shazly, <u>The Crossing of the Suez</u>, 127-128.

¹³²Sadat: We Are Now Back to Square One," Newsweek, 13 December 1971.

for a new Soviet-Egyptian communiqué, which stated, "the Arab states…have every reason to use other means to regain the Arab lands captured by Israel."¹³³ Although the language of the communiqué was implicit, it marked the first time that Moscow condoned war – provided that a diplomatic solution was impossible and that Egypt was militarily ready to resume hostilities.¹³⁴ The major caveat to the communiqué was the second stipulation. While a diplomatic solution did not look any more feasible in 1972 then it had in 1968, Egypt's preparedness for war was entirely contingent on Moscow's willingness to support its client accordingly. Sadat was convinced that in the climate of détente, adequate Soviet support would not be forthcoming. Additionally, all diplomatic initiatives with Washington had proved fruitless. As the scholar Raphael Israel noted, "The United States had become a 'lost cause' for Sadat, as he felt that it had lent its blessing to Israel, 'slamming all doors' in his face."¹³⁵

Sadat's interpretation of the Nixon-Brezhnev summit in May 1972 left nothing to the imagination: "It was clear to me that in Moscow the two superpowers had agreed that there was to be no war in the Middle East area. There was to be nothing for us but surrender."¹³⁶ Sadat's dramatic assessment of the meeting was correct. Following the May summit, Soviet arms shipments were delayed and did not include offensive weapons.¹³⁷ Brezhnev was living up to his part of the détente bargain, which vowed, among other things, to relax military tension in the Middle East. In the Egyptian view, the projected sequence of events was extremely grim. A "military relaxation" meant that Egypt was to receive neither the quantity nor type of weapons

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¹³³Cited in Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 179.

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Raphael Israeli, "Sadat: The Calculus of War and Peace," in Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim, eds., <u>The Diplomats: 1939-1979</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 444.

 ¹³⁶Anwar Sadat, as cited in Baker, Egypt's <u>Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat</u>, 129.
 ¹³⁷Beattie, <u>Egypt During the Nasser Years</u>, 127.

sufficient to launch the war against Israel. Since Israel, backed with implicit United States support,¹³⁸ gave no sign of withdrawing from the occupied territories before directly negotiating with the Arabs, Egypt's continuing inability to forcibly expel the Israeli military was tantamount to acceptance of the status quo, which in turn meant surrender.¹³⁹ Moscow simply did not want to jeopardize its new position vis-á-vis the Western world because of a Middle Eastern border dispute.

Sadat sent Brezhnev a memorandum after the May summit, which asked for an explanation on the affairs of their respective countries. The Egyptian President waited over a month for a reply, which contained only pleasant generalities with none of the specific points of information Sadat demanded.¹⁴⁰ In response, Sadat had a prepared message to be delivered to Moscow by the stunned Soviet ambassador:

It seems that the Soviet Union has no confidence in the Egyptian leadership and fails to appreciate the dangers of the situation. While Egypt is anxious to maintain the friendship of the Soviet Union she is unable to submit to a position of trusteeship to anyone, including the Soviet Union.¹⁴¹

Sadat decided to expel the 15,000 Soviet advisors currently stationed in Egypt and to banish all Soviet equipment that Moscow was unwilling to sell to him.¹⁴² As Adeed Dawisha noted, Sadat decided "that the Russians had become not just a nuisance, but a positive obstacle to his future Middle Eastern and international policies."¹⁴³

Sadat's decision was politically brilliant. As Alvin Rubinstein argued, "Not since Nasser

¹⁴²el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 230.

¹³⁸See chapter 3 for a detailed examination of Kissinger's support of a hegemonic Israel in the years preceding the Yom Kippur War.

¹³⁹el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 229.

¹⁴⁰Glassman, <u>Arms for the Arabs</u>, 94.

¹⁴¹Anwar Sadat, as cited in Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 171.

¹⁴³Dawisha, "The Soviet Union in the Arab World," in Dawisha and Dawisha, eds., <u>The Soviet</u> <u>Union in the Middle East</u>, 15.

had nationalized the Suez Canal Company almost sixteen years earlier to the day had an Egyptian leader so captured the attention and imagination of the Arab world and the international community."¹⁴⁴ Nasser's legacy weighed heavily on this momentous event. Before the expulsion, Soviet military personnel had obtained near-sovereignty on Egyptian army bases – a fact most Egyptians believed Nasser would never have permitted.¹⁴⁵ This was a highly debatable, but for a relatively new president still working in the shadow of his predecessor, invoking Nasser's spirit was beneficial for Sadat's domestic standing. The expulsion was also militarily brilliant. If détente worked toward preventing war between Egypt and the Israelis, Sadat believed that launching a war with a large number of Soviet advisers in harm's way would be impossible.¹⁴⁶

The Soviets complied with Sadat's order. Soviet advisors and weapons were promptly evacuated from Egypt. Moscow hoped that its comprehensive response would remind the client, in the words of Galia Golan, "of the American commitment to Israel – as well as the fact that the Soviet Union was their only true friend – lest they think they would find satisfaction in the West."¹⁴⁷ The message was lost on Sadat, who was no longer interested in finding "satisfaction" elsewhere. The Israelis and the Americans misinterpreted Sadat's expulsion order as a break in Soviet-Egyptian relations that would render another war unlikely. American military and diplomatic analysts were quoted in a July 19 article in the *New York Times* interpreting the effect

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¹⁴⁴Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 189.

¹⁴⁵P.J. Vatikiotis, "Notes for an Assessment of the Soviet Impact on Egypt," in Confino and Shamir, eds., <u>The USSR and the Middle East</u>, 174.

¹⁴⁶Beattie, Egypt During the Nasser Years, 132.

¹⁴⁷Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 25.

of the expulsion as hampering Sadat's ability to expel the Israelis from the Sinai.¹⁴⁸ The expulsion led to one faulty justification of United States support for Israel. As the prominent Israeli historian Nadav Safran observed, Sadat's decision "was seen in the United States as the major payoff of a policy of close support for Israel rather than as a possible ground for changing that policy."¹⁴⁹ Sadat, then, tricked his enemies into believing that their policies would indefinitely prevent war – which was exactly the kind of intelligence climate that would fail to prevent a surprise attack.

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The next few months saw another considerable cooling in Soviet-Egyptian relations. Moscow had stepped up its military supply effort to Syria, which would become a crucial factor in the two-front Yom Kippur War. In October, Egyptian Premier Azziz Sidqi traveled to Moscow for high-level talks in order to smooth over the hostilities between the two countries, thus paving the way for a return – albeit downgraded – of Soviet military personnel to Egypt. The Soviet expulsion in May had successfully transmitted Sadat's intentions to the Americans, Soviets, and Israelis, but Egypt still required Moscow's support for war.

A February 1973 mission to Moscow, headed by Major General Ahmed Isma'il, finally netted the Egyptian military the offensive weapons it needed, most important of which were the SCUD missiles capable of striking Israel and thus serving an important deterrent effect.¹⁵⁰ The arms deal was the biggest in the history of Soviet-Egyptian relations, and not insignificantly, the shipments arrived in a prompt fashion – also unique in Sadat's dealings with Moscow.¹⁵¹ Upon

¹⁴⁸"Egypt tells Soviet to Withdraw Military Advisers and Experts, Citing a 'New Stage' in Relations: Cairo's Hope for Recovery of Sinai Seems Weakened," *New York Times*, 19 July 1972.

¹⁴⁹Nadav Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 469.

¹⁵⁰Beattie, <u>Egypt During the Nasser Years</u>, 127.

¹⁵¹el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 238.

surveying the new situation, the Egyptian President exclaimed, "they are drowning me in new arms!"¹⁵²

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Sadat had many reasons to be happy. In a *Newsweek* interview in early April, he equated the arms shipments with the ability to act independently of Soviet wishes.¹⁵³ This rather bold statement – made in an American periodical, no less – explains Sadat's satisfaction. From the beginning of his presidency, the Egyptian leader viewed his relations with Moscow by a single criterion: his patrons' willingness to provide arms. The Soviet opposition to war was no secret, but as the expulsion demonstrated, Moscow's influence in Egypt was unwelcome if its policies would prevent Sadat from freedom of military action. In the Egyptian view, relations with the Soviets were useless unless they produced the means to complete Egypt's major foreign policy objective.

Sadat knew all too well that Moscow's intentions in the Middle Eat were strategic, not ideological in nature. While détente meant accommodation between the superpowers, it was by no means a signal toward ending competition for global dominance in a bi-polar system. Between its oil and its geo-strategic centrality, the Middle East remained a crucial theater of influence from which Moscow was unwilling to part. Nor were the Soviets prepared to confront the United States directly, which partly explains their "back-and-forth" arms policy with Egypt. However, the Soviet Union decided to resume their arms deliveries to Egypt for another reason. Whereas Nasser had managed to alienate most of the Persian Gulf States as a result of his Yemeni War, Sadat was able to marshal significant support – in the form of outright cash grants and pledges to embargo oil shipments as a sign of pan-Arab power – from the billionaire oil

¹⁵²Anwar Sadat, as cited in Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 181.

¹⁵³"The Battle is Now Inevitable" Newsweek, 9 April 1973.

sheiks, headed by Saudi Arabia's King Faisal. After Israel occupied Arab lands after 1967, the conflict spread beyond the "first circle" border-states to the "second and third circle" Persian Gulf states.¹⁵⁴ At least in terms of the conflict with Israel, Sadat enjoyed the support of most of the Arab world, and Moscow was pleased to obtain oil-derived hard currency, care of Sadat's Persian Gulf backers, who agreed to pay for the massive arms shipments.¹⁵⁵

By March 1973, Sadat had the arms and financial support to wage war. On March 26 he spoke before the Peoples' Assembly in Cairo:

The stage of total confrontation has become inevitable and we are entering it whether we like it or not. The military situation must be made to move, with all the sacrificing this entails. We must tell the world that we are here and that we can dictate our will.¹⁵⁶

Despite Sadat's previous threats, 1973 was to be the real "year of decision" for the simple fact that Moscow was finally willing to supply its client with an arms cache at least quantitatively equal to that of Israel's. Moscow no longer denied its client offensive weapons in the months preceding the war, without which Sadat could never have attempted to dislodge Israeli forces from the Suez Canal region.¹⁵⁷ Moscow's public statements on the Middle East reflected Egypt's new capabilities, and (implicitly at least) recognized that Soviet arms were now potentially capable of contravening Soviet policy. At an April 5 press conference in Stockholm, Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin cryptically responded to a question about Soviet arms deliveries to Egypt: "We believe that Egypt has a right to possess a powerful army now in order to defend itself against the aggressor and to liberate its own lands."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴Nadav Safran, "The War and the Future of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 52 (January 1974), 219-221.

¹⁵⁵Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 235.

¹⁵⁶Anwar Sadat, as cited in "Sadat Decides on War," Sunday Times, (London), 14 October 1973.

¹⁵⁷Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>Soviet Strategy in the Middle East</u>, 167.

¹⁵⁸Alexsei Kosygin, as cited in Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>The Soviet Union and the October</u> <u>Middle East War</u>, 36.

In late summer of 1973 the Soviets considered the many benefits of another Arab-Israeli war. European imperialism was becoming a distant memory in the Arab world, and Moscow was struggling to sustain its relevance in the region – which could only be accomplished through public opposition to Israel, the "new imperialist". In Moscow's view, a new war could deflect widespread anti-Communist sentiment throughout the Arab world and allow the Soviets an opportunity to demonstrate their solidarity with progressive Arab states. While a rapprochement with the conservative Persian Gulf monarchies was a pipe dream, the Soviets (correctly) reasoned that a war could engender a serious breach in their relations with the Americans, especially during a time of détente.¹⁵⁹ All of these positive hypotheticals were augmented by one of Moscow's major concerns. Opposition to war could very well lead to another Soviet expulsion. Given the Arabs' concerted anti-Zionism and their new military capabilities, there was a chance that they could win the war – at which point it would be unlikely that the Arabs would again invite a major Soviet presence in the region.¹⁶⁰

But none of these considerations, of course, existed in a vacuum. In the new era of détente, avoiding confrontation with the United States was still Moscow's greatest foreign policy goal. (See Chapter 1 for an expanded discussion on this point.) The May 1973 Nixon-Brezhnev summit renewed the leaders' mutual commitment to détente, which included pledges to contain local conflicts before they erupted into a superpower crisis.¹⁶¹ In Brezhnev's thinking, détente was one-half of a contradictory policy. As Paul Murphy, a biographer of Brezhnev, put it, the Soviet leader aimed for both "normalized state-to-state relations with Soviet Union [and

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¹⁵⁹Glassman, <u>Arms for the Arabs</u>, 119.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 194.

¹⁶¹Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 49.

demonstrated] vigorous support of national liberation movements and sympathetic factions and regimes engaged in regional conflicts.¹⁵² Moscow's equivocal policies between détente/opposition to war and support of Egypt's objectives reflected Brezhnev's desire to maintain both positions. This was known as the Soviet Union's policy of "no war, no peace"; i.e., a stalemate that would neither force Egypt to accept the status quo, nor precipitate a war that could lead to a superpower engagement. Moreover, since the Soviet Union's relevance in the region centered on its ability to assist the Arabs, as the scholar Roman Kolkowicz argues, "a peaceful settlement of the Middle Eastern situation would erode the rationale for Soviet presence and would diminish Arab dependence on their Moscow patron."¹⁶³

While the Kremlin grappled with this uncomfortable position, Egypt had already resolved to go to war. Sadat laid out his case on the grounds that the situation was not likely to become any more conducive to attack: the Soviets were not going to send any more weapons; Egypt should not expect any more support from the Arab world or the international community; and Egypt's Persian Gulf financial backers stipulated that future aid was conditional upon commencement of hostilities.¹⁶⁴

Soviet Policy Toward Egypt During the Yom Kippur War

Moscow's policy of balancing détente peace initiatives with maintaining its influence on the Middle East took a sharp turn toward the latter in the days preceding the Arab attack on October 6. The Soviet Union had advance knowledge of Sadat's plans and, in the interest of

¹⁶²Murphy, <u>Brezhnev: Soviet Politician</u>, 272.

¹⁶³Roman Kolkowicz, "The Soviet Policy in the Middle East," in Confino and Shamir, eds., <u>The</u> <u>USSR and the Middle East</u>, 150.

¹⁶⁴Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 20.

maintaining the Arabs' military strategy, failed to alert the United States accordingly.¹⁶⁵
Moscow's decision violated the spirit and letter of détente by maintaining secrecy, which was
mandatory for the successful execution of the Syrian and Egyptian two-front surprise strategy.
Additionally, the Kremlin may have considered the confidentiality of the Arab attack as
sufficient "payback" for Washington's failure to notify Moscow of the Chilean coup – of which
the Americans had comparable advance knowledge.¹⁶⁶
For obvious reasons, Sadat did not think he could trust the Soviets with his plans until

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the last possible minute. During an October 3, 1973, meeting between the Egyptian President and Soviet Ambassador Vladimir Vinogradov, Sadat said, as recounted by one Soviet diplomat, that he was planning to "break the deadlock in the Middle East situation."¹⁶⁷ Sadat did not elaborate on the day that the battle was to begin, but there is no question but that Moscow knew that hostilities were imminent, as evidenced by the Soviet response. Vinogradov scheduled a critical meeting with Sadat on the following day to report: "I have an urgent message from the Soviet leadership. Moscow asks you to allow four big aircraft in Egypt to fly the Soviet families out of Egypt."¹⁶⁸ By that evening, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told his staff at the Kremlin that he had learned of the date and time when the war was scheduled to begin: October 6 at 2:00 p.m. When one of his subordinates asked about how the Americans and Israelis might interpret the Soviet evacuation, Gromyko answered bluntly: "The lives of Soviet

¹⁶⁵Alexander L. George, "The Arab-Israeli War of October 1973: Origins and Impact," in Alexander L. George, ed., <u>Managing United States-Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention</u> (Boulder: Westview, 1983), 147.

¹⁶⁶United States, Congress, Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: The Middle East, 1974: New Hopes, New Challenges</u>, 189.

¹⁶⁷Anwar Sadat, as cited in Viktor Levonovich Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin During the Yom</u> <u>Kippur War</u> (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 10.

¹⁶⁸Vladimir Vinogradov, as cited in el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 238.

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people are dearer to us.^{*169} More likely, as Alvin Rubinstein observed, Moscow "wanted to maintain a certain diplomatic distance from the attack: it wanted to be sufficiently aloof so that when war broke out it could not be accused by the United States of complicity, thereby endangering the advantages it gained from détente.^{*170}

The disingenuousness of Soviet rationale is striking, given that the evacuation – regardless of the response it evoked – was proof that Moscow could have shared its intelligence with Washington but instead chose to violate (at least in the strict interpretation) détente policy for its own interests.¹⁷¹ The United States and Israeli intelligence failed to recognize the mounting Arab attack began after the Soviet evacuation; then interpreted it as yet another rupture in Soviet-Egyptian relations.¹⁷² This misinterpretation worked to Egypt's advantage, but the Soviet evacuation irked Sadat nonetheless: "That episode showed a total lack of confidence in us and our fighting ability."¹⁷³

Moscow's actions immediately preceding the war were consistent with its well-established balancing act between détente and Middle East influence. In keeping with détente and other considerations, the Soviet Union was unequivocally against the Arab resumption of hostilities on October 6. Vladimir Kirpitchenko, a KGB agent stationed in Cairo during the war, makes this point clear: "Our leadership proceeded from the fact that the effects of military preparations

¹⁶⁹Andrei Gromyko, as cited in Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 13.

¹⁷⁰Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 261.

¹⁷¹The "Agreement on Prevention of Nuclear War" between the Soviet Union and the United States on 22 June 1973 stated, "the parties agree that they will act in such a manner as to prevent the development of situations capable of causing a dangerous exacerbation of their relations, as to avoid military confrontations, and as to exclude the outbreak of nuclear war between them and between either of the Parties and other countries. (Emphasis added.) United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe of the Committee of Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Détente</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office: 1974), 76.

¹⁷²Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>., 259-260.

¹⁷³el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 247.

would inevitably damage Soviet foreign policy.^{*174} By the time the Arabs had sufficient arms, they were able to do exactly what Moscow hoped its weapons shipments would prevent: the rendering of Soviet foreign policy considerations irrelevant. In other words, Moscow did not want a war, the Arabs were unmoved by Soviet wishes precisely because Soviet arms allowed them the means for war, and Moscow officials in turn believed they could maximize their own Middle East objectives by dispensing with détente principles when they became aware of the war's imminence.

Soviet public objection to the war could have irreparably damaged whatever Arab loyalty Moscow had gained as a result of its weapons shipments.¹⁷⁵ The Soviets were besieged by their contradictory policies in the Middle East and Western-oriented détente. But one more factor weighed heavily on Moscow's policies. China, Moscow's giant Communist neighbor to the southeast, had begun to take the Soviets to task for their gradually accommodating policies vis-a-vis the United States. Vasilii Kozaetsov, chief of the Kremlin's American Affairs department, exemplified Moscow's "China syndrome" at the beginning of the war, when top officials were deliberating on United States-Soviet cooperative measures:

Can you imagine what would happen if some of the Arabs oppose our joint steps with the Americans, and the Chinese consequently veto the resolution? Do you want the Chinese to become leaders of the national liberation, anti-imperialist forces?¹⁷⁶

In the Soviet view, a Middle East border war was not worth an erosion of détente, but neither was excessive "imperialist accommodation" worth jeopardizing the Soviet position throughout the developing world. These factors shed light on Moscow's vigorous support of Egypt and its

 ¹⁷⁴Vladimir Kirpitchenko, as cited in Parker, ed. <u>The October War: A Retrospective</u>, 45.
 ¹⁷⁵Glassman, <u>Arms for the Arabs</u>, 119.

¹⁷⁶Vasilii Kozaetsov, as cited in Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 37-38.

Arab allies for the Yom Kippur War – given that Moscow did not want that conflict.

The Soviet Union's initial public acknowledgment of the war was a bald-faced lie. The lead article in the October 8 edition of *Pravda* stated:

In recent days Israel had concentrated considerable armed forces on the cease-fire lines with Syria and Egypt, had called up the reservists, and, having thus heated up the situation to the limit, unleashed military operations. The responsibility for the present development of events in the Middle East and their consequences falls wholly on Israel and those external reactionary circles, which constantly encourage Israel's aggressive ambitions.¹⁷⁷

In the larger sense, assessing blame for the cause of the Yom Kippur War is, of course, a subjective exercise. Determining who actually started the conflict is not. In fact, Sadat's decision to launch the war on Yom Kippur can be partly explained by Israel's reduced mobilization capability during the holiest day of the Jewish calendar.¹⁷⁸

The Soviets' disregard for the truth at the onset of hostilities was probably a function of their low regard for Arab military capabilities. For all the thousands of tons of Soviet military supplies in Arab hands, Moscow predicted another defeat by the Israelis.¹⁷⁹ The Soviets' completely wrong assessment bears testimony to the antagonistic and non-cooperative climate of Soviet-Egyptian military relations in regard both to Arab-attended tactical schools in Russia and the unpopular presence of Soviet advisors at Egyptian military ports and bases. Just three hours into the war, top Kremlin officials expressed concern of an Israeli counter-attack that could threaten the overthrow of the Egyptian and Syrian governments. Brezhnev assumed that the Arabs would regret ignoring Soviet advice to abstain from war.¹⁸⁰

Israeli and American intelligence knew of an Arab military buildup but failed to

¹⁷⁷<u>Pravda</u>, 8 October 1973, as cited in <u>Reprints from the Soviet Press</u> (New York: Compass Publications, 1973), 5-6.

¹⁷⁸Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 242-243.

¹⁷⁹Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 49.

¹⁸⁰Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 31.

appreciate its meaning. The first several days of the war witnessed unquestioned Arab victories that capitalized on a masterful surprise attack. One-third of Israel's air force was lost against Syrian and Egyptian advances during the first three days alone. But more importantly, a war that was undertaken for political reasons – to force the Israelis to the negotiating table for a settlement on the occupied territories – succeeded in disabusing Israel of its belief that military superiority would maintain the occupation. In the Israeli view, occupation of the Sinai and Golan Heights afforded a security through natural barriers that no treaty or superpower could guarantee. A 1972 publication from the Israeli Foreign Ministry summarized this line of reasoning: "The boundaries are such as will not again expose Israel to temptations of Arab aggression or give an Arab aggressor decisive advantage in various sectors."¹⁸¹ The Arab surprise attack, led by the Egyptians, demonstrated that the land occupation would not guarantee Israeli invulnerability. As Sadat argued: "The myth of Israel's long arm, of her superior, even invincible air force, armory, soldiers—was finally shattered."¹⁸²

Egypt and Syria demanded that their Soviet patron ensure that no UN peace resolutions would pass as long as the Arabs were on the offensive.¹⁸³ On October 8 the Soviet representative to the UN argued against any cease-fire initiatives, on the grounds that a cease-fire "would be exploited by the aggressors again only to distract attention from this key issue and to continue to occupy and annex other peoples' lands."¹⁸⁴ The Soviet representative instead called for the implementation of UN Resolution 242, and argued that there should be no cease-

¹⁸¹Cited in Michael Brecher, <u>Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 447.

¹⁸²el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 255.

¹⁸³Anatoly Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents</u> (New York: Random House, 1995), 290.

¹⁸⁴Cited in Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>The Soviet Union and the October Middle East War</u>, 57.

fire until the Arabs secured the land they lost after the Six Day War.¹⁸⁵ During the first week of conflict, the superpowers deliberated over strategies of containing the war and ensuring a reasonable time frame for a cease-fire. At the same time, however, Moscow was encouraging other Arab and African states to join the struggle against Israel. A message delivered on October 9 from Brezhnev to Algerian President Houari Boumedienne stated: "In our view, there must be fraternal Arab solidarity, today more than ever. Syria and Egypt must not remain alone in the struggle against a treacherous enemy."¹⁸⁶

Moscow maintained its basic stance in the years preceding the Yom Kippur War, that is, keeping in place concurrent (and contradictory) policies of détente toward the West and maintenance of its prestige and influence among the "progressive" nations of the non-aligned world. Indeed, Moscow saw many benefits stemming from a united Arab front. Ideologically, the Arab world might connect the cause of liberation movements to Soviet policy. And militarily, Arab unity could have decreased the chance that Moscow would have to resort to direct defense of its Arab clients.

The Arabs' successes reverberated in the United States as well. As the scholar Burton Kaufman observed, "By almost defeating Israel in the first week of the October War, the Arab states in the Middle East have shattered the aura of military invincibility. No longer could Washington assume that Israel's military superiority over its Arab neighbors would ensure

¹⁸⁵United Nations Resolution 242 of November 22 1967, Article 1(I): "[Affirms]...Withdrawal of Israel Armed Forces from Territories Occupied in the Recent Conflict," http://www.un.org/documents.htm on 28 October 2003.

¹⁸⁶Houari Boumedienne, as cited in Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>The Soviet Union and the</u> <u>October Middle East War</u>, 59.

stability in the region.^{*187} As long as the conflict remained localized, Moscow was willing to augment Arab military prowess with a massive weapons airlift commenced on October 8. Although the airlift was initially a blatant attempt to enhance the Arabs' identification of Arab success with Soviet support, by October 10 Israel launched its first major counter-offensive – thus making the Soviet deliveries indispensable for the Egyptian and Syrian armies.¹⁸⁸

Sadat's response to the airlift was typical of the suspicious/gracious stance he had always assumed when dealing with Soviet support. Upon receiving news of the airlift, Sadat told Ambassador Vinogradov: "Yes, yes. Magnificent! Magnificent! Tell comrade Brezhnev that it is Soviet arms which achieved the miracle of the [Suez] crossing."¹⁸⁹ The Egyptian president, always the astute politician, made sure to tell the Kremlin leaders exactly what they wanted to hear. But to Sadat's close aide, Mohamed Heikal, the President said, "I don't think they will miss this chance" to restore their prestige in the Arab world.¹⁹⁰ Sadat's expulsion of the Soviet advisors in 1972 was still fresh in the minds of his patrons; in a sense the Soviet airlift was a culmination of Cairo's policy of denying Moscow the pleasure of feeling it had stability and prestige on Arab soil.

Even after Egypt began receiving weapons en masse, Sadat shunned Soviet military advice, to Moscow's great annoyance.¹⁹¹ The value of Soviet weapons supplied to the Arabs during the war was roughly equal (\$2.2 billion) to that sent to Israel by the United States.¹⁹² But

¹⁸⁷Burton I. Kaufman, <u>The Arab Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and</u> <u>Superpower Diplomacy</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 87.

¹⁸⁸Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 88-89.

¹⁸⁹Anwar Sadat, as cited in Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 214.

¹⁹⁰Anwar Sadat, as cited in ibid.

¹⁹¹Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 72.

¹⁹²Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 292.

qualitatively, the Soviets simply could not match American air technology.¹⁹³ This fact likely muted the Arabs' appreciation of Soviet support and strictly limited their willingness to heed Moscow's advice advocating a cease-fire on the existing lines.

Israel was on the offensive by the second week of the war, at which point Moscow assumed a more active political role in the conflict. In keeping with Arab wishes, the Soviets refrained from cease-fire initiatives until Israel threatened to beat back the Arabs to their original lines. ¹⁹⁴ Soviet Premier Kosygin's trip on October 13 to Cairo reflected the changing military situation. The Soviets wanted a cease-fire on the present position of each side, because they did not think it likely that the Arabs would advance much further – especially with the commencement of the United States airlift to Israel. Sadat described Kosygin as "vicious" and "aggressive" and in no position to dictate Egyptian military strategy.¹⁹⁵ As usual, the Soviets and the Egyptians were working at cross-purposes.

Kosygin and Sadat agreed to a cease-fire, but the Egyptians believed that a termination of the war at the present time was premature.¹⁹⁶ Kosygin did not help matters by making frequent (and negative) comparisons of Sadat to his predecessor, Nasser.¹⁹⁷ Exchanges between the two leaders were testy, which partly explains Moscow's failure to secure an Egyptian ceasefire from October 13. Sadat did not appreciate what he perceived to be Moscow's overly cautious position, asking: "Are you afraid of Israel?" to which Kosygin replied: "We are afraid of nobody, but we have an obligation to world peace and are committed to search for a just and

¹⁹³el-Shazly, <u>The Crossing of the Suez</u>, 273.

¹⁹⁴Kohler, Gouré, and Harvey, <u>The Soviet Union and the October Middle East War</u>, 59.
¹⁹⁵el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 258.

¹⁹⁶Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 108.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 112.

durable solution of the Middle East problems on the basis of Resolution 242.^{*198} Sadat sensed Moscow's near total lack of confidence in the Arab military machine – even after their successful offensive. He replied sharply to Kosygin's stated concern for the integrity of Cairo: "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but no threat will ever be posed to Cairo."¹⁹⁹ Between two "progressive" states supposedly ideologically united against imperialist aggression, one wonders: why would Sadat claim that Cairo's safety would "disappoint" his patrons?

Sadat called for a cease-fire at the existing lines on October 19. The Egyptian leader recognized that his military's capability had peaked, and decided to accept the basic premise that caused the Soviets to urge termination six days earlier. He told Ambassador Vinogradov: "The two superpowers should guarantee the cease-fire and immediate implementation of Security Council Resolution 242."²⁰⁰ Brezhnev was greatly perturbed by Sadat's refusal to accept the cease-fire when Moscow first wanted it. He called Sadat's October 19 message "desperate...[h]e got what was coming to him."²⁰¹ On October 22 Sadat notified Vinogradov of Egypt's intention to comply with U.N. Resolution 338, which proposed a halting of all activity at each side's present position.²⁰² Both Egypt and the Soviet Union interpreted Resolution 338 as a cease-fire that would be guaranteed jointly by the United States and the Soviet Union. But only a few minutes before the cease-fire was to become effective, Soviet supplied SCUD missiles – under almost total Soviet control because of their ability to strike Israel proper – were being launched

¹⁹⁸Anwar Sadat and Alexsei Kosygin, as cited in Heikal, <u>The Road to Ramadan</u>, 246.

¹⁹⁹el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity</u>, 259.

²⁰⁰Ibid., 264-265.

²⁰¹Leonid Brezhnev, as cited in Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 130-131.

²⁰²United Nations Resolution 338 of October 22 1973, Article 1: "Calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all fighting and terminate all military activity immediately; no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the position they now occupy," http://www.un.org/documents.htm on 3 November 2003.

against Israeli targets.²⁰³ Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko authorized the launch, which contravened Moscow's official policy. Foreign Minister Gromyko ordered Vinogradov to halt the launch, but his order came too late. The SCUDS all missed their targets, but despite their impotence, the Israelis interpreted the SCUD episode as a direct Egyptian-Soviet escalation of hostilities.²⁰⁴

Cairo and Tel Aviv exchanged accusations concerning the violation of the cease-fire. Militarily, at least, Israel was clearly on the offensive with the encirclement of Egypt's Third Army division, beyond which lay an undefended Cairo. Sadat's calls to Moscow for a guaranteed cease-fire On October 23 became desperate as Israel refused to halt its advances. The Kremlin issued a warning to Israel:

The continuation of criminal acts by Israel will lead to grave consequences for Israel itself. The Soviet Union believes that an end of Israel's acts of violence, the liberation of Israeli occupied territory, is the basis for establishing a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.²⁰⁵

The Israelis were confident that Moscow's warning of "grave consequences" was merely a bluff. Sadat further intensified the situation on October 24 by calling for a unilateral presence of Soviet troops on the Egyptian side of the front if the United States refused to send its own troops.²⁰⁶ Like the Israelis, Sadat did not think that Moscow was willing to intervene directly; his request was really a tactic aimed at forcing the Americans to cooperate in the cease-fire. Sadat correctly believed that the Soviets were unprepared to commit troops to the war. In the Politburo, Defense Minister Grechko and President Podgorny advocated a "demonstration of our military presence in Egypt and Syria," while Premier Kosygin, Foreign Minister Gromyko, and Secretary

²⁰³Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 234.

²⁰⁴Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 144.

²⁰⁵Cited in Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 95.

²⁰⁶Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 166.

Brezhnev decided against a unilateral move as too risky.²⁰⁷ Additionally, the Kremlin took Nixon's message of October 20 at its word. Nixon's statement lobbied Brezhnev for commitments "from both of us...to provide the strong leadership which our respective friends in the area will find persuasive."²⁰⁸

Brezhnev's note to Nixon, delivered on October 24, declared:

I will say it straight, that if you find it impossible to act together with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity to urgently consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally. Israel cannot be allowed to get away with its violations.²⁰⁹

While unquestionably harshly worded, the note was nonetheless written under the assumption that Washington would agree to direct intervention in order to prevent Israeli forces from destroying the Egyptian Third Army. If the Soviets were confident of Washington's agreement to send a bilateral force to the front, and if the top Kremlin leaders decided beforehand against unilateral action, why did Brezhnev choose such strong wording with the explicit threat to act alone?

The tone of Brezhnev's note was probably indicative of Moscow's grave concern of the larger

implications of Israel's continued operations. As Jon Glassman observed,

At stake...was not simply the Soviet Union's Middle Eastern clients but, rather, the integrity of the entire 'socialist' – 'progressive' security structure. If Israel was permitted to exercise military supremacy over the 'progressive' Arabs, what would cause other 'aggressive imperialist' forces to shrink from moving strongly against other Soviet client stats and movements?²¹⁰

While Brezhnev's strong language was, of course, written to Nixon, the implied threats were actually reflective of Moscow's internal concerns regarding the threatened state of Soviet

²⁰⁸Richard Nixon, as cited in Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin</u>, 161.

(October 1977), 598.

²⁰⁷Cited in Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 295.

²⁰⁹Cited in William B. Quandt, "Soviet Policy in the October Middle East War-II," <u>International</u> <u>Affairs</u> 53

²¹⁰Glassman, <u>Arms for the Arabs</u>, 175.

influence throughout the world. The note's meaning was not the only miscommunication between the superpowers. At an October 26 news conference, United States Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger explained the American response to Brezhnev's note – the heightened military alert status to DEFCON III – as a reaction to the Soviet alert of its own air force.²¹¹ Given the Soviet alert status, interpreted in conjunction with Brezhnev's sharp note declaring unilateral action if necessary, this may have seemed like an appropriate response to imminent Soviet movement. The problem with Schlesinger's stated rationale was that the Soviet military had been on heightened alert since the beginning of the war; its status did not change when Brezhnev sent his October 24 note.²¹²

Brezhnev's message was not intended to be an ultimatum; the Kremlin likewise responded to the DEFCON III alert with uniform disgust and surprise at what they considered an unjustified provocation. Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin summarized the misunderstanding:

Washington never had any real cause for alarm because the Politburo did not have any intention of intervening in the Middle East. It would have been reckless both politically and militarily, for at that time the Soviet Union was not prepared to mount immediately a large-scale intervention in the region. And even if we could have done so, it would have transformed the Arab-Israeli war into a direct clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. Nobody in Moscow wanted that.²¹³

The Soviet Union maintained a balance between détente politics and its continuing Middle East influence through the major auspices of Egypt to the end of the Yom Kippur War. The communication breakdown with the United States on October 24-25 represented the culmination of Moscow's fractured policy. The Soviet Union was determined to prevent the

²¹¹United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u>, No. 1795 (1973), 621.

²¹²Israelyan, Inside the Kremlin, 190.

²¹³Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 296.

defeat of Egypt, which was the recipient of billions of dollars' worth of Soviet aid distributed over a period of 18 years. Egypt's stature among Moscow's policy of supporting national liberation movements made that country, in the Soviet view, emblematic of the entire Soviet-led socialist global order. But the Soviets, in the climate of détente, were also determined to avoid a superpower clash that may have expanded beyond a regional conflict into general nuclear war. This was the basic contradiction that explained the Soviet Union's unambiguous opposition to Sadat's march toward war. Moscow's faulty "no war, no peace" solution to the contradiction of Western accommodation and world socialist prestige was most strongly opposed by Egypt – the client state on which Moscow staked a great amount of its reputation among the non-aligned world.

The Yom Kippur War did not plunge the superpowers into a nuclear confrontation. By this fundamental criterion, détente was upheld, but not without major damage to Moscow's other basic foreign policy objective. The record of Soviet-Egyptian relations in the interwar period betrays a self-interested client-patron state structure that traded arms for geo-strategic influence on a sliding scale. Immediately after the cessation of hostilities, Sadat demonstrated his utter disregard for Moscow's wishes. Soviet arms allowed the Egyptian army to gain a toehold in the Sinai, thus allowing the Egyptian leader to break the diplomatic stalemate after the Yom Kippur War with direct negotiations, which could finally be conducted with dignity. Beyond this Clausewitzean victory, as Alvin Rubinstein observed, "with not so much as a nod to Moscow's role, Sadat resumed full diplomatic relations with the United States for the first time since Egypt had severed them on June 6, 1967."²¹⁴ Moscow's contradictory foreign policies, not surprisingly,

²¹⁴Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 284.

culminated in a bitter irony. Sadat concluded that the only viable path to regaining its lost territory was improved relations with the United States – a diplomatic coup only achievable through the force of Soviet arms.

Chapter IV

The Challenge of an "Unbreakable" Bond: American-Israeli Affairs Through the Yom Kippur War

"Israel," wrote historian Stephen E. Ambrose, "is not America's ally. There is no alliance between the United States and Israel. But there is an American moral commitment to Israel, one that is so strong as to be unbreakable, in part precisely because nowhere is it spelled out in a treaty."¹ Senator Joseph Clark, upon returning from a 1966 trip to the Middle East, proclaimed, "The United States would never permit the Arabs to overrun the State of Israel."²

The "why" and "how" of these statements, and many like them, are generally not discussed in the American political discourse largely because of their fundamental truth, reaffirmed at both ends of the 20th century. The Balfour Declaration of November 1917, declaring Britain's support of "the establishment in Palestine of a National Home for the Jewish people,"³ enjoyed overwhelming United States Congressional support on grounds ranging from religious conviction, humanitarian sympathy, acknowledgment of nationalist aspirations, and notably, distaste for "Mohammedan" rule over Middle Eastern lands.⁴

Only Cordell Hull, Representative of Tennessee, equivocated on the matter by vaguely

¹Stephen E. Ambrose, <u>Nixon, Volume Three: Ruin and Recovery, 1973-1990</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991), 240-241.

²Joseph Clark, as cited in United States, Congress, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report by Senator Joseph S. Clark: <u>War or Peace in the Middle East?</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1967), 14.

³The Balfour Declaration is reprinted in United States, Congress, Committee on Foreign Relations: <u>A Select Chronology and Background Documents Relating to the Middle East</u>, 2nd revised ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 136.

⁴This theologically incorrect term, which assumes that Muslims pray to Mohhamed as Christians pray to Jesus, signals an ignorance of Islam and preference of allied Britain's post-World War I predominance in the Middle East over the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Both of these factors would begin to change in the years following World War II.

calling for the "Palestine question" question to be decided "by the wishes and the welfare of those affected by the proposed plan."⁵ Fiorello H. LaGuardia, Representative of New York, was alone in his opposition to a Jewish homeland in Palestine, reasoning that such a state would further ghettoize the Jews and retard the advances they have made in such liberal democracies as the United States and England.⁶ In May 1998, a joint resolution, celebrating the 50th anniversary of Israel's birth, reaffirmed Congress's tradition of staunch support for the Jewish homeland, declaring that the United States and Israel for the past half-century and which have existed between the United States and Israel for the past half-century and which have been significant for both countries."⁷ The American government's attitude toward Zionism at both extremes of a remarkable 80-year odyssey of nationhood, bookends American-Israeli relations during the Cold War. These decades, however, considerably complicated truthful yet simplistic affirmations of United States-Israeli relations.

Events leading up to, and culminating in, American policy toward Israel during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 were arguably the most convoluted in the history of this "unique" international relationship. Although Stephen Ambrose and others have assumed the matter as self-evident, it is worth examining the sources of the "moral" and "unbreakable" American commitment to Israel. The historical record, from Harry Truman to Richard Nixon, bears one essential truth: the "unbreakable" bond was neither absolute nor exclusive of other interests.

⁵Cordell Hull, as cited in Zionist Organization of America, <u>The American War Congress and</u> <u>Zionism: Statements by Members of the American War Congress on the Jewish National Movement</u> (New York: Zionist Organization of America, 1919), 211.

⁶Ibid, 166

⁷United States, Congress, <u>United States Statutes at Large, 1998</u>, Public Law 105-175, Joint Resolution, "Friendship Between the United States and Israel," 11 May 1998 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1999), 112.

This fact tends to get obscured in light of more recent developments, which significantly intensified the American-Israel security relationship. Following the Yom Kippur War, United States foreign aid policy to Israel underwent something of a revolution: annual aid to Israel in 1974-1978 jumped to \$1.6 billion from \$360 million before the war; only 20% of pre-war aid was slated for military purposes while that figure increased to 65% by 1974; and most significantly, before the Yom Kippur War, 96% of all United States aid to Israel came in the form of loans – following the conflict Israel enjoyed as much as 60% of all aid in the form of outright grants.⁸

Although Ambrose, writing in 1991, was technically correct in noting that no alliance exists between the United States and Israel, Ronald Reagan, following the unprecedented direct United States military involvement in the Lebanon War of 1982, recognized Israel in the following year as a "strategic partner," and thereafter a de facto American ally.⁹ Although Cold War tensions had heightened in the 1980s after the détente of the previous decade, superpower competition in the Middle East had abated, due in no small part to Moscow's diminished regional prestige following the Yom Kippur War. American policy in the Middle East since the mid-1970s became less concerned with "losing" the Arab world to the Communist orbit, and more preoccupied with protecting its interests abroad and at home from terrorist attack by Arab radicals.

There existed no such equation of American with Israeli interests in the 1945-1973 period, and the reasons generally cited as the foundations for the "unbreakable" bond between

⁸Figures cited in Moshe Efrat, "The USA and the Israeli Military-Economic Dimension: A *Realpolitik* Perspective," in Moshe Efrat and Jacob Bercovitch, eds., <u>Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East: The Imbalance of Influence</u> (London: Routledge, 1991), 132.

⁹United States, Department of the Army, <u>Israel: A Country Study</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), 234.

the two countries – namely religious and political affinity – generally did not override the strategic concerns that prevented a policy of unswerving United States support for Israel. Those matters, in fact, served to complicate an already difficult relationship.

The most important, and for that matter, simplest, factor that accounts for the "unbreakable bond" of the American-Israeli relationship is the sheer number of Jews who live in the United States. The Israeli historian Yossi Beilin wrote, "Israel is the only Western state in the Middle East,"¹⁰ by which he meant that despite a religion and revived language that are firmly rooted in Middle East traditions, Israel's founders and leading *Ashkenazi* classes have transplanted American and European conventions into the heart of the Arab world. A majority of American and Israeli Jews are white, modern, and secular leaning. The Americans learn Hebrew and the Israelis learn English, and both groups traverse the Atlantic with relative ease. In this sense, if large numbers of Jews were attracted to the United States for reasons no different from other immigrant groups, namely for political, economic, and religious liberties, then these are the same ideals built into the core of modern Israeli society. In other words, when American Jews lobby the United States government to support Israel, they are, in a very real sense, lobbying to support themselves.

The Jewish political action committees, among the most influential in Washington, D.C., have allowed Israel a certain confidence in their abilities to influence American politics as few other countries can.¹¹ Throughout the first thirty years of America's search for a just settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict, there was virtually no Arab lobby consisting of actual Arabs in

¹⁰Yossi Beilin, Israel: A Concise Political History (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1992), 1.

¹¹Seth P. Tillman, <u>The United States in the Middle East: Interests and Obstacles</u> (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1982), 158.

Washington. Those who did advocate Arab wishes were generally diplomats and State Department "Arabists," or oil executives whose interests in the Persian Gulf rarely impacted the diplomacy of negotiating between Zionists and the northern, more radical Arab states.¹² As the Israeli historian Nadav Safran noted, it was only in the period directly preceding the 1973 Yom Kippur War that the conservative oil sheikdoms became central to the pan-Arab cause of anti-Zionism.¹³

The Jewish lobby has repeatedly emphasized the moral imperative of the United States to support the only democracy in the Middle East,¹⁴ and to an extent the image of Israel as a pioneering democracy in its early years became a running theme in American popular culture with particular emphasis on Jewish masculinity and association with America's own folkloric tradition of rugged individualism.¹⁵ Yet after the June 1967 War, Israel forfeited much of its ability to advertise itself as a beacon of freedom in an unfree region – however unwilling Israel may have been to become a police state exercising political control over Arabs living in the occupied territories, its leaders were forced to qualify the ethos of freedom in terms of cultural and racial exceptionalism.¹⁶

In sum, viewing the American-Israeli relationship in ideological terms, albeit religious, cultural, or political, is a shaky proposition, which is largely a consequence of one of the basic

¹²Mitchell Bard, "The Israeli and Arab Lobbies," <http://www.us-israel.org/jsource/us-israel/lobby.html> (28 October 2002).

¹³Nadav Safran, "The War and the Future of the Arab-Israeli Conflict," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 52 (January 1974), 219-221.

¹⁴See, for example, United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, <u>Hearings: Priorities for Peace in the Middle East</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 22.

¹⁵See, for example, Michelle Mart, "Tough Guys and American Cold War Policy: Images of History, 1948-1960," <u>Diplomatic History</u> 20 (Summer 1996), 357-380.

¹⁶Gabriel Sheffer and Menachem Hofnung, "Israel's Image," in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., <u>Dynamics of</u> <u>Dependence: U.S.–Israeli Relations</u> (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987), 14.

paradoxes of Zionist/Israeli foreign policy. Israel and the Zionist movement have always sought Great Power protection, not out of choice, but necessity. Theodor Herzl had become convinced, after failing to secure support for the Zionist cause by the European leaders, that Jews could rely only on themselves to create their own nation. The Nazi Holocaust highlighted both the truth of Herzl's conviction and the impossibility that sovereignty could be achieved without the support and recognition of other countries. Without the strenuous efforts of American Jews, the United States may never have become central to the support of Israel in its earliest years. Yet, without the consideration that Israel was a potential strategic value to American Cold War policy – itself a questionable proposition until the second term of Richard Nixon's administration – it is highly unlikely that any ideological factors alone could have sustained the American-Israeli influence relationship.

American Zionism and the Birth of Israel

Despite strong Congressional support, United States' interest in the Zionist question faded in the years following World War I, a symptom of America's withdrawal after its unpleasant experience on the international stage. American interest in the Zionist question did not reemerge until the later years of World War II. In 1944, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee moved to pass a resolution securing Jewish emigration to Palestine with statehood as the ultimate goal. Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson – who was deeply sympathetic to the plight of European Jewry – rejected the plan for strategic reasons. With the Normandy invasion quickly approaching, Stimson did not want any crises developing elsewhere. It was a reasoned prophecy of what would happen four years later.

Franklin Roosevelt, in characteristic fashion, was so impressed with his mediating skills

that he seemed to have convinced himself that he alone could solve the Zionist-Arab conflict. Roosevelt vacillated on the matter, promising both the Zionist organization that he would help establish a Jewish state in his next term, and Ibn Saud, Saudi Arabia's ruler, that no major American policy would be formulated before consultations with both Jews and Arabs.¹⁷ Roosevelt died a week after his promise to Saud, leaving this and all other foreign policy matters to his inexperienced and excluded vice president, Harry Truman.

Truman undoubtedly anguished over the moral implications of post-Holocaust Jewish nationalism placed before him, but he never lost sight of the larger and more threatening developments of the emerging Cold War. At the end of World War II, the United States likely would have been content with British predominance in the Middle East. The Greek civil war and Soviet encroachment in Turkey and Iran soon compelled the United States to replace wartorn Britain as the major power in the region, a policy formalized by the Truman Doctrine.

State Department officials had begun to view the Zionist-Arab conflict in Cold War terms, whereby American support for Zionism would translate into increased prestige for Moscow in the Arab world.¹⁸ The Zionists' argued against this view by noting that Palestine Jews proved to be worthy fighters against the Nazis during World War II,¹⁹ and would likewise be useful

¹⁷Herbert Feis, <u>The Birth of Israel: The Tousled Diplomatic Bed</u> (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), 16.

¹⁸Richard Stevens, <u>American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy</u> (New York: Pageant Press, 1962), 143.

¹⁹The Palestine Jewish struggle against Nazism became so important to the Zionist movement – both for domestic and foreign policy purposes – that a note about it was included in Israel's Declaration of Independence, Paragraph 8: "In the Second World War, the Jewish community of this country contributed its full share to the struggle of the freedom – and peace-loving nations against the forces of Nazi wickedness and, by the blood of its soldiers and its war effort, gained the right to a life of dignity, freedom and honest toil in their national homeland." The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel is reprinted in Israel, Office of Information, <u>Israel's Struggle For Peace</u> (New York: Israel Office of Information, 1960), 161-164.

against the Communists, gained little favor in the State Department, where officials took seriously Ibn Saud's 1947 threat to Truman that should a Jewish state be created in Palestine, the Arab world "will lay siege to it until it dies of famine."²⁰ Leading policy makers in both the State and newly-created Defense Departments, including George Kennan, James Forrestal, and George Marshall, were convinced that American support of the Jews would jeopardize Western access to Middle Eastern oil, a commodity not yet essential to American domestic needs but central to the rebuilding of post-war Europe.²¹

The State Department clearly wanted to avoid the situation entirely, but after the Zionists had achieved their goal, that proved to be impossible. Officials publically blamed the Zionists for the strategic nightmare that the Palestine conflict was creating. United States representative to the UN Warren Austin, in a speech to the General Assembly on April 20, 1948, dispensed with the subtleties of diplomacy: "We hoped that the Jews would make every possible effort to compose their differences with the Arabs in an effort to reduce the violence which persisted in Palestine. Events have not fulfilled these hopes."²² An exasperated memorandum from then-Director of the Office of the United Nations Dean Rusk to Undersecretary of State Robert A. Lovett predicted a Middle East war nine days before Israel declared its independence:

The Jews will come running to the Security Council with the claim that their state is the object of armed aggression and will use every means to obscure the fact that it is their own armed aggression against the Arabs inside Palestine which is the cause of Arab counter-attack. There will be a decided effort, given this eventuality, that the United States will be called upon by

²⁰Ibn Saud, as cited in Daniel Yergin, <u>The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money & Power</u> (New York: Free Press, 1991), 425.

²¹John P. Miglietta, <u>American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and</u> <u>Saudi Arabia</u> (New York: Lexington Books, 2002), 106. The United States boasted major domestic reserves in the early postwar era.

²²Warren Austin, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 461 (1948), 569.

elements inside this country to support Security Council action against the Arab states.

To take such action would seem to me to be morally indefensible while, from the aspect of our relations with the Middle East and our broad security aspects in that region, it would almost be fatal to pit forces of the United States and possibly Russia against the governments of the Arab world.²³

The Truman administration, against the heated objections of the diplomatic and military elite, backed the UN's Palestine partition resolution. If the United States had withdrawn its support for the Zionists, the resolution probably would not have obtained the necessary twothirds majority vote of the General Assembly, without which Israel would have been denied international recognition as a sovereign state. John P. Miglietta, a specialist in Middle East alliance politics, summarized the American motives:

The Truman administration's policy toward Israel was driven by domestic politics in the United States. Truman, faced with electoral pressures, sided with his domestic political advisers over his foreign policy councilors. American support for Israel was based on domestic politics as opposed to perceptions of American national interest.²⁴

After fifty years of lobbying for Great Power support from the stance of moral and strategic imperatives, Zionists ultimately had to thank the unpopularity of an incumbent president for the political support they needed. Facing reelection, Truman understood that no president (with the exception of Woodrow Wilson in 1916) won election without winning New York, where the greatest concentration of voting Jews made clear to Truman that their support was contingent on the president's Zionist policy.²⁵ Truman, never one to mince words, declared, "I'm sorry gentlemen, but I have to answer to hundreds of thousands who are anxious for the success of

²³Dean Rusk, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Foreign Relations of the United</u> <u>States, 1948</u>, V, "The Near East, South Asia, and Africa," part 2 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1976), 895.

²⁴Miglietta, <u>American Alliance Policy in the Middle East</u>, 115.

²⁵James Lee Ray, <u>The Future of American-Israeli Relations: A Parting of Ways?</u> (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), 7.

Zionism. I do not have hundreds of thousands of Arabs among my constituents.²⁶ The president received a letter from Chaim Weizmann on May 13, informing him that the Zionists would declare the existence of the Provisional Government of the Jewish State on midnight of May 15. Truman relented only after his political advisors convinced him that he would lose the election if he did not abandon United States recognition of a temporary trusteeship of the Jews in Palestine.²⁷ The United States recognized Israel's independence minutes after it was proclaimed. In the end, the Zionists had forced Truman's hand. Chaim Weizmann declared in his memoirs, "I was convinced that once we had taken our destiny into our own hands and established the republic, the American people would approve our resolution, and see in our successful struggle for independence the image of its own national liberation a century and three quarters ago.²⁸ American policy makers, at least, were unmoved by the comparison, for now the perpetual conflict they had foreseen was becoming a reality.

Israel and the Eisenhower Years

Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, did not feel beholden to domestic Jewish interest groups because they were nota significant part of the Republican constituency. The president believed that this allowed him a greater leeway in Middle East Cold War policy, which basically meant that he and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles could improve relations with the Arab world without concern of encumbering political constraints at home. Dulles publicized this

²⁶Harry Truman, as cited in Robert J. Donovan, <u>Conflict and Crisis: The Presidency of Harry S</u> <u>Truman, 1945-1948</u> (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977), 322.

²⁷Stevens, <u>American Zionism and U.S. Foreign Policy</u>, 204.

²⁸Chaim Weizmann, <u>Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann</u> (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), 582.

strategy:

We are in the present jam because the past administration had always dealt with the area [the Middle East] from a political standpoint and had tried to meet the wishes of the Zionists in this country, and that had created a basic antagonism with the Arabs. That was what the Russians are now capitalizing on.²⁹

Although Dulles and Eisenhower were still pressing Gamal Nasser, leader of Egypt, to enlist in the American Containment strategy as late as 1955, they had realized two years earlier that the Egyptian strongman refused to see Moscow as the primary threat to the Arab world.³⁰ Nasser reserved that title for Israel. Dulles believed that establishing a security alliance nearer to the Soviet Union's southwest flank would better serve American Containment policy. The resulting American-supported Baghdad Pact of 1955, consisting of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Pakistan turned into an unmitigated disaster, having failed to prevent Moscow from gaining prestige in the region. The Joint Chiefs of Staff quickly concluded that the alliance lacked the military capability to deter Soviet aggression, and Israel denounced the American plan, in part, because of its inclusion of Iraq, a country still technically at war against the Zionists.³¹ Most damaging, however, was Nasser's incensed reaction to the Pact. He believed that the United States was deliberately attempting to shift the power center of the Arab world away from Egypt and into the hands of his Hashemite rivals in Iraq, thereby encouraging Nasser to move squarely into the Soviet orbit. "By 1956," the Cold War historian Thomas Paterson concluded, "the Eisenhower Administration was tangled in Arab-Israeli, Arab-Arab, and Arab-British rivalries,

²⁹John Foster Dulles, as cited in Thomas G. Paterson, <u>Meeting the Communist Threat: Truman to</u> <u>Reagan</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 164.

³⁰Shlomo Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East: An Israeli Perspective</u> (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 115.

³¹Steven Z. Freiberger, <u>Dawn Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953-</u> 1957

⁽Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992), 106.

while the Soviets through their stunning weapons deal with Cairo, leaped over the northern tier and into the Arab core."³²

Nasser, emboldened by his arms deal with Moscow, announced on July 26, 1956, that Egypt had nationalized the Suez Canal. The move threatened to choke the French, British, and Israeli economies. While these three countries were clamoring for war, Eisenhower sharply rebuked any aggressive recourse, preferring diplomacy over force. There could be no more of a damaging blow, Eisenhower reasoned, than collusion between the Zionists and the once-great colonial powers, which would likely drive the Arabs directly to the Soviets. Anthony Eden of Great Britain, however, began to compare Nasser to Hitler, and the Israelis were eager to deliver a blow to their arch-nemesis in Egypt. The tripartite attack of late October 1956 led to some of the harshest criticism to come out of the White House in the post-war era: On October 31, Eisenhower announced:

We believe these actions to have been taken in error. For we do not accept the use of force as a wise or proper instrument for the settlement of international disputes.... The actions taken can scarcely be reconciled with the principles and purposes of the United Nations to which we have all subscribed. And, beyond this, we are forced to doubt even if resort to war will long serve the permanent interests of the attacking nations.³³

The president was referring, without much subtlety, to the opportunity Moscow would take to enhance its already growing influence throughout the Arab world, which in turn would jeopardize Western access to Middle Eastern oil.³⁴

The Suez Crisis served to sharpen Eisenhower's Cold War concerns in two ways. First, the rather pathetic withdrawal of France and Britain from the region signaled an end to Western

³²Paterson, <u>Meeting the Communist Threat</u>, 168.

³³Dwight Eisenhower, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 906 (1956), 744-45.

³⁴Yergin, <u>The Prize</u>, 484.

imperialism in the region, and, in turn proved to be a boon to Arab nationalism. Second, the tripartite attack made Israel appear as an agent of Western imperialism, which provided Moscow with the valuable pretext of encouraging the Arabs to think of Zionism and imperialism as one and the same. In a special message to Congress on January 5, 1957, Eisenhower proposed a new strategy which came to be known as the Eisenhower Doctrine, that would assist every nation in the Middle East, economically, militarily, and politically in order to protect "against overt aggression from any nation controlled by international Communism."³⁵ The Eisenhower Doctrine sought to deter Soviet aggression (which up to this point was non-existent) directly through the auspices of American power, thus replacing the client-state Containment strategy of the Baghdad Pact. The Eisenhower Doctrine used different means to achieve the same ends, and proved no more successful in consolidating Western orientation on the countries in the region. As Avi Shlaim observed, the Eisenhower Doctrine

helped turn the Middle East into a jousting ground for the superpowers and international politics into a zero-sum game in which one player's gain was seen as the other's loss. The region's home grown conflicts, bitter enough on their own, became virtually unsolvable with the involvement of fiercely competitive outside powers.³⁶

In terms of arms shipments, the Eisenhower Doctrine practiced equal treatment of the Middle East Countries in name only. With the exception of 100 recoilless guns sold in 1958, the Eisenhower administration refused to sell Israel any arms at all, while providing heavy artillery to Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Jordan.³⁷ In the faulty logic of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the nations

³⁵Dwight Eisenhower, as cited in Stephen J. Genco, "The Eisenhower Doctrine: Deterrence in the Middle East, 1957-1958," in Alexander L. George and Richard Smoke, <u>Deterrence in American Foreign</u> <u>Policy: Theory and Practice</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 312.

³⁶Avi Shlaim, <u>War and Peace in the Middle East: A Critique of American Policy</u> (New York: Viking, 1994), 32.

³⁷Mordechai Gazit, "Israeli Military Procurement from the United States," in Sheffer, ed., <u>Dynamics of Dependence</u>, 92.

that benefitted the most were those seen to be under the greatest pressure to the Communist threat. Although the Kennedy administration continued Eisenhower's tendency to view the Middle East through the distorting lens of the Cold War, United States policy in the 1960s increasingly saw Israel as a pillar against Communism.

The 1960s, Israel and the "Special Relationship"

The Kennedy administration believed that American policy in the Middle East during the Eisenhower years lacked the nuance necessary to support Arabs and Israelis under the umbrella of anti-Communism without alienating one of the sides in support of the other. Kennedy hoped to improve relations with Israel while the honeymoon between Nasser and his Soviet patrons was becoming strained. Kennedy's task was not going to be an easy one. He viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict primarily in terms of the Palestinian refugee problem, an issue he thought could be solved either by Israeli willingness to repatriate them or compensate their resettlement in other Arab countries. Kennedy's plan seemed like an outgrowth of his Peace Corps optimism, and betrayed either bullheaded determination or naivete on his part. Repatriation would have threatened to erode a Jewish majority, and with it, the existence of Israel.

But David Ben-Gurion, Israel's Prime Minister, also recognized how much Kennedy cherished the cause of global resistence to Communism. The title of Warren Bass's study on Kennedy and the Middle East, *Support Any Friend*, referred to Kennedy's inaugural address, in which he declared America's intention to "support any friend...to assure the survival and success of liberty."³⁸ David Ben-Gurion heard those words not as a departure from official United States

³⁸John F. Kennedy, as cited in Warren Bass, <u>Support and Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the</u> <u>Making of the U.S.–Israel Alliance</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 1.

policy but at the least a willingness to obtain the security assurances and weapons that had been absent since Israel's birth.

Kennedy followed a dual track policy. On the one hand, he called for a reinvigoration of the Tripartite Declaration, because, he reasoned, "once the actions of the Middle East have a firm and precise guarantee, the need for continuing the arms race will disappear....³⁹ On the other hand, Kennedy was determined to counter the Soviet flood of arms into the region. This was a concern shared by the State and Defense Departments that ultimately allowed for the sale of Hawk anti-aircraft missiles in 1962. The decision shattered the arms embargo in a big way; the technology was the finest of its kind and required extensive training of Israeli technicians in the United States. Warren Bass argued that "the Hawk precedent remains perhaps the most underappreciated milestone in the U.S.-Israel special relationship."⁴⁰ Although Kennedy resisted the idea of granting Israel a security guarantee, he assured then Foreign Minister Golda Meir in December 1962 that the United States would not allow Israel's destruction by its Arab enemies who were rapidly arming themselves at the time. Kennedy hoped that this promise would induce Israel to give up its nuclear program at Dimona.⁴¹

Lyndon Johnson presided over America's first overtly pro-Israel administration. Johnson himself made his Zionist sympathies well known during his days in the Senate, and the Rostow brothers Eugene and Walter (Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and National Security Adviser, respectively) strongly encouraged Johnson's friendly policies toward Israel. United

³⁹John F. Kennedy, as cited in Jacob Baal-Teshuva, ed., <u>The Mission of Israel</u> (New York: Robert Speller & Sons, 1963), 12.

⁴⁰Bass, <u>Support and Friend</u>, 145.

⁴¹Kennedy's reasoning betrayed his spotty understanding of Zionism and the importance it attached to self-reliance. David Ben-Gurion had sought to possess a nuclear capability since Israel's birth and would not abandon the program for any reason. This is the central thesis of Avner Cohen, <u>Israel and the Bomb</u> (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

States policy in the Middle East during Johnson's tenure tended to downplay the Cold War concerns that had shaped the perceptions of previous administrations. The war in Vietnam sapped American resources both at home and in other regions of the world. Johnson's major contribution to Middle East geopolitics centered on accelerating arms transfers to Israel. Although Kennedy intended his Hawk sale to satisfy Israel's security appetite – instead this historic precedent only whetted it.

The Israelis were eager to replace France, its major arms supplier, both nuclear and conventional, with the United States. Warren Bass noted, "Ben-Gurion had made the support of a Great Power the central pillar of Israeli foreign policy, and his first choice had virtually always been the United States. For Ben-Gurion, America was an aspiration, France a consolation."⁴² As France was winding down its brutal war in Algeria, Israeli policymakers recognized that the French would soon enough move to improve relations with the rest of the Arab world, which essentially meant that it would reduce arms transfers to Israel and supply Israel's enemies instead.⁴³ Johnson moved enthusiastically to replace France. In 1965, the United States became Israel's largest military supplier. Washington sold 200 Patton tanks and Skyhawk jet bombers to Israel. As John Miglietta observed, "The United States thus began the process of providing Israeli military with the capabilities to attain military superiority in the region that would become a major component of relations between the two countries and a goal of American foreign policy in the region."⁴⁴

By 1967, Israel possessed advanced radar, missile, anti-aircraft and artillery systems

⁴²Bass, <u>Support Any Friend</u>, 4.

⁴³Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), <u>The Arms Trade with the Third</u> <u>World</u> (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1971), 530-531.

⁴⁴Miglietta, <u>American Alliance Policy in the Middle East</u>, 134.

capable of both short-range Blitzkrieg style attacks and long-range "pin-prick" missions against hostile regimes in Libya and Iraq. Israel's main security threat until the crisis preceding the Six Day War in June 1967 were guerilla-oriented incursions – menacing, American policymakers figured, but not catastrophic. The United States assumed that Israeli military superiority would effectively deter a major Arab attack – the guerilla incursions seemed to prove that the Arabs were willing to go no further. Abba Eban observed, "The United States had grown so accustomed to periodic eruptions in the armistice system that it had ceased to believe that any outburst could destroy the entire structure."⁴⁵ This explains why the Pentagon dismissed largescale Syrian and Egyptian mobilization in May 1967. They assumed that an Arab attack was unlikely, because the Arabs knew the Israelis could wipe them out. Washington thus pressed Israel to wait out the heightened tensions for a diplomatic solution.⁴⁶

Lyndon Johnson's account of the weeks preceding the Six Day War reads like an extended and desperate plea to the Israelis not to preempt: "I have always had a deep feeling of sympathy for Israel and its people," he remembered,

gallantly building and defending a modern nation against great odds and against the tragic background of Jewish experience. I can understand that men might decide to act on their own when hostile forces gather on their frontiers and cut off a major port, and when antagonistic political leaders fill the air with threats to destroy their nation. Nonetheless, I have never concealed my regret that Israel decided to move when it did.⁴⁷

The toll of Vietnam was persuading Johnson of the limitations of military solutions, and he could not bring himself to support military action until all other means had been exhausted, which he believed had not happened by June 5. Second, Johnson's confidence in Israeli military

⁴⁵Abba Eban, <u>My Country: The Story of Modern Israel</u> (New York: Random House, 1972), 239.

⁴⁶Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East</u>, 71.

⁴⁷Lyndon, B. Johnson, <u>The Vantage Point: Perspectives on the Presidency</u>, <u>1963-1969</u> (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 297.

superiority was high, but not absolute. In the event that Israel got into trouble, the president was in no mood to intervene in what could become a full blown Cold War crisis.⁴⁸ Finally, although Nasser's blockade of the Straits of Tiran could not be mistaken for anything other than an act of war,⁴⁹ Euguene Rostow believed that Nasser was exercising his freedom of movement within Egyptian territory, thereby breaking no international laws. An Israeli preemptive strike, he reasoned, would be "a very serious mistake."⁵⁰

Yet, Johnson's famous injunction to Abba Eban, "Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone" and his May 17 letter to Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, in which he warned, "I cannot accept any responsibilities on behalf of the United States for situations that arise as the result of actions on which we are not consulted," hardly constituted threats against Israel on par with Eisenhower's guarantee in 1957 that Washington would protect Israel's right to access international waterways.⁵¹ The United States was in a bind. Meir Amit, head of Israel's foreign intelligence agency (Mossad) concluded after a meeting in Washington designed to ascertain an American response to preemption, that, "it became totally clear that they were not planning to do a thing."⁵² In addition, Johnson was enticed by the prospect that a crushing defeat would lead the Arabs to become disenchanted with the Soviets, which could lead to the downfall of Nasser

⁴⁸William B. Quandt, <u>Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israel Conflict Since</u> <u>1967</u> (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993), 28.

⁴⁹Even Michael Walzer notes that Nasser's actions constituted a "just fear" for the Israelis, thereby making, in Walzer's mind, the Six Day War one of Israel's few morally defensible conflicts. See Michael Walzer, <u>Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations</u>, 3d ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977), 84-85.

⁵⁰Eugene Rostow, as cited in Michael B. Oren, <u>Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the</u> <u>Modern Middle East</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 77.

⁵¹Johnson, <u>The Vantage Point</u>, 293 and 290.

⁵²Meir Amit, as cited in Michael Brecher, "Eban and Israeli Foreign Policy: Diplomacy, War, and Disengagement," in Gordon A. Craig and Francis Loewenheim, eds., <u>The Diplomats: 1939-1979</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 408.

and a begrudging acceptance that Israel could not be destroyed.⁵³ It was under this pretext of implicit American acceptance that Israel launched an attack that resulted in what Donald Neff aptly called "one of the most humiliating defeats in warfare."⁵⁴

The immediate United States reaction to the Israeli strike came from United States Representative to the UN, Arthur J. Goldberg, who heatedly denied American complicity in the Israeli attack. His address to the Security Council on June 6 meticulously recounted Johnson's efforts to stave off war in the preceding three weeks.⁵⁵ Israeli hegemony presented the United States with a problem that would not be swept away with immediate denials. The Arab-Israeli conflict would become the preeminent security issue of the Middle East and would divide along Cold War lines. "Many Israelis," observed the Israeli historian Shlomo Aronson, "developed a consciousness of 'the right of the Western bastion in the Middle East,' after having defeated a heavily Soviet-armed Arab world."⁵⁶ A bastion Israel had indeed become. Israel boasted casualty rates 25 to 1 in its favor, and had decimated nearly all of the Arabs' war-making capacity.⁵⁷ The Jewish state occupied the Sinai, the Golan Heights, and the West Bank (thereby uniting Jerusalem) – 42,000 square miles in total, more than tripling the original size of Israel.

In a series of events eerily similar to the Yom Kippur War of 1973, the Soviet Union issued a warning to Israeli troops marching on Damascus on the last day of the war that Moscow would exert military means to save the Arabs. Prime Minister Alexsei Kosygin's use of the

⁵³George W. Ball and Douglas B. Ball <u>The Passionate Attachment: America's Involvement with</u> <u>Israel, 1947 to the Present</u> (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1992), 55-56.

⁵⁴Donald Neff, <u>Warriors for Jerusalem: The Six Days that Changed the Middle East</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 240.

⁵⁵United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1461 (1967), 934.

⁵⁶Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East</u>, 84.

⁵⁷Oren, <u>Six Days of War</u>, 305-306.

phrase "utmost gravity" was code for a nuclear threat. But it was a desperate threat at the end of the war. The Soviets could save face by only breaking diplomatic relations with Israel. In a milestone in the history of American-Israeli relations, Johnson declared after the war that Israel would should not have to evacuate the territories it took by force until a comprehensive settlement was reached.⁵⁸

No such negotiation was forthcoming. The Soviets were rapidly re-arming their Arab clients, while the Jewish lobby, with solid backing from Congress, pressured Johnson to sell Israel 50 F-4 Phantoms in order to maintain the balance of power. The Republican candidate for president, Richard Nixon upped the ante in a speech to the B'nai Brith organization, declaring that

The balance of power must be tipped in Israel's favor... [we] support a policy that would give Israel a technological military margin to more than offset her hostile neighbors' numerical superiority. If maintaining that margin should require that the United States supply Israel with supersonic Phantom F-4 jets we should supply those Phantom jets.⁵⁹

Johnson relented, and Israel came to possess technology available previously only to America's NATO allies. If American foreign policy was easing into the notion that an impregnable Israel would serve Washington's interest by deterring Arab/Soviet military plans, the Phantom sale represented a flawed logic. Israeli hegemony discouraged neither Arab rearmament nor Soviet deployment of military advisers to the region. As a result, Cold War tensions increased yet again.⁶⁰

Under the circumstances it is hardly surprising that UN Security Council 242 of

⁵⁸Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East</u>, 86.

⁵⁹Richard Nixon, as cited in Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Nixon Stresses Commitment to Israel," New York Times, 9 September 1968.

⁶⁰Robert O. Freedman, "The Superpowers and the Middle East," in Roy Allison and Phil Williams, eds., <u>Superpower Competition and Crisis Prevention in the Third World</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 124.

November 22, 1967 (what Nadav Safran aptly called, "that masterpiece of ambivalence"⁶¹) became more a sign of deadlock than one of settlement. The resolution called for a "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict"; Israel had no intention of doing so, perhaps ever or until Arabs recognized its right to exist. The resolution also called for a "termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for an acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace with secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force," something the Arabs had no intention of doing, perhaps ever, or at the very least until Israel relinquished the occupied territories.⁶²

"Arab nationalism," observed Abba Eban, "drew no...lesson from its failure in war. The Arab reaction to defeat was not to assume that the anti-Israel policy had failed, but rather that it had not been sufficiently applied."⁶³ Nasser proved Eban correct, announcing to his National Assembly, "That which was taken by force will be regained by force," thus managing to defy both affirmations of the UN resolution in one sentence.⁶⁴ Nasser spoke with confidence, since Israel's victory and despised occupation of Arab territory had created a unity unprecedented in Arab interstate politics. At the Arab Summit Conference held in Khartoum in September of 1967, the heads of state agreed to combine their efforts to push Israel back to its boundaries of June 4. The communique declared: "This will be done within the framework of the main principles to which the Arab States adhere, namely: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no

⁶¹Nadav Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 430. ⁶²United Nations. 2004. <u>U.N. Security Council Resolutions, 1967</u>,

(12 March 2004).

 ⁶³Abba Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u> (New York: Random House, 1977), 453.
 ⁶⁴Oren, Six Davs of War, 326.

negotiations with it...."65

United States policy supported Resolution 242. Since it was obvious that the Arabs and Israelis would never reach a settlement under the 242 rubric on their own accord, the only other recourse – short of abandoning the resolution entirely and accepting a permanent state of belligerency – called for an imposed settlement from without. In May 1968, a memorandum from Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, to Johnson, considered the methods available to get

this problem off of dead center.... One possibility would be that we and the Soviet Union discuss this matter secretly and in complete detail – putting together a package which the two of use would then try to impose on the countries of the area. I do not believe that this would work. I doubt that we and the Soviets would agree simply because their and our interests are in direct conflict.⁶⁶

By that point, the United States gave up hope that Israel could be prodded into indirect negotiations with the Arabs, a policy that Israelis flatly refused because it would allow the Arabs to avoid recognizing its existence.⁶⁷ At the beginning of the UN's diplomatic initiative, headed by Special Envoy Gunner Jarring in 1968, Johnson offered his full support but hinted at the futility of any third party solution: "It is the parties themselves," he declared, "who must make the major effort…in this much needed peacemaking process."⁶⁸ Five years later, Nixon repeated in his foreign policy report to Congress what Johnson had believed since the beginning: "A solution cannot be imposed by the outside powers on unwilling governments. If we tried, the

⁶⁵Arab Summit Conference, 1 September 1967, Communique reprinted in United States, Congress, Committee on Foreign Relations: <u>A Select Chronology and Background Documents Relating to</u> <u>the Middle East</u>, 249.

⁶⁶Dean Rusk, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Foreign Relations of the United</u> <u>States, 1964-1968</u>, XX, "Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1968" (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2001), 356.

⁶⁷Ann M. Lescsh and Dan Tschirgi, <u>Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict</u> (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 94.

⁶⁸Lyndon B. Johnson, as cited in United States, President, <u>Public Papers of the Presidents of the</u> <u>Unites States: Lyndon B. Johnson</u>, 1968 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 947.

parties would feel no stake in observing its terms, and the outside powers would be engaged indefinitely in enforcing them."⁶⁹

It is impossible to know how Israel would have reacted if the Arabs had abandoned their belligerence, and accepted Israel's existence through direct negotiations because no such thing occurred. It is certain, however, that the Israelis, seeing no reason to give up territories in exchange for nothing were at least strategically satisfied with their post-war position. The Israeli writer Chaim Herzog summarized Israel's reasoning:

The depth afforded by the territories taken by Israel in the Six Day War gave the country for the first time in its history a strategic option. All Israeli centers of population were now removed from the Egyptian forces and a desert barrier some 150 miles wide separated Israel from the Suez Canal, in itself a barrier of no mean proportions....⁷⁰

The Israelis concluded that they won a crushing victory without the benefit of buffer zones; their acquisition thus made Israel far less vulnerable. Israel also found political justification for the occupation, summarized neatly by Henry Kissinger: "Israel, having never lived within accepted frontiers, saw no essential difference between locating its boundaries in one unaccepted place and another; condemned to Arab belligerency, it sought the widest imaginable security belt."⁷¹

Israel's postwar position had a profound effect on its society. The Israeli military elite attained something of a celebrity status. General Ariel Sharon enjoyed telling anyone who would listen that the *Zahal* (Israeli Defense Forces) could defeat any Arab regime in any location and that he would be too old to fight in the next Arab-Israeli war.⁷² In fact, the 39-year old Sharon found himself on the front lines in both the 1969 and 1973 wars. The writer Max Jacobs

⁶⁹Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Shaping a Durable Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 136.

⁷⁰Chaim Herzog, <u>The War of Atonement</u> (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), 3.

⁷¹Henry Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 197.

⁷²Safran, Israel: The Embattled Ally, 257.

wondered in his travelogue whether "undue emphasis on materialism during the six years between the Six Day War and the Yom Kippur War produced a softening of Israel's fiber, resoluteness, strength."⁷³ Yitzhak Rabin recalled in his memoirs returning to Israel in 1973 after his tenure as Ambassador to the United States: "The Israel I came home to had a self-confident, almost smug aura to it, as befits a country far removed from the possibility of war."⁷⁴ Levi Eshkol bordered on the obnoxious in a February 1969 interview with *Newsweek*: "After the Six Day War it is a miracle that we are still here – so why should we now crawl on our hands and knees to the Arabs and say: 'please do us a favor and take it all back....' Our occupation of the territory is the outcome of war."⁷⁵ But no Israeli could best Defense Minister Moshe Dayan's *chutzpah*. He informed *Time* in an interview conducted in July 1973:

Nobody has faith in the United Nations. First of all, because it has no power and its composition is absolutely against us. It can never have any positive decisions for us. All those Communist countries and Arab countries and African countries. It is the worst place for us to go and put our case.⁷⁶

In effect, Israel in these years became so confident of its strength that it blinded itself to the Arab perspective. By offering only direct negotiations without any prior conditions, Israel confronted the Arabs with an offer merely to negociate from a position of weakness. This Israeli policy had the unintended effect of convincing the Arabs that launching a general war – even if they were likely to lose it – was preferable to passive acceptance of a political surrender. Five years of standstill diplomacy and a pointless "war of attrition" during Richard Nixon's first term reinforced the assumption among Israeli and American policymakers that the Arabs would never

⁷³Max W. Jacobs, <u>Day of Atonement</u> (New York: Vantage Press, 1976), 86.

⁷⁴Yitzhak Rabin, <u>The Rabin Memoirs</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 254.

⁷⁵Newsweek, "Eshkol: A Reply to Nasser," 17 February 1969.

⁷⁶Time, "Israel: Waiting in the Wings," 30 July, 1973.

exercise the "third option." It was this framework that ultimately created one of the most astounding intelligence blunders of the 20th century.

Nixon Inherits and Accepts Israeli Hegemony

As the Republican candidate for the presidency in 1968, Richard Nixon was eager to show the Israelis that as leader of the United States, he would view American and Israeli foreign policy objectives as one and the same. He informed Israeli Ambassador to the United States Yitzhak Rabin:

I believe it necessary to reach an understanding with the Soviets, and I am convinced that the only language they respect is the language of force. You can't reach an agreement with them unless you do so from a position of strength.

Nixon elicited in Rabin exactly the response that he wanted: "We too believe that it is vital to reach an agreement with our adversaries in the Middle East," Rabin replied. "But negotiations can only begin when Israel speaks from a position of strength and has concrete backing."⁷⁷

As Nixon understood the situation, Israel's smashing victory in June of 1967 saved the American position from collapsing altogether in the Middle East. A victory by Nasser and his coalition would have meant a victory of Soviet arms over Western arms. If Israel remained strong, Nixon reasoned, the Arabs would eventually become disenchanted with Moscow's inability to change the situation. Politically, the Soviets were in no position to pressure Israel; they had after all broken relations with the Israelis during the Six Day War. That left Moscow with only one strategy to retain its prestige in the region: arm the Arabs and send Soviet soldiers to operate the most lethal equipment. In this influence system, American policy would counter

⁷⁷Richard Nixon and Yitzhak Rabin, as cited in Rabin, <u>The Rabin Memoirs</u>, 133.

the Soviet weapon transfers with more sophisticated equipment to be used by more competent clients. As the option for war would be neutralized indefinitely, the Arabs would agree to direct negotiations under American auspices.

Like past presidents, Nixon did tend to inflate Soviet capabilities, but his commitment to Israel, inherited from the past two administrations, could not change before the Arabs abandoned their belligerent policy. Nixon understood perfectly well the implications of his policies on Arab-American relations, as demonstrated in his 1972 Foreign Policy Report to Congress. He declared that the Arab-Israeli conflict was harmful because: "It has drawn the Soviet Union and the United States into close military association with the combatants, with all the danger that poses to world peace." And: "It has caused the disruption of normal U.S. relations with a number of Arab countries. This, in turn, has increased the already excessive Arab dependence on Soviet support, and therefore their dangerous vulnerability to excessive Soviet influence."⁷⁸

As Harry N. Howard, a former U.S. foreign service officer, observed, Nixon's frequent invocation of balance of power in the Middle East "all too often seemed a transparent euphemism for the maintenance of Israeli military superiority.... [I]t became clear by 1972 that more military and economic assistance had been given to Israel during the Nixon administration than in those of all his predecessors since 1948."⁷⁹ Such was Nixon's Middle East policy. Had the Arabs and Israelis found common ground in Resolution 242, Nixon would have gladly

⁷⁸Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: The Emerging Structure of Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 123-124.

⁷⁹Harry N. Howard, "The United States and the Middle East," in Tareq Ismael, <u>The Middle East</u> <u>in World Politics: A Study in Contemporary International Relations</u> (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1974), 135.

accepted it. In the meantime, Middle East intransigence was best kept at a low boil. That is why Nixon placed the region in the jurisdiction of the State Department, headed by Secretary of State William Rogers. This freed the president and his National Security Advisor Henry A. Kissinger to focus on the more pressing problems of how to end the war in Vietnam.

Rogers, an old friend of Nixon's, had been Attorney General under Eisenhower. He had little experience in foreign policy, and his easygoing manner would not likely steal attention from Nixon, who believed that foreign policy belonged to the White House. With a diplomatic breakthrough in the Middle East unlikely, Nixon reasoned that the inevitable problems could be blamed on the State Department.⁸⁰ The policy revealed Nixon's unique conception of friendship to say the least. Thus, one must refer to two Middle East foreign policies, which is a distinction some observers have failed to make.⁸¹ Nixon cited the Rogers Plan as evidence – contrary to Arab "propaganda"– that Nixon sought an even-handed approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In actuality, Nixon did not believe an "even handed" approach was possible – a fact that did not necessarily affect his views on Israel. As Kissinger recalled, rather undiplomatically, "During the first term Nixon had initially left the Middle East to the State Department, partly to placate Rogers, partly because Nixon thought Middle East diplomacy was a loser from the domestic point of view and sought to deflect its risks from himself."⁸²

The State Department, both Arab-leaning and anti-Communist, served Nixon's interest well. Its officials and the White House shared a belief in the Middle East's central role to Cold War strategy. Joseph Sisco, the Assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia,

⁸⁰Quandt, Peace Process, 67.

⁸¹See, for example, Theodore Draper, "The United States & Israel: Tilt in the Middle East?," Commentary, April 1975, 34.

⁸²Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 196.

explained American interests in the Arab-Israeli dispute, in April, 1969:

In a shrunken, interdependent world, areas of instability are too dangerous and could become the source of major power conflict. In this connection, we are keenly aware that the expansion of Soviet influence in the area in the past dozen years, and more particularly since the June War, has added a new dimension and complexity. We have strategic interests in the area.⁸³

The State Department, like Nixon and Kissinger, clearly wanted to expel Soviet influence from the region. Their strategies parted in how to go about accomplishing that goal. Secretary of State Rogers made clear his interpretation of Resolution 242. In testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations in March 1969, Rogers declared, "There can be no secure and recognized boundaries without withdrawal."⁸⁴ In other words, the State Department planned to embark on its Middle East initiative with the expectation that Israel must withdraw from the territories *before* any meaningful settlement could occur. Nixon and Kissinger knew that the Israelis would fight the State Department's assumption to a stalemate, which would create a delaying tactic that the White House had wanted. As Nadav Safran observed, the State Department's interpretation of Resolution 242, "considered that a complete identification with Israel not only hurt the American interests in friendly Arab countries but was precisely calculated to give the Soviet Union the best opportunities to score against the United States."⁸⁵⁵

Such were the methods used by the State Department, as plainly evidenced by the first two articles of the preamble of the 1969 Rogers Plan: I) "As part of a package settlement, Egypt and Israel would determine a timetable and procedures for withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from UAR territory occupied during the conflict of 1967; "II) "The state of war between Egypt and Israel would end, and a formal state of peace would be established. Both sides would

⁸³Joseph Sisco, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1558 (1969), 391.
⁸⁴William Rogers, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1555 (1969), 385.
⁸⁵Safran, Israel: The Embattled Ally, 439.

undertake to prevent all forms of aggressive actions from their territory against the people and armed forces of the other."⁸⁶

Kissinger was never one to let moral scruples get in the way of his personal ambitions. As his perceptive biographer Walter Issacson noted, "Kissinger had worked to delay any progress" in the Middle Eastern diplomacy. "His rivalry with Rogers meant that he was not rooting for a quick success, no doubt he would have seen less value in a stalemate if he had been given the portfolio for the Middle East."⁸⁷

Seymour Hersh, one of Kissinger's harshest critics, may have been correct in his allegation that Kissinger's need to dominate Rogers was all-consuming,⁸⁸ but the charge does not diminish Kissinger's rejection of the Rogers Plan on strategic grounds. "As long as Egypt was in effect a Soviet military base," Kissinger observed,

We could have no incentive to turn on an ally [Israel] on behalf of a Soviet client. This is why I was always opposed to comprehensive solutions that would be rejected by both parties and that could only serve Soviet ends by either demonstrating our impotence or being turned into a showcase of what could be exacted by Moscow's pressure.⁸⁹

Elsewhere, Kissinger wrote, the Rogers Plan "never solved the problem of how to persuade Israel to give up all its conquests when Syria rejected *any* terms and Egypt refused to make peace

⁸⁶The Rogers Plan preamble is reprinted in Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 80-81. As late as October 1971, Rogers was still convinced that Israel could be prodded into accepting his interpretation of Resolution 242: "Both sides to the conflict are committed to the fundamental and reciprocal principles to which the Jarring Mission is dedicated: living in peace with each other and withdrawal from territories occupied in the 1967 conflict as set forth in Security Council Resolution 242." William Rogers, as cited in "Statement on Interim Peace, Before the United Nations General Assembly, 4 October 1971," reprinted in United States, Congress, Subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East, Report: <u>The Search for Peace in the Middle East</u>: <u>Documents and Statements</u>, 1967-1979 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1979), 301.

⁸⁷Walter Issacson, <u>Kissinger: A Biography</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 511.

⁸⁸Seymour Hersh, <u>The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House</u> (New York: Summit Books, 1983). Hersh argues throughout his book that Kissinger's moral deficiencies had grave consequences on American foreign policy.

⁸⁹Henry A. Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), 1279.

without Syria or the Palestinians, who were determined to destroy Israel."90

The pressure to which Kissinger referred came in the form of withholding arms from Israel during its 1969-1970 "war of attrition" with Egypt along the Suez Canal. Because Israel's defense structures, which relied on reserve units to mobilize quickly and fight with fewer, yet more sophisticated weapons, the State Department believed that it could force Israel to be more amenable to indirect negotiations in the face of the vicious bloodletting on the Sinai canal border. As Israeli political scientist Nitza Nachmias noted, the strategy rested on a paradox: It assumed "that Israel was strong enough to deter Arab threats, yet sufficiently dependent on American arms so that leverage could be effectively applied without endangering Israeli security...."⁹¹ The strategy betrayed either the State Department's profound misunderstanding of, or disregard for, one of the central historical concerns of Zionism. This "stick" approach, argued Michael Brecher, hit "a fear rooted in the Holocaust psychology of the Jewish State and periodically confirmed by Great Power behavior."⁹²

The Israeli government could not understand why the Rogers Plan accepted the Arabs' unwillingness to negotiate directly with a state recognized by the United Nations. For Israel, this unwillingness clearly signaled a fundamental Arab rejection of peace that had become bolstered by American complicity.⁹³ Golda Meir declared as much in her December 1969 address to the Knesset:

⁹⁰Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 200 [emphasis Kissinger's].

⁹¹Nitza Nachmias, <u>Transfer of Arms, Leverage, and Peace in the Middle East</u> (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 50.

⁹²Michael Brecher, <u>Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975),
508.

⁹³Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East</u>, 113.

[The Rogers Plan does] not obligate the Arab states expressly to recognize Israel's sovereignty, they don't advocate the delineation of secure, negotiated, and agreed borders by free negotiations between the parties, they do not obligate the Arab states effectively to put an end to territorial activities from their territories.⁹⁴

The Rogers Plan came under heavy domestic criticism as well. Eugene Rostow published

an article in April 1971 warning against excessive concern that support of Israel would forever

polarize the Arab world against the United States:

Many Arab leaders would be relieved to make peace with Israel. They realize that the idea of revenge against Israel is sterile and destructive, and that its true purpose is not the destruction of Israel, but the radicalization of Arab politics, and the extension of Soviet influence.⁹⁵

In a Spring 1971 article, Michael Curtis, a Cold War scholar, employed the ultimate (if

overused) historical analogy of appeasement in his criticism of the Rogers Plan:

The United States has vacillated in its attitude in the Middle East crisis, and a policy of firmness is now required. Israel cannot become another Munich. The 'even handed' policy of Secretary of State Rogers, with its parallel refusal to supply planes to Israel, is tantamount to acquiescence in Soviet domination of the area.⁹⁶

Nixon virtually declared the so-called Four Power talks dead in his 1970 Foreign Policy

Report to Congress, intimating that the guiding assumption of the Rogers Plan – imposed peace from without – was not a viable solution: "We have gone as far as we believe useful in making new proposals," he contended, "until there is a response from the other parties."⁹⁷ Hearing (and expecting) no such response, Nixon declared at a news conference his support for Israel's strength, something no State Department official ever had: "We will do what is necessary to

⁹⁴Golda Meir, as cited in Bernard Reich, "Israel in US Perspective: Political Design and Pragmatic Practices," in Efrat and Bercovitch, eds., <u>Superpowers and Client States in the Middle East</u>, 58.

⁹⁵Eugene V. Rostow, "The Middle Eastern Crisis in the Perspective of World Politics," <u>International Affairs</u> 47 (April 1971), 276.

 ⁹⁶Michael Curtis, "Soviet-America Relations and the Middle East Crisis," <u>Orbis</u> 15 (Spring 1971),
 418.

⁹⁷Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, President, <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S. Foreign Policy for the 1970s: A New Strategy for Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1970), 79-80.

maintain Israel's strength vis-à-vis its neighbors, not because we want Israel to be in a position to wage war – that is not it – but because that is what will deter its neighbors from attacking it." 98

The Gunnar Jarring Mission, which was the UN's forerunner to the Rogers Plan during two years of failed diplomacy after the Six Day War, and essentially an international extension of the State Department's policy for the next two years, met its end on February 26, 1971. The UN Proposals never deviated from its support of indirect negotiations as a means to achieving the implementation of Resolution 242, and Israel gave its final reply to Jarring, the well-meaning Swedish diplomat: "Israel will not withdraw to the pre-June 5, 1967 lines."⁹⁹ This was the response Israel had issued repeatedly since June 11, 1967.

It was a stance Israel had the confidence to make, indefinitely it seemed. Even before the Six Day War, Abba Eban wrote, "The plain truth is that Arab nationalism emerges from nearly two decades of uncompromising anti-Israel struggle in total strategic defeat."¹⁰⁰ By the time the diplomatic initiatives that had been based on indirect negotiations had run their course, Israel saw no qualitative evidence of an improved Arab strategic position. Additionally, the powerfully demonstrated Israeli strength during the Six Day War, observed Shlomo Aronson, reinforced in the United States "Jewish support for Israel and silenced Jewish groups that were anti-Zionist or that had reservations about Israel."¹⁰¹ The post-war period saw an unprecedented unity among Israel's American co-religionists which helped to make the Israeli embassy one of the best funded, organized, and politically influential of any in Washington. Most important,

⁹⁸Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1618 (1970), 112113.

⁹⁹As cited in Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 122.

¹⁰⁰Abba Eban, "Reality and Vision in the Middle East: An Israeli View," in Ihud Olami, ed., <u>Israel</u> <u>Today: A New Society in the Making</u> (Tel Aviv: Labour Zionist World Movement, 1967), 31.

¹⁰¹Aronson, <u>Conflict and Bargaining in the Middle East</u>, 94.

Israeli leaders were quickly learning how to tell the "right" policymakers either what they wanted to hear, or to a greater effect, what they did not. In a July 1, 1970 letter to Nixon, Golda Meir raised the tensions of the "war of attrition" along the Suez Canal by threatening to bomb the Soviet-manned SA-2 and SA-3 anti-aircraft missile batteries. By blatantly acknowledging the possibility of an Israeli-Soviet clash, which could quickly escalate into a dreaded superpower confrontation, Meir was in effect attempting to blackmail the Americans into sending more arms and aircraft.¹⁰² The episode constituted a radical departure from the traditional structure of the American-Israeli influence relationship. By this point, both countries were using the carrot-and-stick approach against one another. Israeli hegemony had clearly evolved from post-war exhilaration to established reality.

Sadat and the Soviets: Pretext to the Surprise Attack on Yom Kippur

Egyptian President Anwar Sadat expelled the Soviet advisors in July of 1972.¹⁰³ "By that time," noted Nadav Safran, "American policy in the Middle East became completely oriented on Israel, sharing with it not only basic goals but also an identical evaluation of the situation and a common conception of means and ends."¹⁰⁴ In hindsight, the first instance that exposed the dangers of this increasingly comfortable relationship can be traced to May 27, 1971, a year before the expulsion. On that day, Soviet and Egyptian leaders signed a Friendship Treaty, the contents of which American and Israeli leaders accepted at face value: the two countries were intensifying their relationship to challenge American-Israeli predominance. In fact, the

¹⁰²Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u>, 582.

¹⁰³The dynamics of this episode are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁴Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u>, 448-449.

Friendship Treaty was a sign of extremely strained relations between Moscow and its Egyptian clients. Israeli hegemony had succeeded in producing exactly what Nixon and Kissinger had wanted: Arab frustration at the Soviet's inability to deliver either a military or diplomatic settlement. Where the Friendship Treaty served to camouflage this fact, more alert American analysis would have picked up its real meaning. Kissinger was forthcoming about his interpretation:

Not knowing Sadat, I had to conclude that he was still playing Nasser's game. Furthermore, Sadat's impatience was becoming evident in repeated declarations that 1971 had to be the 'year of decisions' in the Middle East. Our strategy had to be to frustrate any Egyptian policy based on military threats and collusion with the Soviet Union. Therefore Sadat's Friendship Treaty with the Soviets, whatever its motives, did not galvanize us to help him as he might have hoped.¹⁰⁵

Washington got it backwards. In Sadat's subtle way, he was telling the White House that their support of Israel had succeeded in forcing Arab frustrations. But Kissinger believed that the Friendship Treaty was another threat of Arab belligerence, and Sadat was not to be rewarded out of fear that the Arabs would attack Israel with full Soviet backing. Subtlety had hardly been Nasser's forte; there was not yet any reason to assume that Sadat was any different.

Predictably, Nixon responded with further staunch support of Israel. Between 1970 and 1972, American military aid to Israel increased ten times over, from \$30 million to \$300 million, and the Jewish State was well on its way to becoming the largest recipient of American foreign assistance.¹⁰⁶ The fourteen months between the Friendship Treaty and Sadat's Soviet expulsion proved to be a particularly bad time for any revolutions in United States Middle East geopolicy. Kissinger and Nixon were almost totally focused on building détente with the Soviet Union and

¹⁰⁵Kissinger, White House Years, 1285.

¹⁰⁶Miglietta, <u>American Alliance Policy in the Middle East</u>, 169.

ending the war in Vietnam – two closely linked projects. Most significantly, Nixon wanted to prevent any turmoil in the Middle East during an election year. As Kissinger recalled, "My principle assignment was to make sure that no explosion occurred to complicate the 1972 election – which meant in effect that I was to stall."¹⁰⁷ All of this succeeded in frustrating Sadat, and so he kicked out the Soviets in what was widely perceived as the final proof that the Israelihegemony policy had worked. It had not; like Egyptian strategy and the Friendship Treaty, Sadat's decision to expel the Soviet advisers defied intuition. Now Sadat became set on war, a decision supported by the fact that he would soon become silent on the matter.

Kissinger claimed in his memoirs that he considered the possibility that the expulsion "may well refer to the possible fact that the presence of Soviet advisors with Egyptian units could serve as a Soviet break on Egyptian offensive movements."¹⁰⁸ (In fact, this was Sadat's principle motive for the expulsion.) If this was an honest self-appraisal of Kissinger's analysis, he nonetheless deserves only limited credit. The Israelis, on whom the Americans relied for most of their intelligence, overwhelmingly interpreted the expulsion as vindication for Israel's massive deterrent-oriented arms buildup. Abba Eban summarized the Israeli reaction:

The general belief was that Sadat had obtained an emotional satisfaction at the expense of his strategic and political power....There had been an obsessive fear in Israel that Washington would exercise pressure for a settlement which would relieve it of the menace of global war. From now on, this nightmare seemed to have faded. With the departure of Soviet troops, the powder keg was defused.¹⁰⁹

Senator Frank Church reported after his August 1972 study mission to Israel that the Soviets were happy to avoid a potential strategic nightmare:

¹⁰⁷Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 196.

¹⁰⁸Kissinger, <u>White House Years</u>, 1296.

¹⁰⁹Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 479.

Israel's military leaders consider that the narrow straits limiting entrance by naval forces to the Mediterranean presented the Soviet Union with a difficult strategic problem. Every Israeli official to whom I talked, military and civilian, gave the American F-4 Phantom the credit for making the crucial difference in the power equation. 'The F-4 is not just a machine,' one said, 'it has changed the entire strategic picture in the Middle East.'¹¹⁰

This prevailing complacency punctuated Golda Meir's March 1973 trip to Washington. Kissinger recalled, "With respect to negotiations, Golda's attitude was simple. She considered Israeli military impregnable; there was, strictly speaking no need for any change."¹¹¹

An Intelligence Failure: American-Israeli Assumptions Before the Yom Kippur War

In the early 1970s Israel treaded a fine line between fantasy and reality. The collective memory of Judaism related Israel's current strength to biblical times. The scenario was all the more poignant because of the compression of time between destruction and regeneration. The Nazi Holocaust destroyed nearly half of world Jewry; by the summer of 1967 Israel controlled the Old City of Jerusalem, and Jews could pray at their spiritual home. And the United States, the most powerful country in history, had finally become the political, military, and economic guarantor that David Ben-Gurion had sought since the birth of Israel. Israel was very much blinded by its good fortunes.

Yet, on the day-to-day level the possibility of an Arab attack never faded completely. The Israelis thought a good deal more about their response to an attack than the attack itself. Kissinger's biographers, Marvin and Bernard Kalb, quote one of their subject's constant admonishments to Israel. "Don't ever preempt! If you fire the first shot, you won't have a

¹¹⁰Frank Church, as cited in United States, Congress, Committee on Foreign Relations, Report by Senator Frank Church: <u>Prospects for Peace in the Middle East: The View from Israel</u>, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 2.

¹¹¹Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 221.

dogcatcher in this country supporting you. You won't have presidential support. You'll be alone, all alone. We wouldn't be able to help you. Don't preempt!"¹¹² Kissinger's crude warning rested on the same concerns that had guided Lyndon Johnson's failed opposition to preemption before the Six Day War: the United States had no desire to allow the Arab world an opportunity to associate American arms and assistance with Israeli aggression. And while Israel enjoyed the power it could project, it had lost virtually all of its support from Europe and the non-aligned world. This added a certain credibility to Kissinger's threat.

Such was Israel's strategy: stay armed to the teeth and never preempt an attack that would not occur. It was a bizarre defense posture that matched a profound misreading of Arab intentions.¹¹³ Sadat, as the world was about to find out, was not Nasser; he and his allies wanted only to regain the occupied territories. The cherished notion of destroying Israel had, for all intents and purposes, died on the Arab airfields on June 5, 1967. In October of 1973, they were fighting for their own dignity, something they feared would be lost forever if they recognized Israel while it occupied Arab lands. The military historian Lawrence L. Whetten surveyed the situation:

If in fact the war was waged from the Arab side, as was alleged, only for the recovery of Arab honor and lost territories, then Israel was fighting merely for land it had been attempting to exchange for security for the past five years. In this case Israel fought the wrong war, at the wrong time, for the wrong aims.¹¹⁴

But it was the false sense of security afforded by the occupied territories that prevailed over a

¹¹²Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, <u>Kissinger</u> (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1974), 460.

¹¹³The CIA, for that matter did not do much to counter Israeli prejudices. American

investigations into the failure of the CIA to predict the Arab attack yielded this embarrassing passage from a 1971 CIA handbook: "Arabs lack the necessary physical and cultural qualities for performing effective military services." Cited in *Village Voice*, "The Select Committee's Investigative Record – The Middle East War: the System Breaks Down," 16 February 1976.

¹¹⁴Lawrence L. Whetten, <u>The Canal War: Four-Power Conflict in the Middle East</u> (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1974), 278.

political understanding of the conflict. Yitzhak Rabin wrote an article in Ma'ariv on July 13, 1973 explaining Israel's strategy:

Our present defense lines give us a decisive advantage in the Arab-Israeli balance of strength. There is no need to mobilize our forces whenever we hear Arab threats, or when the enemy concentrates his forces along the cease-fire lines. Before the Six Day War, any movement of Egyptian forces into Sinai would compel Israel to mobilize reserves on a large scale. Today, there is no need for such mobilization so long as Israel's defense line extends along the Suez Canal.¹¹⁵

"The concept," as Israel's defense posture was simply nicknamed, held that Syria would not attack from the north without a simultaneous Egyptian attack from the south. It was a reasonable assumption given that neither Arab army could match the full deployment of the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) - and one that ultimately proved true on October 6, 1973. But the problem with "the concept" was that it assumed that Egypt would only attack with a superior air force. This meant that, with the introduction of the F-4 Phantom to the Middle East arms race, Israel discounted the possibility of a two-front war, and accordingly, reduced its annual reserves call-up from two to one month.¹¹⁶ Israel compounded its faulty strategic considerations with an operational blunder that ultimately compelled the United States to airlift supplied to Israel during the Yom Kippur War. Elmo Zumwalt, Jr. Chief of U.S. Naval Operations, observed: "Israel always had assumed it would defeat the Arabs in a number of days, and it had stocked military 'consumables' – ammunition, spare parts, all the things that get used up fast – on that basis."¹¹⁷

Ian Black and Benny Morris made the useful distinction between political and statistical intelligence: "Knowing the Arab war plan or plans was one thing; believing that the Arabs

¹¹⁵Yitzhak Rabin, as cited in Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 488-489.

¹¹⁶United States, Department of the Army, <u>Israel: A Country Study</u>, 260.

¹¹⁷Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., <u>On Watch: A Memoir</u> (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1976), 432.

cost an average of \$10 million but also forced the country into a virtually frozen state. The IDF's citizen-soldiers comprised both a bulk of the army and a fair size of the country's labor force.

While the "crying wolf" theory holds up generally, it fails to explain several unusual situations that had occurred in the first days of October 1973. On October 3, three days before the war began, the Soviet Union mounted a major evacuation of its nationals from Egypt, civilian and military alike. Israel assured the United States that the move was yet another rupture in Soviet-Arab relations. As Alexander George, an expert on international relations, noted, "Nothing in the available record indicates that Kissinger considered asking the Soviets why they were taking their citizens out of Egypt and Syria and whether they expected war."¹²² Moscow wanted to get its people out of the way of a massive Arab troop concentration preparing for war. Golda Meir recounted in her memoirs that the deployments – in fact the largest ever assembled on Israel's borders – were regarded as no reason for concern. "Nobody," he recalled, "at the [Monday, October 3 intelligence] meeting thought that it was necessary to call up the reserves, and nobody thought that war was imminent."¹²³

The CIA essentially parroted Mossad's interpretation of the Arab concentrations. Nixon recounted, "The news of the imminent attack took us completely by surprise."¹²⁴ Kissinger went one step further in his October 12 news conference, where he basically heaped all of the blame on the CIA, thus excusing himself entirely:

We asked our own intelligence as well as Israeli intelligence, on three separate occasions during the week prior to the outbreak of hostilities to give us their assessment of what might happen.

¹²²Alexander L. George, "The Arab-Israeli War of October, 1973: Origins and Impact," in Alexander L. George, et. al., <u>Managing U.S.–Soviet Rivalry: Problems of Crisis Prevention</u> (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 147.

¹²³Golda Meir, <u>My Life</u> (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 422..

¹²⁴Richard M. Nixon, <u>RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon</u>, 2d ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), 920.

There was the unanimous view that hostilities were unlikely to the point of there being no chance of it happening.¹²⁵

Nixon wrote in his memoirs that he was disappointed in the CIA. A more accurate account would have included a note that the CIA, in turn, was disappointed in the White House.¹²⁶ Israel experienced bureaucratic shortcomings of its own. Michael Brecher observed that Abba Eban's influence before and during the Yom Kippur War had significantly diminished from his central role in the Six Day War.¹²⁷ Eban's jurisdiction in 1973 was the UN; for matters of national security, Eban's political gifts were relegated to the periphery. His reduced capacity was indicative, in fact, of a larger intelligence problem in the United States. As Yitzhak Rabin recalled, "Nixon believed that national leaders should maintain direct and regular contacts without going through their respective foreign ministries."¹²⁸

In short, Nixon, and of course Kissinger, disdained bureaucracies and they paid the price for it when the Arabs launched their surprise attack on October 6. In a damning article, Ray S. Cline, Director of Intelligence and Research at the State Department from 1969-1973, called the National Security Council an "empty shell" under Nixon and claimed that had Kissinger bothered to ask Cline of the State Department's assessment of the Arab buildup, he would have told the new Secretary of State that the chance of a war erupting from October 4 onward were "better than even."¹²⁹ Congress had long complained that Kissinger's immunity from

¹²⁵United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1792 (1973), 534.

¹²⁶See Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, <u>The CIA and American Democracy</u> 2d ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 176-193, for an excellent account of the strained relations between the White House and the CIA. Jeffreys-Jones contended that Nixon and Kissinger politicized intelligence for their own gain, which crippled the CIA's ability to influence policy and guard against surprises.

¹²⁷ Brecher, "Eban and Israeli Foreign Policy: Diplomacy, War, and Disengagement," in Craig and Loewenheim, <u>The Diplomats: 1939-1979</u>, 418.

¹²⁸Rabin, <u>The Rabin Memoirs</u>, 154.

¹²⁹Ray S. Cline, "Policy Without Intelligence," Foreign Policy 17 (Winter 1974-75), 132-133.

Congressional inquiry – which he cherished and fought to protect – as Nixon's National Security Adviser had become a danger to American democracy and security.¹³⁰ If Cline's charges are to be believed, Kissinger's self-imposed insulation as Secretary of State raised important questions of Constitutional propriety. John Lewis Gaddis concluded,

Bureaucracy, properly used, can monitor disparate and complex events without oversimplification, advise ahead of time of approaching dangers, and thus reduce the chances of being caught off guard. A major liability of the Nixon-Kissinger administrative style was that it virtually precluded using the bureaucracy in that way.¹³¹

The location of American and Israeli principals at the time of the Arab attack underscores just how off guard the two countries found themselves. Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, Gold Meir, Abba Eban, and Israeli Ambassador to the United States Simcha Dinitz, were all away from their command posts on the morning of October 6.¹³² It was the ultimate victory for Sadat's long game of disinformation. William Bundy observed, "Essentially Sadat took advantage of a failure of imagination as much in Israel as in Washington."¹³³ Having achieved his major pre-war objective, Sadat ordered his troops to cross the Suez Canal at 2:00 p.m., in coordination with a massive Syrian forward thrust on the Golan Heights.

¹³⁰ See, for example, United States, Congress, Committee on Foreign Relations, <u>Hearings:</u> <u>National Security Act Amendment</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1972), 122-123.

¹³¹John Lewis Gaddis, <u>Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American</u> <u>National Security Policy</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 334.

¹³²T.G. Fraser, <u>The USA and the Middle East Since World War II</u> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 99.

¹³³William Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency</u> (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 434.

The Eruption: A Different Kind of Middle East War

"We won the war," Golda Meir wrote in her memoirs.¹³⁴ The statement is among the best evidence that Israel did not win the Yom Kippur War. One would be hard pressed to find an Israeli leader make a similar claim about the Six Day War; it is not necessary to insist upon something that is self-evident.

This is not to say that Israel lost the war, either. Israel stayed on the offensive from October 15 to October 28, rejuvenated by an enormous American resupply effort until all fighting was halted. By the end of the war, the IDF was in position to strike and occupy Cairo and Damascus – a show of brute force even greater than the blitzkrieg of the Six Day War, and restrained only by superpower intervention. But Israel, in any event, lost the war, for two reasons. First, the Arabs' surprise attack demonstrated that the occupied territories were a strategic liability, not the crucial buffer zones Israeli leaders claimed them to be. In effect, Israel's entire defensive stance since the Six Day War was turned on its head. Second, the Arab victories of the first week of fighting shattered Israel's invincibility myth, which restored some of the dignity the Arabs had lost in June of 1967.¹³⁵ Egypt's gains ultimately set in motion the normalized relations between these two bitter enemies in later years. For this reason, those who view the Yom Kippur War in technical terms – as a tactical Israeli victory – diminish its larger diplomatic significance.

Of course, none of this was apparent on the morning of October 6. Henry Kissinger was asleep in his suite at the Waldorf-Astoria in Manhattan when Joseph Sisco, the Assistant

¹³⁴Meir, <u>My Life</u>, 420.

¹³⁵Burton I. Kaufman, <u>The Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and</u> <u>Superpower Diplomacy</u> (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 87.

Secretary of State, shook him awake to warn of an imminent outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East. The groggy, and thoroughly perturbed, Secretary of State had no idea which side had initiated the crisis, and so he immediately began to work the phones, informing the Israelis, Arabs, and Soviets that the United States strongly disapproved of any preemptive actions.¹³⁶ Golda Meir was well aware of the likely American reaction to any preemptive strike. Against the advice of her military advisers, Meir declared, "I know all the arguments in favor of a preemptive strike, but I am against it. We don't know now, any of us, what the future will hold, but there is always the possibility that we will need help, and if we strike first, we will get nothing from anyone."¹³⁷ The Prime Minister's decision was a prudent one from a political standpoint, but strategically moot. On the Sinai front, the Egyptians and Soviets had amassed one of the most fortified air defense systems in the world, complete with the latest surface-to-air missile (SAM) technology and aircraft housed in bomb-proof hangars. There was to be no repeat of the June 1967 debacle. As Lawrence Whetten noted, the missiles and fortifications "combined to make an effective Israeli preemptive attack impossible."¹³⁶

Meanwhile, the outbreak of war had not ended Washington's intelligence blunder. Two hours after the Arab attack, the CIA remained convinced that Israel fired first.¹³⁹ Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger insisted, "I just don't see any motive on the Egyptian-Syrian side."¹⁴⁰ The reality of the situation, however, quickly became apparent, and the Arab advances were transforming American strategy as the Israelis endured a severe beating. At first, Nixon and

¹³⁶Henry A. Kissinger, <u>Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 18-19.

¹³⁷Meir, <u>My Life</u>, 426.

¹³⁸Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 274.

¹³⁹Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 152.

¹⁴⁰James Schlesinger, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 34.

everyone else in Washington assumed that the Israelis would deliver another decisive knockout. The president believed that the likely outcome would be yet another setback to diplomacy. He told Kissinger, "The one thing 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...."¹⁴¹ Nixon's statement speaks clearly to the fact that his acceptance, and encouragement, of Israeli hegemony centered on his confidence in Israel's deterrent effectiveness. He and Kissinger did not want a negotiated settlement any less than the State Department; they simply remained convinced that no such breakthrough was forthcoming. That is why the initial Arab victories, once they became apparent, came as welcome news to the White House.

The prevailing rationale was quickly transformed from staunch support of Israeli strength to quiet desire to let the Israelis suffer at the hands of the exhilarated Arabs. Nixon recalled: "I believed that a battlefield stalemate would provide the foundation on which fruitful negotiations might begin."¹⁴² Marvin and Bernard Kalb elaborate on Kissinger's fundamental agreement with Nixon's strategy:

From the earliest days of the war, it had never been Kissinger's policy to encourage the Israelis to win another decisive victory, such as they had won in 1967. Such a victory would not buy peace, but rather create tensions that would trigger still another war. Besides, Kissinger believed that in the current diplomatic climate, a clear-cut Israeli victory would contribute to a further isolation of Israel, and, given America's close ties to the Jewish state, encourage a new wave of anti-Americanism in the Middle East.¹⁴³

The fact that neither side wanted a cease-fire in the first days of fighting suited the

¹⁴¹Richard Nixon, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 490.

¹⁴²Nixon, <u>RN</u>, 921.

 ¹⁴³Kalb and Kalb, <u>Kissinger</u>, 487. Kissinger spelled out this line of reasoning in both his October
 12 and October 25 news conferences. See United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1792 (1973),
 539 and United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1794 (1973), 585.

Nixon-Kissinger strategy quite nicely. The Security Council met four times in the first week of fighting to no effect; the Arabs were enjoying their victories over Israel for the first time, and Israel, in a sort of national shell shock, was unwilling to accept a cease-fire with Arab armies planted in the occupied territories. Both the Arabs and Israelis counted on victory – neither wanted the UN to spoil their chances.¹⁴⁴

Three days into the war, Israel began to understand its dire position, thus overcoming its faulty strategy of five years in a matter of days. Abba Eban explained:

For several years the expectation had been that if war broke out at all, it would be swiftly ended by the superiority of Israeli arms. The idea that Israel would not be able to deal the Arabs a fatal blow with its existing weaponry had not entered anyone's head.¹⁴⁵

By October 9, Israel had already depleted large portions of its stocks in every category: planes, tanks, bombs, ammunition, even guns. Ambassador Simcha Dinitz informed Kissinger that Golda Meir was willing to come to the United States herself to underscore how badly Israel needed a major American resupply. Kissinger rejected the proposal immediately without asking

Nixon.¹⁴⁶ He reasoned:

Such a proposal could reflect only either hysteria or blackmail. A visit would take Golda away from Israel for a minimum of thirty-six hours. Leaving while a major battle was going on would be a sign of such panic that it might bring in all the Arab states still on the sidelines.¹⁴⁷

To Kissinger's likely chagrin, Nixon authorized El Al (Israel's commercial jet fleet) to pick up

Sidewinder missiles and ammunition. Compared to the Soviet airlift - carried out by the Soviets

¹⁴⁴Thomas A. Bryson, <u>American Diplomatic Relations with the Middle East, 1784-1975: A</u> <u>Survey</u> (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1977), 267.

¹⁴⁵Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 512.

¹⁴⁶It was a pattern Kissinger followed throughout the war. Nixon's troubles with the Watergate scandal were worsening by the day, consuming nearly all of his attention. Kissinger essentially directed United States foreign policy on his own.

¹⁴⁷Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 493.

themselves – the American supply was modest.¹⁴⁸ Thus began a major American-Israeli disagreement that would last the course of the war. The Israelis pushed the idea that a major, and immediate, resupply effort ought to have been as attractive to the Americans as it was to them. Golda Meir's October 8 request for a major shipment of F-4 Phantoms implored: "The aims of our fighting are absolutely clear to you. It is our objective that the heavy blows we will strike at the invaders will deprive them of any appetite they will have for any future assault."¹⁴⁹

Meir's line of reasoning likely would have gained favor in the White House before the Yom Kippur War. But she was advocating the benefits of a strong deterrent effect – for which the Phantoms played a crucial role – *after deterrence had plainly failed in preventing the outbreak of war*. The Israeli Prime Minister could not grasp how and why the Arabs' successful attack was quickly producing a revolution in American policy, a fact that was emphasized by a statement she made at an October 13 news conference: "You cannot imagine what would have happened to us had we moved back to the June 4, 1967 lines, when this attack on us took place."¹⁵⁰ In fact, what Meir herself could not imagine, was that the Yom Kippur War was not a war of annihilation like the Six Day War.

The Airlift: Anatomy of a Showdown

Israel's struggle to obtain war materiél from its unwilling patron reintroduced a basic policy argument that had been going on from the time of Israel's birth to the beginning of the Yom Kippur War: did a strong Israel facilitate or hinder United States interests in the Middle East?

¹⁴⁸Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 435.

¹⁴⁹Golda Meir, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 123.

¹⁵⁰Golda Meir, as cited Michael Brecher, <u>Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 175.

There never existed any consensus in the debate, and domestic pressures had always added an element that resisted objective strategic considerations. In the Truman and Eisenhower administrations, Israel was perceived as more of a threat to Arab-American relations than as an ally in the Cold War. Over the course of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, United States policy slowly shifted to emphasize the latter of these two considerations. After the Six Day War polarized the radical Arab states and Israel along Cold War lines, Nixon moved to accelerate a trend largely begun with Kennedy's Hawk sale to Israel in 1962.

The fact that Israel needed arms so early and so desperately in the fighting was itself an intelligence failure: the Israelis simply misread their enemies. And when they could not understand Washington's hesitation in uncritically supplying them with any and every weapon they had requested, the Israelis had come to misread their own Great Power patron. For four years, Israel nurtured the fantasy that their Cold War role in the Nixon Doctrine existed independent of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It did not. Nixon and Kissinger correctly perceived within a few days of the fighting that a new opportunity had arisen. If the Arabs could use Soviet weapons to force the Israelis to the negotiation table (and in doing so regaining the honor they had lost in the June 1967 debacle), they would likely negotiate under American auspices, simply because no other country could exert significant pressure on Israel. In short, the Middle East version of the Nixon Doctrine supported Israel at the exclusion of the Arabs out of necessity, not choice. The Yom Kippur War presented the White House with the first possibility of encompassing an Arab-Israeli settlement while excluding the Soviets. It was not an opportunity to be missed.

An examination into the details of the delay in the airlift invariably pits Secretary of State Henry Kissinger against Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger. In imploring Kissinger to begin Israel's urgently needed airlift, Israeli Ambassador Dinitz would hear of bureaucratic foot dragging at the Pentagon, logistical concerns, and Schlesinger's "pro-Arab" concern that a direct American airlift would trigger an Arab oil embargo. Schlesinger countered that the delay was part of Kissinger's Machiavellian design; the Secretary of Defense claimed to do what he was told.

Leonard Garment, an aide to Nixon, observed, "to this day I am not sure who was primarily responsible."¹⁵¹ Essentially, it is a fruitless task to blame one at the expense of the other, unless one is looking to make a character judgement.¹⁵² In the first place, as Edward N. Luttwack and Walter Laqueur have pointed out, much of the diplomacy conducted during the airlift episode was communicated verbally; what was recorded was done so selectively for the simple fact that individuals wanted history to judge them favorably.¹⁵³ Second, and more important, whatever the details of who was responsible for what, both Kissinger and Schlesinger, and the institutions they represented, had reason to be less than enthusiastic about a major American airlift. They might have shifted blame between each other, but this does not mean that Kissinger's grand schemes or Schlesinger's bureaucratic logjams had to be mutually exclusive.

There is no doubt that Schlesinger had serious reservations about a resupply. Walter Isaacson paraphrased his comments during one strategy session early in the war: Schlesinger

warned that a major rearming of Israel, especially if it helped turn the war around, would poison America's relations with the Arabs. There was a distinction, he argued, between defending

¹⁵¹Leonard Garment, <u>Crazy Rhythm</u> (New York: Random House, 1997), 196.

¹⁵²See Walter Isaacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 811, Note 3, for a useful survey of the divergent accounts. What is clear is that negative portrayals of Kissinger in general tend to focus on the "Machiavellian" angle of which the airlift delay is cited as one of many examples.

¹⁵³Edward N. Luttwack and Walter Laqueur, "Kissinger & the Yom Kippur War," Commentary, (September 1974), 33.

Israel's survival and defending its right to keep control of the occupied territories it had taken during the Six Day War of 1967.¹⁵⁴

The Kalbs' account (written in cooperation with Kissinger) portrayed Schlesinger as being excessively concerned that an airlift might cause an Arab oil embargo. It is a plausible assertion in that one of the Defense Secretary's many responsibilities is to ensure that United States forces have adequate supplies of fuel. In fact, the ensuing Arab oil embargo did have a detrimental impact on the military's global maneuverability. Additionally, Schlesinger may have felt compelled to be especially cautious with oil politics to compensate for Kissinger's lack of concern on that subject.¹⁵⁵

Schlesinger's own account of the airlift (which Nixon himself finally ordered for October

13) lacks any regard for Israel's own fortunes. His discussion of the airlift in the Defense

Department annual report of 1975 focused on the airlift as a symbol of American capabilities to

project force elsewhere:

A dependable U.S. capability to deliver large scale reinforcements to Europe quickly in an emergency could not only be decisive in preventing a NATO defeat, it could also be decisive in deterring the attack in the first place. Indeed, I can think of no more impressive a deterrent to a Warsaw Pact attack on NATO than a clearly demonstrable U.S. capability to put down in Europe a fully-equipped combat-ready division (including its supporting forces) every few days.¹⁵⁶

Schlesinger repeated his reasoning twenty five years later in a symposium on the 1973 war:

Among major equipment items, we flew four M-60 tanks to Israel. Given the immense weight of the tank, that was all we could put on a C-5A [transport plane]. It was logistically insane, but psychologically and symbolically it was important. We wanted to demonstrate that we could fly tanks to Israel.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴Walter Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 518.

¹⁵⁵Kissinger once remarked to his aides, "Don't talk to me about barrels of oil. They might as well be bottles of Coca-Cola. I don't understand!" Henry Kissinger, as cited in Yergin, <u>The Prize</u>, 613.

¹⁵⁶James Schlesinger, as cited in United States, Department of Defense, <u>Annual Defense</u> <u>Department Report, FY 1975</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 157-158.

¹⁵⁷James Schlesinger, as cited in Richard B. Parker, ed., <u>The October War: A Retrospective</u> (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), 158.

Given his stated concern for an oil embargo, it is not improbable to deduce from these statements that had Schlesinger failed to see the benefits of the airlift which had nothing to do with Israel, he would have remained opposed to it by employing whatever stalling tactics were available to him.

Although Israeli Ambassador Dinitz placed a majority of the blame for the airlift delay on Schlesinger, his recounting of Kissinger's strategy makes clear that Kissinger saw weapons transfers as a tool to calibrate the outcome of the war in a way favorable to him. Dinitz quoted Kissinger:

Egypt should suffer the consequences of its attack enough to realize that war does not pay, and that alliance with the Soviet Union does not assure security; but Egypt should not be destroyed and Sadat should not be humiliated so that he could be a party to the negotiations that would follow the war under American guidance.¹⁵⁸

Walter Isaacson quoted a more explicit statement by Kissinger at the beginning of the conflict: "The best result would be if Israel came out a little ahead but got bloodied in the process, and if the U.S. stayed clean."¹⁵⁹ This unseemly statement supports Admiral Elmo Zumwalt's charge that Kissinger deliberately ordered Schlesinger to stall in the name of the president. Zumwalt, no great fan of Kissinger, wrote: "He did not scruple to deceive his allies or besmirch the reputation of his colleagues."¹⁶⁰ James Reston, the venerable *New York Times* columnist, based his famous "Hidden Compromise" editorial on the notion that because the Arabs have the manpower for an attritional war and Israel does not, then a selective airlift could be used to effectively intensify Israeli dependence on the wishes of Kissinger and Nixon.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁸Simcha Dinitz, as cited in P.R. Kumaraswamy, <u>Revisiting the Yom Kipput War</u> (London: Frank Cass Publishing, 2000), 113-114.

¹⁵⁹Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 514.

¹⁶⁰Elmo Zumwalt, as cited in Ambrose, <u>Nixon, Volume Three</u>, 234.

¹⁶¹James Reston, "The Hidden Compromise," New York Times, 19 October 1973.

In sum, the significance of the airlift delay lies not in who was responsible for it, but in the fact that there was a general consensus that Israel should be denied the means to defeat and demoralize the Arabs again – which the Israelis surely would have done if given the opportunity. Such widespread agreement on this policy was a rarity in Washington in those days. While the airlift delay may have placed an excessive burden on Israel, no American policymakers were prepared to see it destroyed, either. That would have been as much a disaster for American policy as another smashing Israeli victory. The airlift provided an example of basic Cold War strategy: Soviet arms must not defeat American arms in battle. That is the reason that Washington quickly assembled one of the largest airlifts in history when it believed the time was right.¹⁶²

The first issue impeding the airlift did not even involve the problems that would result in a direct airlift of American planes to Israel. Golda Meir's October 10 letter to Nixon did not hide her panic: "I know that in this hour of dire need to Israel I could turn to you and count on your deep sympathy and understanding."¹⁶³ Schlesinger apparently wanted to do anything he could not to offend the Arabs. He opposed the idea of El Al planes loading supplies at American military bases. He finally agreed after Kissinger absurdly suggested that the tail markings could be painted over, obscuring the Star of David that makes El Al the unmistakable airline of the Jewish state.

Kissinger's spray paint solution hardly made him a hero of the Israeli war effort. By October 12 Israel had contemplated two unthinkable scenarios: a military defeat at Arab hands;

¹⁶²Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 163.

¹⁶³Golda Meir, as cited in Nixon, <u>RN</u>, 924.

and the threat, or even use of nuclear weapons (if indeed Israel had a deliverable capability).¹⁶⁴ Schlesinger later recalled, "As Israel began to fall apart Henry began to fall apart."¹⁶⁵ If the charge was true, Kissinger had not yet lost his sense of geopolicy. Even though the El Al passenger fleet could not possibly handle Israel's resupply needs, Kissinger remained opposed to American planes flying directly to Israel. In essence, Schlesinger's own hesitation centering on an Arab oil embargo, dovetailed conveniently with Kissinger's own concern of a Soviet response and erosion of détente.

Kissinger suggested that the United States charter commercial transports to Israel – that way, he assumed, Israel could be saved while the United Stats could stay "clean." The problem with this plan was that no sane charter executive had any inclination to fly into a war zone. Kissinger deviously told Ambassador Dinitz that the charter plan was being held up by Pentagon foot dragging – in actuality the foot dragging was his own.

The following day, October 13, Nixon realized that the charter scheme – even if it had worked – would look no different to a hostile Arab world than a direct airlift. At a strategy meeting, the president decided that the airlift delay could go on no longer. He yelled, "Do it now!" And so, a week after the war had erupted, the airlift got underway in full force. American C-130s and the even larger C-5A transport planes began landing in Israel that evening, loaded with materiél including the crucial F-4 Phantoms.

Nixon recalled the sheer immensity of the mission: it was "an operation bigger than the Berlin airlift of 1948-49."¹⁶⁶ Although the Soviet airlift to the Arabs had to cover a much shorter

¹⁶⁴Safran, Israel: The Embattled Ally, 483.

¹⁶⁵Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 521.

¹⁶⁶Nixon, <u>RN</u>, 927-928.

distance, and, of course, was not hindered by fears of an Arab oil embargo, the American airlift dwarfed Moscow's, in the category of efficiency. The Soviets flew a total 15,000 tons of materiél in 934 missions; the Americans boasted 22,395 tons in 566 missions.¹⁶⁷ United States Air Force pilots often flew 28-hour round trips without relief, and the Israelis did not overlook the sacrifice. Colonel Donald R. Strombaugh, Commander of the airlift mission, named "Operation Nickel Grass," received hundreds of letters from Israeli schoolchildren, one of which promised: "Thank you for helping us in our war. When you have a war we will help you."¹⁶⁸ The sight of the behemoth American transport planes flying over Tel Aviv prompted drivers to get out of their cars, cheering "God bless America!" It was the first time in the war that Golda Meir cried.

Israel's rejoicing, however did not exactly stem from as clear and present a danger as its leaders had indicated to Washington. The real meaning of Israel's doomsday fears was rooted in the fact that after the first week of fighting, its defense abilities were in an unprecedented position: Israel did not know how much longer it could hold out against an enemy with a seemingly unlimited amount of soldiers and a steady resupply from the Soviets.¹⁶⁹ The American airlift did not "save" Israel in any real sense; rather, it saved Israel from the potential that the Arab armies would advance into Israel proper. As of October 13, there was no evidence to support Israel's fears. Its forces were clearly fighting to retain the occupied territories. The airlift, thus, allowed Israel to go on the offensive almost immediately. No longer constrained by the possibility of running out of crucial weapons stocks, the Israelis in short order set out to

¹⁶⁷Figures cited in David A. Brown, "Israel Airlift Flights Underscore C-5 Rapid Deployment Capability,"<u>Aviation Space Week & Technology</u>, 10 December 1973.

¹⁶⁸Cited in Chris J. Krisinger, "Operation Nickel Grass: Airlift in Support of National Policy," Aerospace Power Journal (Spring 1989),

<http://www.airpower.maxwell.af.mil/airchronicles/apj/apj89/krisinger.html> (16 March 2004).

¹⁶⁹Brecher, <u>Decisions in Crisis</u>, 206.

accomplish Washington's desire to see American weapons prevail on the battlefield. In the American strategy, if the airlift triggered an oil embargo (which in fact it did), it would be a relatively small price to pay in the context of Cold War considerations.

In demanding an airlift, Nixon told Kissinger, "It's got to be the works. What I mean is, we are going to get blamed just as much for three planes as three hundred."¹⁷⁰ It was an astute observation, predicated on the belief that an Arab victory would immeasurably heighten Soviet prestige in the area. In this scenario, an oil embargo in the short-run – largely seen in Washington as a tactical, not strategic, penalty against American support to Israel was preferable to what Kissinger called a "concomitant radicalization of the area."¹⁷¹ The international affairs specialist Bernard Reich offered the best summary of American strategy in Congressional testimony:

Israel's fall would very likely increase Soviet prestige and power in the Middle East since the Russians have contributed the know-how and materiél to achieve the Arab victory. It would further weaken those moderate Arab states, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia, whose overthrow has been a stated goal of various guerilla and opposition movements within the Arab world and who would no longer be diverted from their aim by preoccupation with Israel.

It would probably facilitate Arab radical pressures which have been destabilizing factors in the Persian Gulf. These achievements would, in turn, negatively impact on the U.S. effort to maintain regional stability and peace, on American economic interests, and on the flow of oil to the West.¹⁷²

In other words, the United States was glad to endure an oil embargo by its moderate Arab friends. An embargo dictated by Soviet whim was unacceptable. And so once more Israel benefitted from Washington's Cold War concerns.

The Israelis were making better use of the airlift than perhaps Washington had intended.

¹⁷⁰Richard Nixon, as cited in Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 522.

¹⁷¹Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 531.

¹⁷²Bernard Reich, as cited in United States, Congress, Subcommittee on the Near East and South Asia, <u>Hearings: The Impact of the October Middle East War</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 27.

Attempting to keep Israel strong enough to defeat Soviet weapons, but not so strong as to humiliate Soviet clients proved to be a difficult balancing act. By October 19, the Soviets, who urged the Syrians and Egyptians to accept a cease-fire when it became apparent that Israel would prevail with fresh American arms, were now beginning to panic themselves. Like Washington, the Soviet Union had come to fear that its position in the Middle East was under threat. Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin delivered a message from General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev urgently requesting that Kissinger come to Moscow on October 20. Nixon and Kissinger assumed that the Soviets could be dissuaded from taking drastic action (like a unilateral military intervention) if Kissinger heeded their request.

Kissinger received a bombshell en route to Moscow. Nixon transmitted to Brezhnev a note through the Soviet Embassy in Washington, which called for "a firm commitment from both of us to devote our personal efforts toward achieving that goal [a final peace] and to provide the strong leadership which our respective friends in the area will find persuasive."¹⁷³ Kissinger, by his own account, was "horrified." In effect, Nixon was proposing a joint superpower effort to impose peace on the region. Kissinger quickly decided to pretend as if the note did not exist; he made no gesture toward its contents during his visit to Moscow. In doing so, Stephen Ambrose charged: "The opportunity was lost. We cannot know if Nixon and Brezhnev could have made peace between Israel on the one hand, Egypt and Syria on the other. We do know that because of Kissinger, the attempt was not made."¹⁷⁴

But Kissinger did not attempt to scuttle a final peace. He tried to prevent Nixon, in his distressed state, from throwing away four years of American strategy. October 20, the day Nixon

¹⁷³Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 547.

¹⁷⁴Ambrose, <u>Nixon, Volume Three</u>, 247.r

sent the note, came to be known in Watergate lore as the "Saturday Night Massacre," when Nixon fired Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox. It was arguably the most tense day of Nixon's presidency. He was looking for something, anything, to halt the impeachment process which by that point was approaching full steam. Apparently he thought that an imposed peace – something both the Arabs and Israelis had bitterly opposed for the past five years – could be accomplished with a partner who had never budged from advocating the radical Arab demand of withdrawal without recognition or security guarantees. On top of all of this, Soviet and American arms were still engaged in a brutal proxy war that had showed no signs of abating.

Kissinger fulfilled his objectives in Moscow; he stalled. The UN passed Security Council Resolution 338, jointly supported by the United States and Soviet Union, which called for both sides to "terminate all military activity immediately...in the positions they now occupy."¹⁷⁵ The resolution was basically a sop to the Soviets, who could use it to demonstrate to their Arab clients the effectiveness of Soviet diplomacy. As Walter Isaacson noted, Kissinger's goal "was to have step-by-step negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis, with the U.S. serving as the middleman while the Soviets were relegated to the sidelines."¹⁷⁶ Kissinger's stopover in Israel after Moscow revealed to him just how much the Israelis feared an imposed peace. The Secretary of State assured them that no such thing would happen. If the cease-fire held, Kissinger surmised, he would begin his shuttle diplomacy almost immediately.

But the cease-fire had almost no effect on the war in the Sinai. William Quandt wisely observed,

¹⁷⁵United Nations. 2004. <u>U.N. Security Council Resolutions, 1973</u>, <http://www.un.org/documents/sc/res/1973/scres73.htm> (12 March 2004). ¹⁷⁶Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 525.

It did not matter which side was technically responsible for firing the first shot after the cease-fire was to have gone into effect. What was clear was that Israeli forces were advancing beyond the October 22 cease-fire lines.¹⁷⁷

The IDF succeeded in surrounding Egypt's Third Army Division, which was not only the jewel of the Egyptian military, but the only force that stood between advancing Israeli forces and an undefended Cairo. During the night of October 23, Egypt sent in commando and infantry units in a failed attempt to break open an escape corridor for the Third Army. Michael Brecher has contended that Egypt's refusal to surrender the Third Army was welcomed by the Israeli military, which used Arab resistance as a pretext to strengthen its grip on the battlefield.¹⁷⁸ Israel refused to allow rescue teams to provide water and medical assistance. Basically, Israel wanted to starve the Egyptians into submission, to demonstrate their power over Egypt in any future negotiations. Furthermore, as Ambassador Dinitz argued, Israel would refuse to release the Third Army until it had dropped its weapons: "We will not open up a pocket," he told Kissinger, "and release an army that has come to destroy us. It has never happened in the history of war."¹⁷⁹

The situation was quickly escalating into the most dangerous crisis of the war. If the Americans and Soviets agreed on one thing, it was this: Israel must not be permitted to destroy Egypt. From Moscow's perspective, this could be the final blow to its credibility in the region, since millions of dollars of arms, Soviet advisers, and staunch backing of Arab demands at the UN could end with an Israeli occupation of Cairo. In Washington's view, a humiliating defeat delivered to the Arabs would essentially render post-war diplomacy useless. The radical Arab states would continue to demonstrate no inclination to recognize Israel, and worse, the pro-

¹⁷⁷Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 172.

¹⁷⁸Brecher, <u>Decisions in Crisis</u>, 223-224.

¹⁷⁹Simcha Dinitz, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 379.

Western Persian Gulf States would likely become more shrill and daring in their objections to America's Middle East policy.

The United States made clear to Israel in its opposition to further aggression. In a lecture delivered in late 1974, former Defense Minister Moshe Dayan said:

The Americans, in order to smooth the way with the Arabs, confronted us with an ultimatum to the effect that, if we would not enable the Third Army to receive food and water, we would find ourselves in a political conflict with them [the Americans].¹⁸⁰

According to Bernard Reich, the United States threatened Israel that it "would supply the Third Army themselves if Israel did not allow other means of relief.¹⁸¹

The Israelis believed that the Soviet Union was prepared to do the same. Abba Eban explained why this action would bring tensions to a dangerously new level: "The Soviet Union would then be physically involved in the war against Israel, and it would become necessary for the United States to think long and hard about its own commitment to regional stability and to Israel's security."¹⁸² Eban, of course, was referring to the one question American policymakers hoped they would never have to ask themselves during a proxy conflict: is the situation worth a nuclear confrontation?

At 9:35 p.m., Wednesday October 24, Brezhnev issued a note which increased tensions still further. Moscow wanted the United States to know that it would not passively accept Israel's actions. Ambassador Dobrynin read the note slowly over the phone to Kissinger to make sure there was no confusion. Brezhnev intoned:

¹⁸⁰Moshe Dayan, as cited in Draper, "The United States & Israel," Commentary, 30.

¹⁸¹Reich, "Israel in US Perspective," in Efrat and Bercovitch, eds., <u>Superpowers and Client States</u> <u>in the Middle East</u>, 61.

¹⁸²Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 535.

I will say it straight that if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally. We cannot allow arbitrariness on the part of Israel.¹⁸³

Nixon later commented on the note: "It was very firm and...left very little to the imagination as to what he [Brezhnev] intended."¹⁸⁴ Nixon wanted to convey the myth that he was active in making policy during this latest episode of the crisis. He was not; the Watergate affair was incapacitating him, and he stayed upstairs in his living quarters while Kissinger took full control of the situation.¹⁸⁵

In those tense late night hours, Brezhnev's note was not taken lightly. United States intelligence had detected radioactive emissions emanating from a Soviet ship at Port Said, Egypt. This alarming news was interpreted at the strategy session that night as adding credibility to Brezhnev's implied threat. Although the source of those emissions was never determined, it is unlikely that Moscow would have allowed the United States to detect nuclear material so close to the crisis area if its presence was unrelated to the conflict.

Kissinger understood at the time that Sadat proposed that a joint superpower force be sent in to resolve the Third Army crisis or, if necessary, a unilateral American deployment to accomplish the same thing. What Sadat did not want – for the same reasons as Kissinger – was a unilateral Soviet move, which could quickly explode into an Israeli-Soviet confrontation. Put another way, Sadat did not want a nuclear superpower and a regional (and allegedly nuclear) power confronting each other on Egyptian soil. Kissinger reasoned:

¹⁸³The note is cited in Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 173.

¹⁸⁴Richard Nixon, as cited in Marylin Berger, "Brezhnev Note: I will Say it Straight," Washington Post, 28 November, 1973.

¹⁸⁵Raymond L. Garthoff, <u>Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to</u> <u>Reagan</u> (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1985), 378.

If the Soviets sent troops, it would be unilaterally, without the sanction of either the host country or the United Nations. This would be much easier for us to resist, and we were determined to do so. It showed – though we could only guess this at the moment – that Sadat was staking his future on American diplomatic support rather than Soviet military pressure.¹⁸⁶

Kissinger chose to focus on Washington's concerns over Soviet intentions at his news conference following the crisis: "It is inconceivable that we should transplant the Great Power rivalry into the Middle East, or, alternatively, that we should impose a military condominium by the United States and the Soviet Union."¹⁸⁷

The United States expressed its opposition to the unilateral Soviet move by heightening its worldwide military alert status to Defense Condition (DEFCON) III. DEFCON I is maximum force readiness, or the alert status just before war. Kissinger defined DEFCON III: it "increases readiness without the determination that war is likely; it is in practice the highest stage of readiness for essentially peaceful conditions."¹⁸⁸ In other words, DEFCON III is the most nuanced of the alert statuses: its function is to convey a stern message without causing the opponent to panic.¹⁸⁹ Coral Bell provided a useful characterization of Brezhnev's note and the DEFCON III response:

as an exchange of rather loud signals – excessively loud, one might hold, and thus unnecessarily abrasive to the nerves of the world. But they probably needed to be loud, in order to carry over certain background noises, and to reach other ears other than those of the American and Russian policymakers concerned, who were, of course, perfectly well able to communicate in whispers unless it was useful that others should hear.¹⁹⁰

Indeed, the American response could not have been much louder, if Kissinger's only intention

was sabre-rattling. Every United States command post around the world heightened its alert

¹⁸⁶Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 355.

 ¹⁸⁷Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1794 (1973), 587.
 ¹⁸⁸Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 350.

¹⁸⁹Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 441.

¹⁹⁰Coral Bell, <u>The Diplomacy of Détente: The Kissinger Era</u> (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 88-89.

status, including the Strategic Arms Command, which spearheaded nuclear missions. Between fifty and sixty B-52 strategic bombers were transferred from Guam to the United States, the aircraft carrier *John F. Kennedy* moved West across the Mediterranean from the Straits of Gibralter, and the 82nd Airborne Division received orders to prepare for deployment.

All of those actions fit with Kissinger's attitude toward crisis management. As Barry M. Blechman and Douglas M. Hart noted, "Rather than matching Soviet actions 'tit for tat,' the Secretary believed, it was necessary to do something more dramatic, something which would get the attention of Soviet decision makers because it was several times more alarming than their own action."¹⁹¹

Kissinger wanted the Israelis to be as alarmed as the Soviets. Lawrence Whetten argued that Kissinger's threats were "aimed against Israel as much as they were aimed against the Soviet Union."¹⁹² Not only did Washington want Israel to understand the gravity of its insubordination, but Kissinger wanted to freeze the situation before Israel pushed the Egyptians back from the sliver of land west of the Suez Canal. This was the land they had won in their short-lived glory days of the war, before the American airlift turned the tide against them.¹⁹³ Raymond Gartoff took this line of reasoning one step further. He interpreted the public meaning of Kissinger's DEFCON III alert as an opportunity to demonstrate that the United States would not bow down before the Soviet ultimatum. The real use of the alert, Garthoff argues, was "as leverage in pressing the Israelis into stopping their advance – and not because the Soviets wanted them to

¹⁹¹Barry M. Blechman and Douglas M. Hart, "Nuclear Weapons and the 1973 Middle East Crisis," in Robert J. Art and Kenneth N. Waltz, eds., <u>The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics</u>, 5th ed. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1999), 249.

¹⁹²Whetten, <u>The Canal War</u>, 293.

¹⁹³Luttwack and Laqueur, "Kissinger & the Yom Kippur War," Commentary, 39.

stop, but because the *United States* wanted them to."¹⁹⁴ Garthoff dismissed Nixon's "farfetched" reference to the Cuban Missile Crisis as a lame attempt to characterize himself as a strong president capable of making the right choices in times of crisis.¹⁹⁵ Garthoff's argument is all the more damning in light of a telephone conversation between Kissinger and Chief of Staff General Alexander M. Haig an hour after they had received Brezhnev's October 24 note. Kissinger wondered, "I don't think they would have taken on a functioning president." Haig replied, "They couldn't."¹⁹⁶

The DEFCON III episode was certainly bizarre. Israel had received its harshest rebuke in the history of its relations with the United States, and from an administration that was its staunchest supporter. The DEFCON III alert proved to the Egyptians that American diplomacy could guarantee their wishes where Soviet weapons could not – in effect, the alert crisis became the first stage in a quick resumption of diplomatic relations between Egypt and the United States. President Anwar Sadat proved to be a flexible and enthusiastic participant in Kissinger's post-war shuttle diplomacy.

Israel, over a series of painful steps, began to accept the fact that its bitter enemy, Egypt, would come to yield its own considerable influence in Washington. Shortly after the DEFCON III alert, Israel yielded to UN Security Council Resolution 340,¹⁹⁷ permitted resupply of the Third Army and begrudgingly recognized Egypt's military presence west of the Suez Canal. The situation was such that Egypt and Israel could sit down in the next few days for direct

¹⁹⁴Garthoff, <u>Détente and Confrontation</u>, 384 [emphasis Garthoff's].

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Crisis</u>, 350.

¹⁹⁷Security Council Resolution 340 essentially repeated the cease-fire initiative of Resolution 338, although 340 replaced the word "urging" with "demanding." The cease-fire held this time.

negotiations, a first with an Arab nation in the history of the Jewish state.

It is to Kissinger's credit that events turned out they way they did. Although the crisis did not nearly approach the danger of the Cuban Missile Crisis eleven years earlier, the Secretary of State, National Security Adviser, and for all intents and purposes, executor of United States foreign policy, took a nuclear gamble. As John Lewis Gaddis observed: "One resorted to escalation to prevent escalation, and so ran the risk, if the other side did not back down, of bringing about precisely what one had sought to avoid."¹⁹⁸

What of the implications of American actions for détente? If détente sought nothing more than to institutionalize a fundamental agreement between the superpowers – that nuclear war was an unacceptable response to an ongoing Cold War – how did the DEFCON III alert affect the détente? The paradox of the alert itself was that Kissinger sought to avoid nuclear war by threatening it. An answer to this question must reflect the ambivalence of the alert strategy. The lead editorial in the October 26 edition of the Washington Post observed of the DEFCON III alert:

The result was, in our view, perhaps the single most significant vindication of the word 'détente,' that much abused word, which the world has seen to date. It was a vindication all the more valuable for preventing an extremely serious disruption of Great Power relations.¹⁹⁹

The corresponding editorial in the New York Times weighed in on the other side: the DEFCON

III alert served as a reminder of how

tenuous détente really is....If it is surmounted successfully, the Middle East War of 1973 will have been useful as a reminder of the reality 'partners and adversaries' really implies. Since it is evident that such a relationship can still be carried to the brink of nuclear war, the United States, the Soviet Union and the world need something better and more secure.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸Gaddis, <u>Strategies of Containment</u>, 313.

¹⁹⁹Washington Post, Editorial, "...And the Meaning for Détente," 26 October, 1973.

²⁰⁰New York Times, Editorial, "From Cuba to Suez," 26 October 1973.

Détente, it seemed, existed very much in the eye of the beholder. If the choices of interpretation have the alert either as proof that détente either prevented nuclear war, or was a smokescreen that could not prevent the superpowers from approaching the brink, then the wisest conclusion must lie somewhere in the middle.

If one clear lesson emerges from this convoluted episode, it is that whatever ambiguous effect the Yom Kippur War exerted over Soviet-American relations, those between the United States and Israel underwent a drastic change. American policies toward Israel in its early years had always taken Arab concerns into primary consideration. This framework had not disappeared by the time of Nixon's first term; instead it was necessarily muted in order to grapple with an intractable situation that underscored the fascinating relationship between force and diplomacy.

The Yom Kippur War abruptly offered United States policy the chance to contain the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in doing so, enlist both Egypt and Israel as anti-Communist friends in a bipolar, Cold War world. With the Egyptians back in the Sinai and a shaken Israel stripped of its interwar hegemony, the stage was thus set for an American-brokered peace, which, in the Middle East theater, proved to be the most potent weapon in America's Cold War arsenal.

Chapter V

American Diplomacy at the Expense of the Soviets: Kissinger's Step-by-Step Approach to Managing the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict, October 1973-January 1974

The end of the Yom Kippur War of October, 1973, produced a revolution in the political order at both the regional and global level. In the Middle East, Israel could no longer equate occupation of Arab territories (most notably the Sinai and the Golan Heights) with national security, as it had since the end of the Six Day War of June, 1967. Likewise, the Arabs, led by Egypt, demonstrated military prowess and a new political unity based on a common anti-Zionist platform. Though the Yom Kippur War was concluded technically as an Israeli victory, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat successfully executed the political objectives of his war aims; that is, he forced the Israelis to the negotiating table after a major and largely balanced military confrontation stripped Israel of its supposed regional invincibility.

As one theater of the global Cold War system, the Yom Kippur War demonstrated to the United States that stability along the eastern rim of the Mediterranean could no longer be guaranteed by American-supported Israeli hegemony. Effective crisis management in the final days of the conflict achieved the twin American goals of avoiding nuclear war and ending the war as a stalemate, which, in turn, effectively diminished the relevancy of any Soviet involvement in postwar negotiations. In this sense, American crisis management assumed a strategic, as well as diplomatic, posture. By refusing to allow Moscow to unilaterally deploy troops to the Sinai (in the form of the DEFCON III nuclear alert), the United States simultaneously reduced the potential for Great Power conflict, and proved to Egypt that American-brokered diplomacy could maintain Arab security far more effectively than Sovietbrokered violence.

When the war ended, the Nixon administration's Middle East foreign policy, largely formulated by Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, redefined the United States vision of stability as a negotiated peace between adversaries willing to make the necessary concessions. Massive Soviet arms shipments enabled Egypt and Syria to mount a successful surprise attack on October 6, which produced exactly the opposite of Moscow's wishes. As Malcolm H. Kerr, a scholar observed,

Since 1970, Sadat has been at home and abroad. It seems to me that Sadat's launching of the October War, and his diplomacy since then, can best be explained in this light. The war gave him a chance to negotiate in a way that he could not do before, with the twin objectives of settling on respectable terms with Israel and loosening his dependence on the Soviet Union.¹

In the three months that followed the war, Kissinger's extraordinary diplomatic efforts set in motion a policy long in the making, yet requiring innovative means. Through the revolutionary use of "shuttle diplomacy," the relatively new U.S. Secretary of State effectively managed an unforseen political-strategic situation in which the Soviet position was increasingly irrelevant. At its most basic criterion, détente was successful in preventing a nuclear conflict between the superpowers, but this fact did not signal a new confluence of Soviet-American interests. The Yom Kippur War allowed the United States the opportunity to redefine its regional influence to encompass both Israel and its Arab adversaries. By the time of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement on January 18 1974, American Middle East diplomacy, as embodied by Henry Kissinger, was at its apex.

¹Malcolm H. Kerr, as cited in United States, Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: The Middle East, 1974: New Hopes, New Challenges</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 39.

The American goal of stability in the Middle East was not affected by the course and consequences of the Yom Kippur War. The Nixon Administration's objective of regional stability had remained unchanged; what the war revolutionized was the means necessary to maintain it. President Nixon's Foreign Policy Report to Congress of May 3, 1973, outlined the basic American position regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although the United States supported U.N. Security Council 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal of occupied territory in exchange for peace, a real settlement could not come from without. Nixon wrote,

a solution cannot be imposed by the outside powers on unwilling governments. If we tried the parties would feel no stake in observing its terms, and the outside powers would be engaged indefinitely in enforcing them. A solution can last only if the parties commit themselves to it directly. Serious negotiation will be possible, however, only if a decision is made on each side that the issues must be finally resolved by a negotiated settlement rather than by the weight or threat of force.²

In fact, Arab force was what finally pushed Israel into serious negotiations under the 242 rubric, where the diplomatic efforts of the American-sponsored Rogers plan and the U.N.-directed Jarring mission had failed before. Nixon, of course, could not foresee the Yom Kippur War in May 1973, but he understood that the war produced the necessary conditions for a settlement. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy rested on the mutual willingness of the Egyptians and Israelis to negotiate in the wake of the fighting. In the quest to maintain Middle Eastern stability, Kissinger's diplomatic method did not attempt to impose American interests on either side. The particularities of the disengagement, though hotly contested between Egypt and Israel, were minor in the American view so long as its two major objectives were maintained: that the United States was doing the mediating, and thus denying the Soviet Union its regional prestige.

²Richard Nixon, as cited in <u>Report to Congress</u>, "U.S Foreign Policy for the 1970s: Shaping a Durable Peace," (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 136.

In Kissinger's view, American ascendancy in the region was of vital importance. By the 1970s, he argued, the Cold War order had matured from a Europe-centered bipolarity to a global multipolarity in which "equally grave risks are likely to arise in trouble spots outside Europe."³ When Kissinger wrote, "the challenge of the seventies will be to forge unity with political measures," he was referring to the strains in the trans-Atlantic relationship, although, as his diplomatic efforts after the Yom Kippur War illustrated, his sentiment was realized most dramatically in the Middle East.⁴ Shuttle diplomacy represented a synthesis of Kissinger's global perspectives: he devoted his greatest diplomatic efforts outside of Europe by means of a basic shared objective of all concerned parties. In the framework of détente, Kissinger was afforded greater latitude to negotiate a settlement between Egypt and Israel. Because the superpowers maintained reduced tensions at the global level, the Secretary of State took full advantage of the fact that Moscow would not precipitate another crisis during the shuttle diplomacy.

Kissinger's position was formulated as a response to the consequences of the war. After the Six Day War through September 1973, Israel's leadership regarded its occupation of the Arab territories as a superior guarantor of security over that of political concessions. Yitzhak Rabin's overview of the new geographic barriers afforded by territorial occupation reflected Israel's policy during the interwar period:

The present borders run along natural barriers: Egypt – the Canal; Jordan – the Jordan River...and with Syria, there will no longer be a need to climb up mountains. The distance from the Egyptian border to Tel Aviv was once 130 kilometres and only 80 kilometres from the Gaza Strip. But the distance from our border on the Canal today to Cairo is only 130 kilometres. The distance from our border to Cairo was once something over 400 kilometres. Today the distance

³Henry Kissinger, <u>American Foreign Policy</u>, Expanded Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 67.

⁴Ibid., 71.

from the Egyptian border on the Canal to Tel Aviv is 400 kilometres.⁵

In other words, the Israeli leadership held that while security through political agreements was fleeting, a buffer zone carved from natural barriers was not. The great irony of the interwar period is that because the Arabs were forced to recognize Israel's military strength (but never its sovereignty), the aims of the Yom Kippur War were decidedly more limited than the strategy of annihilation in 1967. Sadat in 1973 was fighting to regain the Sinai, not to destroy Israel. The Egyptian president went to war for a territory, the occupation of which Israel, ironically, presumed made war less likely. Thus, the outcome of the Yom Kippur War finally betrayed the untenable character of the Israeli position, thereby ensuring the beginning steps to negotiation through the auspices of Henry Kissinger. The United States would no longer have only one client in the region, which meant that Moscow would have trouble maintaining influence with Sadat, whose need for Soviet weapons was now significantly reduced.

The "war of attrition," led by Egyptian President Gamel Nasser in 1969, falsely demonstrated to Washington that Israel was immune from war. Sadat took advantage of Israel's security policy, which had become lax during the six years of Israeli dominance. As one observer has argued, Sadat demonstrated that Washington's special relationship with Israel was not an effective deterrent to war – on the contrary, the political nature of the Yom Kippur War was partially a function of the influence U.S. policy could potentially exert over Israel after the fighting.⁶ At the launch of Yom Kippur War, which commenced with a massive bombardment on Israeli positions, the United States maintained the policy it had developed in the preceding

⁵Yitzhak Rabin, as cited in Michael Brecher, <u>Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 447.

⁶Leon T. Hadar, <u>Quagmire: America in the Middle East</u> (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 1992), 79.

years should another general war begin.

The initial attack was apparent to the Israelis and Americans only hours before the first launch, at which point Washington quickly moved to ensure the stalemate for which they had generally planned. The fighting demonstrated to both Egypt and Israel that neither could get everything it wanted. For the former, total defeat of Israel was impossible; for the latter, territorial occupation failed to maintain a shield from attack. Finally, for both, negotiations would supplant force as the key to their diminished objectives.⁷ As one specialist observed, only after the Yom Kippur War and the beginning of Kissinger's mediation did both sides stop viewing their relations as a zero-sum game bound for "rigidity, fatalism and despair."⁸

Yet the policy of shuttle diplomacy was not a spontaneous reaction to a surprise war, rather, its principles were put in place long before October 1973, when war was only a hypothetical possibility. As one scholar paraphrased U.S. policy in the pre-war period, "when and if hostilities between the two sides should again occur, it was crucial that they be ended on terms and under conditions that allowed, so far as possible, successful negotiations afterward."⁹ As the war unfolded, it was obvious to Kissinger that meaningful negotiations could only occur if the United States maintained a military stalemate, which in turn required a carefully restrained arms flow to Israel that would ensure both its safety, yet deny another crushing defeat of the Arab nations, after which negotiations would be impossible.¹⁰ There has been much debate around the reason for the arms delay to Israel during the war, with Kissinger and Secretary of

⁷Nitza Nachmias, <u>Transfer of Arms, Leverage, and Peace in the Middle East</u> (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 57.

⁸Nadav Safran, "Engagement in the Middle East," <u>Foreign Affairs</u> 53 (October, 1974), 48.

⁹William Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency</u> (New York: Hill and Wang,1998), 442.

¹⁰Ibid.

Defense James Schlesinger sharing various portions of the blame, but what is important is that the decision to hold back arms deliveries – irrespective of the bureaucratic, political, and strategic difficulties a massive arms airlift would engender – was a deliberate expression of U.S. policy designed to ensure a military balance throughout the fighting.¹¹ The Yom Kippur War thereby reduced Israel's standing; it became one among several roughly equal players in the larger framework of American objectives in the Middle East. Israel, to be sure, received a massive amount of materiel throughout the war. But the staggering quantity and value of the airlift (so great that U.S. forces were actually in a diminished capacity due to depleted weapons stocks) must be understood in the context of the Arabs' own arms shipments of roughly equal value.¹² That is, the airlift itself did not underscore the special character of the American-Israeli relationship.

What was especially striking about the American steps toward a negotiated peace was that Kissinger was able secure political influence in Egypt only shortly after the United States had supplied its adversary. As one expert argued in terms of military support to its client, toward the end of the Yom Kippur War, "the United States had gained in influence in the Arab world at the very time that it was most supportive of Israel." In his memoirs, Nixon observed that "for the first time in an Arab-Israeli conflict the United States conducted itself in a manner that not only preserved but greatly enhanced our relations with the Arabs—even while we were massively resupplying the Israelis."¹³

¹¹John P. Miglietta, <u>American Alliance Policy in the Middle East</u>, <u>1945-1992</u>: <u>Iran</u>, <u>Israel</u>, and <u>Saudi Arabia</u> (New York: Lanham Books, 2002), 141.

¹²Dale R. Tahtinen, <u>The Arab-Israeli Military Balance Since October 1973</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974), 32.

¹³Richard M. Nixon, <u>RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon</u>, 2d ed. (New York, Simon & Schuster, 1990), 941.

Although the cease fire to end the Yom Kippur War was implemented on October 22, Israel had encircled Egypt's Third Army, beyond which lay an undefended Cairo. On October 24, Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev sent a note to President Nixon urging for a joint superpower task force to maintain the cease fire. (This crisis period is examined in detail at the end of chapters 2 and 3.) The United States responded with a DEFCON III world-wide military alert – an unambiguous signal to the Soviets that direct superpower intervention in the region was unacceptable. The DEFCON alert was supposedly a strategy primarily designed as a form of nuclear deterrence, in which nuclear war would be avoided, ironically, by threatening it, as Washington believed that direct contact between superpower forces could expand into a general war. Kissinger offered another reason that fits within the U.S. policy toward a negotiated settlement on which shuttle diplomacy depended. He outlined the "what if" had Nixon accepted the terms of Brezhney's note:

Either we would be the tail to the Soviet kite in a joint power play against Israel, or we would end up clashing with Soviet forces in a country that was bound to share Soviet objectives regarding the cease fire or could not afford to be perceived as opposing them. But the impact would go far beyond Egypt. If Soviet forces appeared dramatically in Cairo with those of the United States – and even more if they appeared alone – our traditional friends among Arab moderates would be profoundly unnerved...Egypt would be drawn back into the Soviet orbit, [and] the Soviet Union and its radical allies would emerge as the dominant factor in the Middle East.¹⁴

Kissinger's reasoning – in light of recent studies that argue that the Soviet Union was totally unprepared for a military intervention – provides a credible story for explaining U.S. interests.¹⁵ A basic stalemate between Egypt and Israel emerged as the war neared its end. Both sides had trapped forces that were vulnerable to destruction, and U.S. policy, put in place since

¹⁴Henry Kissinger, <u>Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 348.

¹⁵See, for example, Viktor Levonovich Israelyan, <u>Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War</u> (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 190; and Anatoly Dobrynin, <u>In</u> Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War <u>Presidents</u> (New York: Random House, 1995), 296.

the beginning of the war, could now proceed as sole arbitrator between adversaries more or less equally intent on disengagement. As Malcolm H. Kerr noted, "It was the October War which enabled Sadat to come out as a certified leader of his people. It therefore enabled him to begin to talk about peace in a way not possible prior to that time."¹⁶

Sadat's political success rested on the fact that he forced the Israelis to make a stark decision, as one writer outlined, "between contested frontiers some distance from the main centers of Jewish population, and negotiated frontiers close to Israel's heartland, with some form of external guarantee."¹⁷ The contested frontiers no longer afforded Israel security, and the Prime Minister, Golda Meir, begrudgingly had little choice but to retool Israeli policy around negotiations with the United States as external guarantor.¹⁸ As the international relations expert Coral Bell described it, the cost for Israel to maintain a defense of the occupied territories against competent and concerted Arab forces would have been "intolerable."¹⁹ Additionally, as I. William Zartman, a scholar, noted, Israel's "military successes [at the end of the Yom Kippur War] had not been sufficient to make its neighbors sue for peace, and the more it conquered of their territory, the more it would be burdened with an unassimiliable Arab population."²⁰

Egypt recognized that Israel had no other options but to defer to Kissinger's reorientation, which they turned to their advantage for political leverage that Soviet arms had

¹⁶Malcolm H. Kerr, as cited in United States, Congress, <u>The Middle East</u>, <u>1974</u>: <u>New Hopes</u>, <u>New</u> <u>Challenges</u>, 1974, 42.

¹⁷Sydney D. Bailey, "The Prospects for Real Peace," in <u>From Wars Toward Peace in the Arab-</u> <u>Israeli Conflict, 1969-1993</u>, vol. 4, Ian. S. Lustick, ed., (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), 337.

¹⁸Nadav Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 509.

¹⁹Coral Bell, "The October Middle East War: A Case Study in Crisis Management During Detente," <u>International Affairs</u> 50 (October 1974), 541.

²⁰I. William Zartman, "Explaining Disengagement," in <u>Dynamics of Third Party Intervention</u>: <u>Kissinger in the Middle East</u>, Jeffrey Z. Rubin ed., (New York: Praeger, 1981), 149.

failed to provide. Kissinger believed that it was precisely America's special power – not a sentimental connection – over Israel that would oblige Egypt to follow American mediation toward a negotiated peace.²¹

Thus the stage was set for an American-sponsored settlement between two willing adversaries. Kissinger summarized U.S. policy throughout the war at a news conference on October 25 :

Throughout the crisis the president was convinced that we had two major problems: first, to end hostilities as quickly as possible—but secondly, to end hostilities in a manner that would enable us to make a major contribution to removing the conditions that have produced four wars between Arabs and Israelis in the last 25 years.²²

His statement was not totally truthful; the arms delays were primarily intended to induce a stalemate, which would have had the opposite effect of ending the hostilities immediately. Admitting this, however, would have been impolitic. In any regard, U.S. policy after the war was sincerely aimed at solving the conflict once and for all. All parties, save the Soviet Union, would benefit from the results. Near the end of the war, Moscow denounced Israeli aggression, which was little more than a reflection on their own perceived irrelevance in the region.²³ Indeed, what would soon be called "shuttle diplomacy" could just as well have been termed "solo diplomacy" as Kissinger equated direct negotiations with the Arabs as the most effective way of shutting the Soviets out of the conflict resolution framework."²⁴

Perhaps the greatest beneficiary of the ensuing negotiations was Kissinger himself, whose

²¹William B. Quandt, <u>Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict</u> <u>Since 1967</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 184-185.

²²Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1794 (1973), 585.

²³Galia Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis</u> (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 147.

²⁴Ann M. Lesch and Dan Tschirgi, <u>Origins and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict</u> (London: Greenwood Press, 1998), 26.

decisions were always a unique mixture of Cold War *Realpolitik* and concern for personal glory that would be gained as supreme peacemaker of the Middle East. The Watergate scandal had reached a fever pitch by the end of October, and Nixon hoped that a successful Middle East settlement could offset his domestic woes. Kissinger benefitted from Watergate in two ways. First, a domestically weakened Nixon gave his Secretary of State unparalleled authority to represent United States foreign policy abroad.²⁵ Second, Kissinger's time spent flying all over the world to shore up support for American peace initiatives allowed him to distance himself from an administration that was coming apart at the seams.²⁶ Kissinger grasped the opportunity with astonishing vigor. Golda Meir characterized Kissinger's efforts as "superhuman;" he conducted shuttle diplomacy "as though he had never heard of the word 'fatigue.²⁷⁷ The word that Kissinger did keep in mind, of course, was détente. Unbridled by the fear of Soviet nuclear blackmail, Kissinger was able to pursue his objectives in full force as described by Golda Meir. The impact that Kissinger's diplomatic initiatives had on détente will be discussed shortly.

Opening Moves Toward Disengagement

On Saturday, October 27, the cease-fire was holding, and the DEFCON imbroglio between the superpowers had ended. Moscow refrained from a unilateral troop deployment and the Israeli military allowed a resupply of the Third Army – all without either superpower resorting to anything more than bluffs and threats. Kissinger was thus able wrote to the Egyptian President to inquire about a proposed trip to Cairo on November 6. Sadat agreed not only to Kissinger's overture but also to direct talks with the Israelis at the rank of major general at Kilometer 101

²⁵Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 183.

²⁶Anatoly Dobrynin, <u>In Confidence</u>, 306.

²⁷Golda Meir, <u>My Life</u> (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 443.

(on the Suez road where the Israelis were entrenched), which, as Kissinger noted, constituted "the first direct talks between Israeli and Arab representatives since the independence of Israel."²⁸On the following day Israeli and Egyptian military representatives met at the Cairo-Suez road, which effectively ended the war in the Sinai. Shortly thereafter, Sadat announced that he planned to award the American Bechtel Corporation a \$345 million contract to build an oil pipeline that from the Gulf of Suez to the Mediterranean. He seemed to intend to demonstrate to the Americans just how ready he was to do business.²⁹ Kissinger reflected that the United States became "the pivotal factor in the diplomacy."³⁰ Walter Issacson, a largely sympathetic biographer of Kissinger, outlined the momentous American victory the direct talks had engendered:

Henceforth, negotiations would replace armed conflict in the Arab-Israeli dispute. It was, for Kissinger, a major diplomatic success. His strategy, which had seemed foolhardy during the war, had produced just what he had desired: a military stalemate that would require intricate negotiations. The Soviets had lost their influence, and America's historic difficulty in forging ties with Arab nations had been overcome.³¹

Formidable problems, nonetheless, lay before Kissinger. A mutual willingness on the part of Egyptians and Israelis to negotiate did not mean that the ensuing shuttle diplomacy was going to be easy. Before Kissinger embarked on his historic Middle East trip, he recognized the fragile nature of the cease-fire. The Egyptian Third Army was still cut off, and their situation would likely become more dire so long as Israel did not get back its POWs.

The Arab oil embargo, commenced during the height of the fighting in protest of American support to Israel, was wreaking havoc on the industrial alliance of West Europe, Japan

²⁸Henry Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u> (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1982), 610.

²⁹Joseph Kraft, "Letter from Cairo," <u>New Yorker</u>, 17 December 1973, 132.

³⁰Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 612.

³¹Walter Issacson, <u>Kissinger: A Biography</u> (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 537.

and the United States. The former two – entirely dependent on foreign oil sources – were clearly shifting their policy to a more pro-Arab stance, thus demonstrating to the Persian Gulf states that oil could be an effective tool of coercive diplomacy. Israel, always conscious of its own survival, realized that its intransigence could dampen American support, as evidenced by Washington's refusal to allow the destruction of the Third Army. In fact, only after the United States linked further aid to Israel with cooperation in allowing a UN task force to monitor the Third Army did Meir relent.³² In the Israeli view, there was no other country in the world on which it could count. If American policy would not be formed in lockstep with Israeli wishes, they wondered where the concessions would end.³³

To make matters worse, Kissinger had never conducted diplomacy with an Arab nation before. Until the Yom Kippur War, the Cold War had, in recent times, effectively sealed off the United States from the Arab world. Kissinger's first significant contact came on October 29. The acting (soon to be permanent) Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy paid Kissinger a visit at the State Department in preparation for Kissinger's upcoming trip to Egypt. Fahmy's mission, as Kissinger recalled, was removed "the tensions that had characterized Egyptian-American relations for nearly twenty years."³⁴ The Foreign Minister reported exactly what Kissinger wanted to hear. Sadat, he reported, was not interested in destroying Israe. In Middle East politics, this was a small step toward official recognition of the Jewish state.

Détente and the New American Position

Between the time of the war's close and his departure for the Middle East, Kissinger had

³²Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u>, 510.

³³Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 620.

³⁴Ibid., 617.

successfully laid the groundwork that would ensure American leadership in, and Soviet expulsion from, the peace process between the Arabs and Israelis. Soviet influence in the Middle East was based not on socialist-fraternal ideology but on the special geo-strategic characteristics that the dependent Arab states afforded Moscow. The diplomatic efficacy of Soviet weapons had run its course during the war, and now Kissinger was prodigiously attempting to deny the Russians a meaningful role in the negotiation process – a relatively easy task for the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement, given that Sadat had little to no interest in Soviet involvement.

As Washington understood the new system of relaxed superpower tensions that had developed in recent years, it is worth asking: Did American diplomacy after the Yom Kippur War run counter to détente principles? Melvin Laird, former Secretary of Defense under Richard Nixon, described American-Soviet relations in the détente period with these words:

The true question confronting us is not whether it is possible to have instant revolution in our relations with the Soviet Union. It is, rather, whether we can be peaceful adversaries without becoming belligerent antagonists, whether we can resolve what can be resolved and control what cannot. That is what the statement of Basic Principles of Mutual Relations between the United States and the U.S.S.R. agreed to in Moscow on May 29, 1972, is all about.³⁵

As Laird's characterization of the 1972 summit – the pinnacle of détente politics – makes clear, détente was in no way an idealistic path toward superpower solidarity, but merely a recognition that a continuing adversarial relationship ought never to devolve to the point of nuclear war. A contemporary State Department brochure quoted Kissinger's conception of détente: "We will react if a relaxation of tensions is used as a cover to exacerbate conflicts in international trouble spots. The events in the Middle East during October 1973 demonstrated that this...principle cannot be disregarded without endangering the entire U.S.-Soviet relationship."³⁶

³⁵Melvin R. Laird, <u>The Nixon Doctrine</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1972), 6.

³⁶United States, Department of State, <u>The Meaning of Détente</u>, Publication No. 8766 (1974), 2.

Kissinger embarked on the American-mediated Egyptian-Israeli disengagements on a basis that worked within the framework of détente in two ways. The Cold War system continued to be defined as a superpower competition for influence in the Third World, of which the Middle East was one vital region. The adversarial U.S.-Soviet relationship was based largely on this basic determinant, which, after the Yom Kippur War, tipped in favor of the United States. In Washington's view, it was actually Soviet actions before the war that violated the spirit of détente, when Moscow failed to alert the Americans of an imminent Arab attack. The Soviet Union's longstanding opposition to an Arab attack was effectively neutralized when Moscow realized that its Arab clients had received sufficient arms to ignore the Soviets' will. Rather than risk another loss of influence on par with Sadat's famous expulsion of Soviet advisors in the summer of 1972, Moscow decided to support its Arab clients' determination to go to war. The Arab battle plan required a surprise attack, at which point the Soviets decided to sweep détente politics in favor of Moscow's influence in the Middle East.

Because the Soviets had no political sway over Israeli foreign policy, arms supplies to their Arab clients constituted their only viable method of maintaining prestige in the region. Moscow's lack of political influence in the Arab-Israeli conflict explained, as one expert noted, their "interest, not in peace in the Middle East, but in a low-burning, continuing conflict which [gave] them leverage in the Arab world."³⁷ As Kissinger's diplomatic efforts began the path to a true negotiated peace, Moscow denigrated American policy not because American influence in the region violated détente politics; quite the opposite. United States policy following the Yom Kippur War sought to supplant the faulty and newly excluded Soviet policy for

³⁷United States, Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, <u>Hearings: Détente</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1974), 145.

Washington's own interests in peace and political regional influence. As one expert concluded of the new post-war situation, "[Moscow] understands that nothing could assure a diminution of its role or its attractiveness to prospective regional clients than the development of peace and stability in the area."³⁸

Kissinger's efforts produced exactly the effect that Moscow feared, as exemplified by Sadat's meeting with the Soviet ambassador to Egypt Sergei Vinogradov to inform him – only in passing – of the Six-Point process toward disengagement with the Israelis, as brokered by Kissinger.³⁹ Indeed, Moscow was truly relegated to the periphery of the peace process. Perhaps most stunning of all United States diplomatic efforts came when Kissinger visited China on November 10, when Premier Zhou Enlai congratulated the Secretary of State for his role in reducing Soviet prestige in the Arab world.⁴⁰ Zhou's response was exactly the kind that Kissinger's linkage policy had aimed to elicit. With Sino-American relations on the upswing, Moscow found itself further isolated on the international stage, and was thus sufficiently unable to protest meaningfully Washington's new position amid the Arab-Israeli conflict.⁴¹

Not only was U.S. diplomacy bringing both sides of the protracted Middle East conflict within its sphere of influence, the recent loss of the Soviet Union's regional prestige was taking on global proportions. Moreover, all of this happened without any significant threat of nuclear war. Before Kissinger began his historic Middle East trip, he declared, "We must prove to the

 ³⁸United States, Congress, <u>The Middle East</u>, <u>1974</u>: <u>New Hopes</u>, <u>New Challenges</u>, 1974, 42. 76.
 ³⁹Golan <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 137.

⁴⁰Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 683.

⁴¹It is telling that <u>Pravda</u> and <u>Izvestia</u>, the two major news organs of the Soviet Communist Party, gave almost no attention to the Arab-Israel conflict in the months following the Yom Kippur War. For a news summary that typically avoids any honest appraisal of Moscow's diminished position, see "The War in the Middle East – III," reprinted in <u>The Current Digest of the Soviet Press</u> 43 (Columbus, OH: American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, 1973), 7.

Arabs that they are better off dealing with us on a moderate program than dealing with the Russians on a radical program."⁴² Kissinger embarked on his Middle East trip with the intent to exploit the benefits of détente: the superpowers were to remain adversaries, but the unlikelihood of nuclear war helped to ensure the success of his diplomatic goals.

Dr. Kissinger Goes to the Middle East

Kissinger's goals were relatively plausible, at least with Anwar Sadat. One scholar goes so far as to argue, "only the failure of the U.S. to respond to Sadat's overtures prevented a policy transformation prior to the October War....American mediation was what he wanted all along."⁴³ Ironically, the Saudis, who were then engaged in coercive diplomacy, in the form of a major oil embargo that amounted to economic warfare in protest of pro-Zionist American policies, were instrumental in guiding Sadat to seek a political solution under U.S. auspices.⁴⁴ As the war ground to a halt, Sadat sought desperately for a political solution that would finalize a military disengagement between Israeli and Egyptian forces. The Egyptian economy was in ruins, and Sadat was eager to reopen the Suez Canal to attract foreign capital to the region – a feat that could only be accomplished with a durable peace in hand.⁴⁵ Kissinger's step-by-step approach, which demanded incremental concessions from both sides, offered the most promising delivery for a rapid disengagement. The Egyptian leader was all too eager for Kissinger's arrival.

As one observer noted, when Kissinger landed in Cairo, he established "something the

⁴²Ibid., 616.

⁴³Raymond A. Hinnebusch, Jr., <u>Egyptian Politics Under Sadat: The Post-Populist Development of</u> <u>an Authoritarian-Modernizing State</u> (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988), 55.

⁴⁴Kirk J. Beattie, <u>Egypt During the Sadat Years</u> (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 148.

⁴⁵Alvin Z. Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship Since the</u> June War (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 290.

United States had never really possessed before – an Arab policy.^{*46} Kissinger's simple formula stated that the United States was committed to a new even-handed role in the Middle East peace process that promised a balance of Arab territorial demands with Israeli security. Kissinger was greeted at the Cairo airport warmly and met Sadat between a whirlwind tour of the Egyptian Museum and the Great Pyramids . Perhaps these visits were meant to overwhelm the American with Egypt's long history and power. As one scholar noted, the diplomatic objectives of Kissinger and Sadat were so similar that at their meeting, "they rushed in to each other's arms."⁴⁷ Kissinger, always the consummate diplomat, flattered Sadat by asking him how he managed to pull off the brilliant surprise attack that made the Yom Kippur War possible. Afterwards, Kissinger recalled his basic message to Sadat:

Nasser's policy of trying to extort concessions by mobilizing the Third World against us with Soviet support had not worked in the past and would not be permitted to work in the future. Peace in the Middle East could not come about by the defeat of American allies with Soviet arms—as we had just shown. But an Egypt pursuing its own national policy would find us ready to cooperate. We sought no preeminence in Egypt.⁴⁸

Kissinger's narrow definition of "preeminence" in the context of Arab politics attempted to contrast U.S. aims with Soviet aims. Whereas Moscow had armed much of the Arab world as a tradeoff for regional influence and prestige, the United States indeed sought "preeminence" in the sense that American diplomacy would replace Soviet weaponry as the grand peacemaker. Kissinger was not telling Sadat anything the Egyptian president did not know or believe, but he wanted to make sure that Sadat was under no illusions about Kissinger's goals and expectations:

Look, I am a serious person. I shall keep what I can promise, but I shan't promise what I can't

⁴⁶Edward R.F. Sheehan, "How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East," <u>Foreign Policy</u> 22 (Spring, 1976), 17.

⁴⁷John Waterbury, <u>The Egypt of Nasser and Sadat: The Political Economy of Two Regimes</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 401.

⁴⁸Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 638.

keep. If you expect from me broad and sweeping declarations, then I'm not your man....We must put aside irreconcilable differences for the moment. We must build confidence; conceive a negotiating dynamic. We must set in motion small agreements. We must proceed step by step.⁴⁹

The meeting ended with Sadat's acceptance of what came to be known as the Six-Point Agreement, which mandated strict observance of the cease-fire, free transfer of nonmilitary supplies to be managed by UN checkpoints (especially important for the Third Army, which was facing certain ruin at this point), and an immediate transfer of all POWs.⁵⁰ Egypt's acceptance of the plan thus officially set in motion that country's acceptance of the United States as postwar mediator. As William Bundy, an expert on the foreign policy of the Nixon administration, characterized the meeting, Kissinger convinced Sadat to accept the American position "as an act of faith: if Egypt and other Arab nations could make Israel confident of its own security, he could persuade it to make territorial concessions."⁵¹ The peace process was only in its infancy; at the end of the meeting with Sadat, he reminded the Secretary of State, "never forget, Dr. Kissinger. I am making this agreement with the United States, not with Israel."⁵²

Nonetheless, both the Egyptians and Israelis were quickly moving toward a settlement. For the Israelis, the Yom Kippur War turned their entire defense strategy on its head and exposed a gravely flawed intelligence system. With Egypt's crossing of the Suez, the Sinai had become a strategic liability – not an ideal buffer zone. A disengagement, in Israel's view, would give the country sufficient "breathing space" to recover from the multiple traumas created by a bloody, unforseen war. Meanwhile, the Egyptian military was exhausted, and since both sides basically agreed that American diplomacy would pick up where the fighting left off, there was

⁴⁹Sheehan, "How Kissinger Did It," 16.

⁵⁰See Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u>, 511 for full text of the agreement.

⁵¹Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 447.

⁵²Anwar Sadat, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 643.

little need for continued military engagement. Golda Meir accepted the proposal after some initial protests from the Israeli cabinet about the supposedly pro-Arab characteristics of the Six-Point Agreement. On November 11, Israel and Egypt signed the agreement at Kilometer 101, with General Mohamed Abdel Ghany el-Gamasy representing Egypt and General Aharon Yariv representing Israel. As the political scientist Nitza Nachmias observed: "The direct negotiations signified a de facto recognition of Israel, and the representatives not only negotiated issues relevant to the implementation of the cease-fire, but they also exchanged ideas informally about broader and more far-reaching disengagement agreements."⁵³

By the end of Kissinger's trip, he had visited many countries of the Arab world, effectively smoothed over U.S.-Arab tensions (although the oil embargo would remain in place for months to come), and stabilized the cease-fire. On November 15, Egypt and Israel exchanged POWs. The Egyptian-Israeli war was over, under tight American management with no meaningful Soviet contributions to the process, aside from Moscow's noble refusal to escalate the crisis. The stage was thus set for a negotiated peace.

Toward Geneva

One of Kissinger's aims for the Geneva Conference, to be held sometime in mid-December, was to slow down the bilateral talks at Kilometer 101, which threatened to preempt Washington's interest in mediating the conflict. In Kissinger's view, Geneva would formalize the pivotal United States role in the peace process, and luckily for him, Egypt withdrew from the Kilometer 101 talks on November 29 after repeated frustrations in negotiating with the Israelis. The Egyptian Third Army was still cut off, Israel wanted a formal opportunity to demonstrate its

⁵³Nachmias, <u>Transfer of Arms</u>, 64.

willingness to negotiate with Arabs, and Kissinger wanted remain centrally associated with all negotiations – in part because of his vanity, a determinant never too far from his decisions.⁵⁴ At a news conference on December 6, Kissinger outlined his expectations for Geneva:

We believe that once the [Geneva] conference starts, a negotiating process will be underway, which, dealing first with issues of a military nature and then turning to the overall settlement, will bring about a settlement in accordance with Resolution 242. And the United States, as I have stated repeatedly, will use its influence to bring about such a settlement.⁵⁵

On December 7 Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan visited Washington, D.C., to discuss the plan for Geneva. Dayan stated that the full disengagement need not wait until after the Israeli national elections scheduled for December 31. Kissinger, tellingly, warned against excessively swift actions, lest the Arab world assume an exaggerated American leverage over Israeli foreign policy. Dayan proposed a disengagement that would ultimately be based on a return to the Israeli borders prior to the Six-Day War, which would be commenced by a withdrawal approximately 30 miles east of the Suez Canal in return for Egyptian demilitarization and a pledge to reopen the Canal.⁵⁶ Sadat, with some minor haggling, agreed to Dayan's proposals, which formed the basis of the full disengagement on January 18. So as not to appear as if he were conceding to Israeli plans for force limitations on Arab soil, Sadat stipulated that he would make agreements only through Kissinger, to which the Secretary of State happily agreed.⁵⁷

Warm relations between the Egyptians and Israelis were far from being realized, and in early December, full participation at Geneva remained highly uncertain. Military skirmishes had not

⁵⁴Issacson, <u>Kissinger</u>, 542.

 ⁵⁵Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No. 1800 (1973), 755.
 ⁵⁶Safran <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u>, 515.

⁵⁷Tad Szulc, <u>The Illusion of Peace: Foreign Policy in the Nixon Years</u> (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 758.

yet completely subsided between the Egyptian and Israeli forces. U.S. policy was determined to halt Egypt from destroying the Deservoir pocket, where an Israeli division was vulnerable to destruction. Kissinger arrived in Cairo on December 11, partly to warn that an Egyptian attack on Deservoir might bring a direct attack with U.S. forces. Referring to the heavy military losses sustained by Israel at the beginning of the war, Kissinger threatened Sadat: "The Pentagon will strike at you. The Pentagon will strike you for one reason: Soviet weapons have once before defeated U.S. weapons and, in accordance with our global strategy, we can't allow it to happen again."⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Israel threatened to boycott the Geneva Conference if the thorny Palestinian issue were to be raised there. Nixon's subsequent direct threat to Golda Meir, which was a textbook utilization of coercive diplomacy, underscored the determination of U.S. policy to keep the peace process on track under its own management:

I want to say to you in all solemnity that if Israel now fails to take a favorable 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.⁵⁹

In other words, the Israelis would not be able to count on future American support if they did not come to Geneva. The main reason for U.S. insistence for attendance at Geneva under a stable military situation was because Washington was poised to take full advantage of the diminished Soviet position in Egypt. As Kissinger recounted, Sadat was planning to "gradually eliminate the last vestiges of the Soviet presence....He would let the Soviet-Egyptian Friendship Treaty slide into desuetude or cancel it."⁶⁰ Sadat could not carry out his plans until negotiations were settled. On December 14, Kissinger expounded on the since-ended Kilometer

⁵⁸Henry Kissinger, as cited in Anwar el-Sadat, <u>In Search of Identity: An Autobiography</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 268-269.

⁵⁹Richard Nixon, as cited in Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 759. ⁶⁰Ibid., 768.

101 talks, which, along with the Dayan plan, would form the basis for the January 18 disengagement: thinned-out Egyptian and Israeli forces with the former firmly planted on the Sinai, and a UN buffer force placed in the middle.

The following day, the UN released Security Council Resolution 344, titled "Peace Conference in the Middle East." Article 2 read: "[The Security Council] expresses its confidence that the Secretary-General will play a full and effective role at the [Geneva] Conference, in accordance with the relevant resolutions fo the Security Council, and that he will preside over its proceedings if the parties so desire."⁶¹ The hopes expressed in the UN resolution may as well have been intended for Kissinger, not the Secretary-General. The Secretary of State arrived in Damascus that same day to attempt to convince the Syrians to join the conference. Kissinger's objective ultimately failed, although Syria's boycott was not necessarily a protest against the entire peace process per se, but reflective of their negative attitude to Geneva in particular. In any event, U.S.-Syrian relations did not blossom after the war – Syrian leader Hafez al-Asad was not nearly so interested as Sadat in reorienting his foreign policy toward the West. Moscow responded by redirecting much of its efforts to exert influence on Damascus once Sadat made the Soviets unwelcome in Egypt.⁶² Kissinger's trip to Israel on December 16 and 17 proved more fruitful; Israel accepted the invitation to Geneva on the condition that there would be no mention of the Palestinians.⁶³

Despite significant problems, Israel and Egypt agreed to attend the conference. On December 20, in Geneva, one day before the start of the conference, Kissinger dined with Soviet

⁶¹United Nations. 2003. <u>U.N. Security Council Resolutions, 1973</u>,

 (9 November 2003).

⁶²Richard C. Thornton, <u>The Nixon-Kissinger Years: Reshaping America's Foreign Policy</u> (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 253.

⁶³Quandt, <u>Peace Process</u>, 196.

Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, who expressed frustration at the growing Soviet irrelevance during the peace process.⁶⁴ Moscow's participation at Geneva would satisfy (if only symbolically) the Brezhnev-Nixon agreement of October 21, which guaranteed the Soviets a role in the post-war negotiating process.⁶⁵ The Soviet Union's rather perfunctory presence at the conference was basically a necessary function of détente policy, (in this formal setting, Washington deferred to the Basic Principles Agreement of May, 1972, a document that opposed unilateralism) and was in no way a reflection of Moscow's position in post-Yom Kippur War period.

The Calculation of Geneva

The Israeli leaders were skeptical of the Geneva Conference from the moment it was put forth as a negotiating forum. As Golda Meir recounted,

Neither I nor most other Israelis really believed, in our heart of hearts, that we would **Game** va with peace treaties in our hands, and we didn't go there with many illusions or in a state of euphoria. Still, the Egyptians and Jordanians had agreed to sit in the same room with us, and that, in itself, was something that they had never consented to do before.⁶⁶

The Israeli position was reasonable enough; as one scholar noted, Kissinger's real intent was to finally eliminate Moscow from the negotiations during a conference that would only perpetuate the failure of solving the Arab-Israeli dispute under formal circumstances.⁶⁷ The real peace process would be conducted during Kissinger's famous shuttle diplomacy, characterized by informal one -on-one contacts with all sides.

⁶⁴Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 794.

⁶⁵Ishaq I. Ghanayem and Alden H. Voth, <u>The Kissinger Legacy: American-Middle East Policy</u> (New York: Praeger, 1984), 126.

⁶⁶Meir, <u>My Life</u>, 454.

⁶⁷Bundy, <u>A Tangled Web</u>, 448.

After a minor problem concerning seating arrangements, the conference began on December 21.⁶⁸ Kissinger's opening speech managed to erase any remaining political credibility the Soviets may have retained with Sadat, who had found in the Secretary of State a new ally in delivering exactly what he hoped the Yom Kippur War would force. Kissinger declared: "Our final objective is the implementation in all its parts of Resolution 242. This goal has the full support of the United States."⁶⁹ The American goal of realizing Resolution 242 was not new, of course, but after six years of failed UN attempts to secure its own policies, Kissinger effectively assumed the central mediating position under UN auspices. At Geneva, the Secretary of State managed to solve the self-defeating Arab and Israeli positions that had made negotiation before the war impossible.⁷⁰ Israel had always sought direct negotiations with Arab leaders before considering any territorial concessions, and the Arabs refused direct negotiations as long as Israel was occupying Arab territory. Kissinger appealed to both sides, not by scolding their positions, but through flattery. He was a natural mediator, which is exactly how the United States wanted to contrast its position with that of the Soviets. Kissinger declared: "The great tragedies of history occur not when right confronts wrong, but when two rights face each other."71

Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban told the Arab delegations what would amount to the first major Israeli pledge to trade land for security – the very bargain Jerusalem shunned because of the security they assumed that the occupied land would guarantee: "We are ready for a territorial compromise which would serve the legitimate interests of all signatory states. In this

⁶⁸The final position had the United States between Egypt and Jordan. The Soviet Union sat between Israel on one side and an empty table for the Syrians, in case they decided to attend later on.

⁶⁹Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Special Report: U.S. Policy in</u> <u>the Middle East December 1973-November 1974</u>, Bureau of Public Affairs Publication No. 8799 (1975), 12.

⁷⁰United States Institute of Peace, <u>Making Peace Among Arabs and Israelis: Lessons from Fifty</u> <u>Years of Negotiating Experience</u> (1991), 8.

⁷¹Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Special Report</u>, 13.

matter, as in others, there must be a basic readiness on all sides to make such concessions as do not threaten vital security interests."⁷² Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy, for his part, advocated sovereignty for all nations of the Middle East – of which Israel, by implication, was one. Fahmy's subtle delivery was yet another hint from Egypt that his country was ready to move toward normalized relations with a nemesis of 25 years that had never before enjoyed political recognition from the Arabs.

The Geneva Conference ended after two days, despite the impressive political exchanges. As one observer characterized the conference, "the only result was that Egypt and Israel were urged to begin discussing the disengagement of their forces on both sides of the Suez Canal."⁷³ Geneva ended exactly as Kissinger had hoped: promising rhetoric between Egypt and Israel without any immediate substance that could be linked to Moscow's presence.

Toward the Shuttle

A December, 1973, article in Egypt's semi-official *Al-Ahram* newspaper outlined the connection between the war and the ability to negotiate: "Before the war the Arabs had no cards to play in negotiation...it had become fixed in the world's mind that they would never fight...after the war all that had changed."⁷⁴ The Arab "cards" were crucial for the successful execution of Kissinger's diplomacy, which required both sides to be in a position of relative strength so that concessions would be tolerable. Israel, after enjoying six years of unchallenged hegemony, was now amenable – at least in principle – to negotiations that could eventually lead to full realization of Arab

⁷²Abba Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, (New York: Random House, 1977), 550.

⁷³Szulc, <u>The Illusion of Peace</u>, 749.

⁷⁴Raymond William Baker, <u>Egypt's Uncertain Revolution Under Nasser and Sadat</u> (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 138.

demands in exchange for the regional recognition that had always eluded the young country since its creation in 1948. Most important, all mediating rested in the hands of the United States. As Alvin Rubinstein, a scholar, colorfully noted,

With stunning alacrity, Sadat proceeded to plump all it-s eggs ostentatiously in Kissinger's basket, leaving the Soviets empty handed and furious. They had provisioned Egypt, shielded it from certain defeat, and imperiled their détente with the United States, only to find their relations with Sadat worse than ever and the Soviet government relegated to the sidelines in the negotiations that were under way for a Middle East settlement.⁷⁵

The term "shuttle diplomacy" was coined by Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco, as a Boeing 747 more or less became an airborne United States Department of State that flew back and forth between Egypt and Israel during much of January 1974. Whereas the formal setting of the Geneva Conference mirrored the bureaucratic style of the failed Rogers and Jarring missions, under United States and UN auspices, respectively, the face to face nature of shuttle diplomacy would deny Moscow any meaningful influence and allow both Israel and Egypt to offer incremental concessions to each other through the personal mediation of Kissinger.

As Israeli Foreign Minister Eban noted, there was no precedent for shuttle diplomacy, which was truly a one man show, whose leader "showed a candid lack of reverence for the professional skills at the disposal of the State Department."⁷⁶ When Kissinger wrote in a 1974 essay that "a scientific revolution has, for all practical purposes, removed technical limits from the exercise of power in foreign policy," he may very well have had his Boeing in mind.⁷⁷ Kissinger's plane was fully equipped for all incoming and outgoing communication, and rather than delegate other diplomatic assignments to subordinates back at Foggy Bottom, (concern with the rest of the world quickly took a back seat to Middle East affairs, which monopolized

⁷⁵Rubinstein, <u>Red Star on the Nile</u>, 288.

⁷⁶Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 558.

⁷⁷Kissinger, <u>American Foreign Policy</u>, 54.

Kissinger's attention for the next several months) the State Department and its responsibilities followed Kissinger around the Middle East.

Kissinger defined the objectives of shuttle diplomacy at a State Department news conference on December 27: "We are not approaching the problem of negotiations by drawing up a list of concessions that either side should make. What we have attempted to do is discover, as honestly as we could, in these trips through the Middle East, what the minimum requirements of each side were and then attempt to bring these into some relation to each other."⁷⁸ Kissinger believed the Rogers Plan of 1969 failed precisely because it was based on a sweeping and final agreement – something neither side was willing to accept then or in late 1973.⁷⁹ As I. William Zartman put it, the idea of the step-by-step process is "eating bit by bit what cannot be swallowed all at once, and it is the idea of building both mutual concessions and mutual trust upon the previous partial agreement."⁸⁰ Kissinger believed that the commitment to peace in both Egypt and Israel was fragile – the path must be forged incrementally. While Moscow's radical policy of maximum demands for Israeli evacuation of the occupied territories had failed, sweeping diplomatic gestures could shatter the balance and bring the Arab-Israeli conflict back to its prewar deadlock.

Additionally, Kissinger's method carefully abstained from pressing American wishes on either side. As Nadav Safran, a Middle East specialist put it, "Such a role would have brought about the end of negotiations the moment one of the parties refused to go along with a position of his, and would have put the United States under the obligation to side actively with the party

⁷⁸Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Bulletin</u> No.1804 (1974), 55.
 ⁷⁹William B. Quandt, <u>Decade of Decisions</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 209.
 ⁸⁰Zartman, "Explaining Disengagement," in Rubin, ed., <u>Dynamics of Third Party Intervention</u>,

that had agreed with it or to risk losing credibility and usefulness.^{#51} Where Egypt and Israel haggled over kilometers and force strengths as the major foreign policy issues, the American interest was far broader and implicit throughout.⁸² So long as Kissinger was doing the mediating at the exclusion of the Soviets (and keeping the peace process moving forward), the centrality of the American position *was* Washington's interest. The United States was happy to see real progress made in the Arab-Israeli conflict, which had been at a standstill during the entire interwar period. Kissinger's opposition to the Rogers proposals (and for that matter, all forms of sweeping diplomacy) was finally vindicated, as his claim made throughout Nixon's first term – that peace was impossible so long as the Soviets advocated all Arab demands – came to fruition, when Egyptian and Israeli officials negotiated directly for the first time in history, without any input from Moscow.

In sum, Kissinger's step-by-step method in the Middle East was in keeping with his larger conception of international relations. As Kissinger biographers Bernard Kalb and Marvin Kalb noted, Kissinger based his foreign policy on the concept of linkage, which "was an up-to-date application of Kissinger's theories about the balance of power."⁸³ The post-war situation in the Middle East offered the Secretary of State a microscopic application of his grand theory: after the Yom Kippur War Israel and the Arabs mutually recognized their rough balance of power. As Kissinger's conception of linkage held, a balance of power was required for the basis of negotiations, which in turn would provide lasting stability. As G. Warren Nutter, a former Assistant Secretary of Defense, noted, Kissinger's application of shuttle diplomacy could not

⁸¹Safran, "Engagement in the Middle East," 59.

⁸²United States Congress, Senate, Committee on Foreign Relations, <u>Hearings: Priorities for Peace</u> <u>in the Middle East</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1975), 144-145.

⁸³Bernard Kalb and Marvin Kalb, <u>Kissinger</u> (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), 102.

succeed, "unless a stable order is achievable, the quest for peace is bound to be self-defeating. Hence the statement has the paramount duty of creating and preserving stability."⁸⁴ Kissinger saw himself as the crucial link in a series of Middle East events that was on a clear progression toward peace – all of which was happening at the exclusion of Moscow. It was not an opportunity to be missed.

From the Shuttle to the Disengagement

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan visited Washington on January 4 to present Jerusalem's plan for disengagement. He proposed that Egypt would keep the land it had won, while Israel would move back approximately 20 kilometers from the Canal and a UN force would separate the two forces. On a map, the Israeli government was offering a few kilometers – quantitatively a barely significant amount. In symbolic terms the offer was momentous. Egypt was about to receive a firm hold in the Sinai and all of the Suez Canal area, thus fulfilling a small portion of Sadat's major war objective. The offer, however, was more a reflection on Israel's internal turmoil than anything else. Jerusalem needed a quick disengagement as badly as Cairo. Whereas Sadat was eager to reopen the Suez Canal, as mentioned above, the reservists currently serving in the Israeli military had cut the domestic work force by a quarter, thus ensuring severe decline in the gross domestic product which was further harmed by Israel's increased defense expenditures.⁸⁵ Like Egypt's own position, Israel's eagerness to disengage boded well for Kissinger's plan.

Kissinger began his famous shuttle on January 11. His first stop was Aswan, the town

⁸⁴G. Warren Nutter, <u>Kissinger's Grand Design</u> (Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1975), 2.

⁸⁵Safran, <u>Israel: The Embattled Ally</u>, 522.

where Sadat was currently residing. The Egyptian leader was so keen on disengagement that he offered Kissinger a self-imposed deadline to travel around the region to convince other Arab leaders of America's good intentions, which, he hoped, would end the oil embargo and strengthen Nixon's precarious position in Washington. Remarkably, Sadat assured Kissinger that Egypt's desire for disengagement stood irrespective of the Syrians' intransigence. As Kissinger recounted, "Sadat was convinced that unless Egypt proceeded alone, President Hafez al-Asad would always find some pretext for delay or put forward impossible demands. A Sinai agreement would thus, in Sadat's view, help Syria face its realities."⁸⁶

Kissinger's most difficult task for the disengagement centered on force reduction levels. By the middle of January, Israel and Egypt agreed to positioning, acceptable weaponry, and the presence of a UN buffer zone. Kissinger managed to convince Sadat, against the advice of his senior military officers, to reduce Egypt's manpower on the front from 70,000 to 7,500. As Abba Eban recalled, "It was this decision by Sadat that led me, for the first time, to reflect that a substantive change of direction might have taken place in Egyptian territory."⁸⁷ On January 13, Kissinger sensed that the disengagement was close to completion. He proposed that three letters should be drafted to formalize the process – one each for Egypt, Israel, and the United States. The lack of any Soviet involvement was striking, especially since there was no attempt on Kissinger's part to maintain a low-level atmosphere about the negotiations.⁸⁸ After some relatively minor quibbling about force positioning, both Israel and Egypt agreed to the essence of what Moshe Dayan had proposed in Washington earlier in the month. Each side pledged to

⁸⁶Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 815.

⁸⁷Eban, <u>An Autobiography</u>, 561.

⁸⁸Sheehan, "How Kissinger Did It," 32-33.

reduce its strength to an identical level: 7,000 troops, 36 artillery pieces, and 30 tanks.⁸⁹ In four days of shuttling between Aswan and Jerusalem, Kissinger managed to secure an agreement between two hostile but willing adversaries. Upon Sadat's January 14 commitment to proceed with the disengagement, Kissinger summarized (and not without a tinge of gloating): "The disengagement, above all, would mark Egypt's passage from reliance on the Soviet Union to partnership (in Sadat's phrase) with the United States; and it would give us a major stake in the peace process that would be further magnified by having it be seen to emerge from an American proposal."⁹⁰

During a White House speech announcing the disengagement, Nixon declared:

In the past generation there have been, as we know, four wars in the Mideast, followed by uneasy truces. [The disengagement], I would say, is the first significant step toward a permanent peace in the Mideast...[o]ur role has been one of being of assistance to both parties to bring them together, to help narrow differences...I think that we could probably say that the area of the world that potentially is the one in which the great powers can be brought into confrontation is the Mideast, that area more than any other is in that category, as recent events have indicated.⁹¹

It is perhaps too cynical to interpret Nixon's triumphal tone merely in terms of his need to seek respite from Watergate. The significance of the disengagement, and for that matter the concept of "permanent peace," is open to debate. But the Yom Kippur War would be the last between Egypt and Israel.

On January 19, Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko predictably declared that the disengagement was the result of the Geneva conference. He gave no mention of Kissinger's

⁸⁹United States Institute of Peace, <u>Making Peace Among Arabs</u>, xxii. For the full text of the Sinai Disengagement see United States Congress, House, <u>The Search for Peace in the Middle East: Documents</u> and Statements, 1967-1979, report prepared for a subcommittee on Europe and the Middle East. 1979, 1.

⁹⁰Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 825.

⁹¹Richard Nixon, as cited in United States, Department of State, Office of the Historian, <u>The</u> <u>Quest for Peace: Principal United States Public Statements and Related Documents on the Arab-Israeli</u> <u>Peace Process, 1967-1983</u> (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984), 51

efforts in the Middle East. ⁹² The messages between Anwar Sadat and Golda Meir, as relayed by Kissinger on the day of the disengagement, belie a much more honest assessment. Meir's note to Sadat read, "I, for my part, will do my best to establish trust and understanding between us." Sadat's response bordered on the sublime: "I am today taking off my military uniform – I never expect to wear it again except for ceremonial occasions. Tell her [Golda] that is the answer to her letter."⁹³

Even if leaders found little reason to trust one another, it was in the interest of both to commit fully to a disengagement. Sadat was now in the vitally important position to rebuild the cities along the Suez Canal, which would virtually guarantee that Egypt would not launch another war.⁹⁴ Israel was on track to reformulate its security policy, which would now rest on something other than military force. A reporter for the *New York Times* observed on Januaray 18: "It is the first time that Israel has placed her faith in something other that her own strength."⁹⁵ As opposed to the American weapons airlift to Israel during the war, and the Six Point Agreement shortly thereafter, the January 18 disengagement, as one scholar argues "represented the first real attempt on the part of the two [countries] since the beginning of the Yom Kippur War to accommodate mutually their interests and aims"⁹⁶ The disengagement thus boosted the level of trust the Israeli leadership placed in Kissinger, which would be crucial for the upcoming (and far more difficult) Syrian disengagement.

Throughout the peace process, Kissinger displayed his famous realpolitik, which was best

⁹²Golan, <u>Yom Kippur and After</u>, 170-171.

⁹³Kissinger, <u>Years of Upheaval</u>, 844.

⁹⁴Szculc, <u>The Illusion of Peace</u>, 759.

⁹⁵"Israel Approves Agreement to Separate Israeli and Egyptian Armies," New York Times, 18 January 1974.

⁹⁶Safran, Israel: The Embattled Ally, 527.

exemplified at the Geneva Conference on December 21: "Today there is hope for the future, for the conflict is no longer looked upon entirely in terms of irreconcilable absolutes. The passionate ideologies of the past have, in part at least, been replaced by a recognition that all the peoples concerned have earned, by their sacrifice, a long period of peace."⁹⁷ The Secretary of State was speaking explicitly of the mutual hatred and fear that had characterized Arab-Israel relations since 1948. But he was also implicitly declaring that Soviet influence in Egypt – which could not exist without perpetual tension - would begin its decline as Moscow had no natural presence in the peace process. As one scholar observed, the Middle East events of late 1973 and early 1974 demonstrated a profound shift from Professor Kissinger of the 1950s to Secretary Kissinger of the 1970s. In A World Restored, Kissinger argued "diplomacy, the art of restraining the exercise of powers, cannot function in [a revolutionary] environment."98 With the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement of January 1974 – the first step on a long and shaky path from revolution to peace - Kissinger proved himself wrong. His was a remarkable performance in a region that measured success incrementally.⁹⁹ Comprehensive and lasting Middle East peace remained elusive, and Kissinger understood that as well as anyone.

As far as American policy was concerned, Moscow's exclusion from the peace process was at once a victory for United States interests, and a requirement for peace itself. If détente is to be judged by its fundamental criterion, the avoidance of nuclear war proved to be a final

⁹⁷Henry Kissinger, as cited in United States, Department of State, <u>Special Report</u>, 12.

⁹⁸Cited in Amos Perlmutter, "Crisis Management: Kissinger's Middle East Negotiations (October 1973-June 1974)," <u>International Studies Quarterly</u> 19 (September 1975), 340.

⁹⁹Even John Lewis Gaddis, a prominent critic of Henry Kissinger, singled out his impressive record in Middle East diplomacy amid an otherwise questionable – even morally reprehensible – tenure as de facto head of American foreign policy in the Nixon and Ford administrations. See John Lewis Gaddis, "Rescuing Choice from Circumstance: The Statecraft of Henry Kissinger," in Gordon A. Craig and Francis L. Loewenheim, eds., <u>The Diplomats: 1939-1979</u> (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 584.

vindication of the viability of relaxed superpower tensions. Yet, beyond this determinant, Kissinger made clear that détente was not tantamount to political cooperation. When Anwar Sadat reestablished diplomatic relations with Washington, Kissinger grasped the opportunity finally to diminish Soviet prestige in the Middle East. It had been his strategy long before the détente summits of 1972 and 1973.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

As the first superpower proxy conflict to follow the Soviet-American summits of 1972 and 1973 (which collectively constitute the high point of the Cold War détente), the Yom Kippur War inevitably put, as the title of this thesis suggests, détente to "the test." The criteria used in this thesis to judge superpower behavior in the Middle East were a construct of détente summitry.

As the historical record clearly indicates, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union held fast to the guarantees each country made to the other. An objective reading of the agreements to emerge from the Soviet-American détente, studied against the backdrop of the policies of each nation toward their Middle East clients in late 1973, revealed, to the author, an astonishing lack of regard of the value of an international promise. This yields important lessons for understanding international relations.

Diplomatic agreements do not always enjoy the backing of a third party guarantor. Those signed by the superpower rivals depended upon an unreliable mixture of incentive and fear. Each superpower took every available opportunity to improve its own standing at the expense of the other when incentive of advantage appeared to outweigh the fear of confrontation. Although leaders of both countries declared détente to be something greater than it actually was, the shared impetus to relax tensions and to avoid possible catastrophe clearly succeeded in downgrading the threat of nuclear war. Consequently, both the Soviet Union and the United States perceived an increased latitude in continuing the political conflict that remained at the heart of the Cold War.

For the many reasons discussed throughout this thesis, the Middle East offered an

unparalleled strategic advantage to the superpower that enjoyed the most influence there. It was, in the Cold War system, the jewel of the non-aligned world. The Arab-Israeli conflict – though mostly indigenous in nature – conveniently served the superpowers' interests as a vehicle to win friends in the region. As Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy demonstrated, there was nothing inevitable about the evolution of the client-patron relationships that had added a global character to a regional conflict. American-Israeli and Soviet-Arab relations were far rockier than the positive, problem-free appearance of public diplomacy. Americans spoke of an "unbreakable bond" and a "moral commitment" to protect Israel; Soviets declared that "socialist fraternity" impelled Moscow's support of the Arabs. All were ideological window dressing designed as a veneer for strategic self-interest.

The Arabs and Israelis, likewise, proved to be unwilling participants in the superpowers' designs, when doing so did not immediately satisfy their own particular goals. Each resented, and resisted, being treated as pawns in the Cold War. The cycle of violence between Israel and Egypt, crudely abetted by the arms/influence policies of their superpower patrons, was finally broken in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. As a result, the stalemate between Israel and Egypt caused both to emerge as winners – a rarity in the history of conflict.

Moscow ultimately lost much of its investment in building Soviet prestige in the region. The United States, in fulfilling the Cold War objective of reducing Soviet influence, would feel the aftershocks of its expanded and largely unwelcome Middle Eastern presence in later years. Yet the superpowers, too, emerged from the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflagration as winners, and for this they had détente to thank. If the policy of relaxed tensions had failed to stave off the Yom Kippur War, the sincere, and shared aversion to nuclear confrontation – as codified by the fundamental purpose of détente – prevailed. Even strategic self-interest had its limits.

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