CONTAINING THE PEACE PROCESS:
HENRY KISSINGER AND THE ARAB-ISRAELI CONFLICT

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Introduction

No matter from what angle one is looking, Washington’s bold engagement in the Middle East “peace process,” established by Henry Kissinger during the 1970s, is hotly contested. This regional dispute is arguably the most talked about, debated, and examined topic in contemporary American foreign affairs. The immense amount of information on the subject and the competing opinions sometimes represented as truth often confuse our understanding of the relationship between the United States and the Arab-Israeli conflict.

What makes this problem so important that it is constantly held under the nation’s microscope. One could answer that the Arab-Israeli conflict is tied to our biblical past since the land being fought over is linked to the historic roots of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, one could answer more accurately that the Arab-Israeli conflict is very much a product of the twentieth century: the rise of nationalism, two world wars, the Holocaust, Zionism, Pan-Arabism, decolonization, and the spread of liberal and democratic values including the principle of self-determination. Also, as oil became an existential necessity for modern societies, the Middle East’s possession of over half of the world’s known “conventional” petroleum reserves transformed the region into one of the most consequential for the economic stability of the industrialized world. This has led to the Middle East’s potential to jeopardize the global economy and tilt the international balance of power.
The pivotal role that oil played in determining the victors of the Second World War is a historical lesson well learned.¹ Hence, during the subsequent period of the Cold War, the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, competed for the control of the Middle East’s vast energy reserves as well as its key trading routes which connect the continents of Europe and Asia. The affect of this imperial penetration has witnessed an astronomical increase in arms sales to Arab nations and Israel, creating a volatile environment where a sudden spark in the Arab-Israeli conflict could tumble the West perilously into a state of economic stagnation. The 1973 OPEC oil embargo attests to that scenario. Other even worse situations could be likely as well; the Middle East remains an area with a potential to ignite a conflict of possible nuclear proportions.

Since World War II, U.S. policymakers have consistently produced foreign policy doctrines and documents defining America’s role in the world as an unsurpassed economic and military power. They have interpreted this role as America’s quest to dominate the world system that the United States created in the post-1945 era. Various policymakers throughout the years have indicated that this could be accomplished by securing one of the most critical geopolitical regions on the planet -- the Persian Gulf. Some notable policies developed during the time include the Eisenhower Doctrine which recognized the Middle East as “vital” to the American national interests and the Carter Doctrine that authorized the use of the U.S. military against “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region.” Similarly, the most recent George W.

Bush and Barack Obama doctrines have marked the spread of democracy in the Middle East -- by force and preventative wars if necessary -- as a key American objective in the region. It could be said that throughout the Cold War and into the twenty-first century the political management and defense of the Persian Gulf in the Middle East, if only illusory, have become chief factors in achieving U.S. grand foreign policy designs.

Realizing that American power was likely to decline gradually over time, U.S. policy planners have nonetheless aimed to sustain the United States’ top position in the world long into the future. Former U.S. National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinsky, also coauthor of the Carter Doctrine, put out this strategy in his book, *The Grand Chessboard* (1997). Referring to the greater Middle East as “Eurasia,” Brzezinski writes, “What happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America’s global primacy and to America’s historic legacy.”² In addition, Brzezinski states that the United States must “manage the rise” of other powers so as not to create a “hostile coalition” against American interests in Eurasia, which could then threaten U.S. predominance within the international state system.³

“Insofar as presidents and their advisors saw a way to resolve the potential conflict among American interests in the Middle East,” writes eminent scholar and former member of the National Security Council, William B. Quandt,

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³ Ibid, 198.
“it was by promoting the Arab-Israeli peace process.”⁴ When the state of Israel was created in 1948 it had effectively displaced the majority Arab population living in Palestine, heightening the volatility and instability of the region. During the Cold War, Washington officials believed that an unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict would lead to ongoing violence in the Middle East and give the upper hand to the Soviet Union and the Arab radical factions it financially backed and militarily supported. If this could take place, the United States, its allies, and its client states in the region would be greatly weakened while simultaneously endangering the region’s oil supplies to the West. By mediating the Arab-Israeli conflict, U.S. policymakers presumed they could increase Israel’s regional security and reduce the Soviet Union’s influence in the Middle East. At the same time, an American-led peace process would strengthen U.S. ties with leaders of oil-rich Arab states who possessed a vested interest in bringing about a comprehensive peace for the ousted Palestinian people.

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In this thesis, I do not pretend to do justice to the diverse complexities of the Arab-Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the context of the United States’ mission to guide the respective parties towards a peace. However, what I attempt to accomplish in the following narrative and analysis is determining the root causes of America’s involvement in the region as well as pinpointing the origins of the United States’ decisive role as the sole arbiter of the Middle East peace process.

Chapter one is an account of the history of the United States’ relations with the Middle East from the end of the World War II to the beginning of Richard Nixon’s presidency. I believe that to understand the major American involvement in the peace process requires not only a chronicle of the events, but also an explanation of the factors and circumstances that have motivated and shaped the United States’ foreign policy in the region since 1945. Chapter 2 is a guide to Henry Kissinger’s diplomatic maneuvers during the 1973 October War and how he conducted the unfolding crisis and played it to his strategy’s advantage. This particular chapter will demonstrate how Kissinger directed American diplomacy into a dominant position in the Middle East by minimizing Soviet political influences and taking charge of the postwar peace talks. Chapter 3 pays close attention to the historical record of Kissinger’s subsequent shuttle diplomacy and disengagement negotiations where he developed the existing framework for the United States’ modern day peace process.

Although the narrative begins at the end of WWII, it was the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict and Henry Kissinger’s diplomatic operations during and after that particular war that is the focus of this thesis. Significantly, this student of American foreign policy has come to see the 1973 October War, one of the many conflicts that have occurred in the Middle East, as a decisive event that has influenced present-day relations between the United States and its efforts to secure a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It would appear that much of the perennial challenges of the Arab-Israeli peace process in U.S. foreign policy are a product of Kissinger’s diplomacy. This was indeed the natural
consequence of America’s “special” relationship with Israel and its unilateralist approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict in the face of the Cold War rivalries of the time. Ironically, the initial framework of the American-led peace process, established by Henry Kissinger during his time as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, would create in the United States one of the major obstacles in achieving a bonafide peace in the Middle East.
Chapter One:

A Brief Account of American Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1968

When the Second World War ended, the United States had come to possess half of the world’s wealth and the American people, climbing out of the depths of the Great Depression, were eager to enter a more prosperous time. Others elsewhere were not so fortunate; major cities across Europe and the Soviet Union were razed to the ground as millions of people were displaced throughout the wreckage. On the other side of the Pacific Ocean, imperial Japan was under direct American control. It would take at least another decade for the island nation to recover from the massive bombings of their cities and two nuclear attacks. With the destruction of the world’s foremost power centers, the United States ascended into a dominant economic and military position unprecedented in modern history.

Even before the war was over, top officials in Washington foresaw the global dimensions awaiting U.S. foreign policy initiatives. In a similar fashion, President Franklin D. Roosevelt envisioned the creation of a new epoch for America and its relationship with the world. The principles set forth in the 1941 Atlantic Charter guided his thinking; they were based on Wilsonian universalism, national self-determination, and a global trading system that was to be implemented within the confines of an expanding liberal-capitalist ideology.\(^5\)

Known as Pax Americana, this ideology Roosevelt put forth involved the rest of

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the world being remade in the image of America, which, according to political scientist Simon Bromley, represented “one of the most radical experiments in history: the unification of the entire world under a dominion centered on America.”

However, when F.D.R. died in April 1945, the newly inaugurated President Harry Truman had been kept mostly uninformed about Roosevelt’s foreign policy plans. All that the thirty-third president was left with was an obscure blueprint for how his predecessor intended to construct an international system built on American power and world leadership. Still, like Roosevelt, Truman was concerned about the Soviet Union’s political meddling in Europe, its reluctance to support the creation of the International Monetary Fund, and its hesitation to accept the U.S. dollar as a universal currency. Not surprisingly, the Truman administration questioned the political ambitions of the Soviet leader, Josef Stalin. Would he cooperate with the United States or would Stalin be a threat to American global interests? As Truman settled into his presidency, he began to develop a framework based on Roosevelt’s vision and, in the process, formulated policies that had the potential to affect every corner of the Earth.

When a telegram written by an American diplomat in Moscow named George F. Kennan landed on President Truman’s desk, it seemed to solidify the president’s viewpoint. Known as “The Long Telegram,” it has become seen as the origin of America’s Cold War containment policy. Kennan described the Soviet Union as acting on a Russian historical inclination to expand its territory.

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6 Ibid.
He posited that the Soviet Union had no intention of cooperating with capitalist countries because of its “neurotic view of world affairs” and portrayed Stalin as a leader fixated on advancing Marxist-Leninist ideology throughout the world. Ultimately, Kennan recommended an American policy of a “patient but firm and vigilant containment of Russian expansive tendencies” where the U.S. should exert pressure “at a series of constantly shifting geographical and political points, corresponding to shifts and maneuvers of Soviet policy.”

Conceptually, Kennan’s containment strategy was framed as a policy that was essentially defensive in nature that sought to restrain the “subversive” character of the Soviet Union. Historians of the Cold War such as William Appleman Williams and Gabriel Kolko, however, point out the discrepancy between the American narrative that describes the Soviet Union as the main aggressor of the Cold War and the actual historical record, which seems to belie this somewhat one-sided construction of reality.

Indeed, the question over which superpower started the Cold War has been amply debated over the years and whether Kennan’s analysis was accurate does not deserve discussion here. Nonetheless, in the case of both the Soviet Union and the United States, the stakes were exceptionally high at the time. In the aftermath of the war, the world was experiencing an immense political vacuum as the European powers were forced to peel back their empires, precipitating an age of decolonization. In hindsight, it appears that both nations, acting out of fear and paranoia, may have overreacted to each other’s perceived

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global ambitions. However, what is crucial to understand for this paper is that the containment strategy was the policy the Truman administration chose to implement.

Officially, the containment of the Soviet Union was set into action after a speech Truman made at a joint session of Congress on March 12, 1947. On that day, the president declared that “it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.”8 After the speech, the president was then given congressional approval of a military and economic aid package worth $400 million to defeat communist insurgents seeking to control Greece and Turkey. The loss of Europe to communism constituted for the United States something that could not be tolerated regarding the objectives devised in its new grandiose foreign policy scheme. Subsequently, U.S. policymakers began to develop an even more elaborate anti-Communist agenda by advancing a multi-billion-dollar European Recovery Program. This eventually became known as the Marshall Plan, named after the man who conceived the program, Secretary of State George Marshall.

The Marshall Plan became one of the most effective U.S. postwar policies helping to revitalize European economies and international trade.9 However, there is a less recognized facet of the postwar recovery program. This is the central role oil from the Middle East played in its execution and success.

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8 Truman address, 12 March 1947.
Since Europe’s economic problems after WWII were based on a sharp spike in oil prices and the expensive American dollars required to buy that oil, “the United States sought to ensure that this critical area received the dollars it needed” to purchase petroleum and especially from American companies. Under the provisions of the Marshall Plan, seventy-five percent of the petroleum came from U.S. oil firms operating in Arab countries in the Persian Gulf. International economics historian, David S. Painter, asserts that the “Marshall Plan aid for oil preserved markets for US oil companies and shaped Western Europe’s energy use patterns and its relations with the United States,” ushering in a new political order premised on American economic dominance over Western Europe. In doing so, the Marshall Plan contributed to a major piece of America’s global strategy first outlined by Roosevelt and put in practice by Truman.

Furthermore, the flow of oil from American companies in the Middle East to Europe prevented communist forays from entering the region, in particular in France and Italy. In the article, “The Marshall Plan and Oil,” Painter writes, “Oil’s importance made maintaining access to foreign oil, especially to the vast reserves of the Persian Gulf, a key priority of US foreign policy...to containing the Soviet Union, to maintaining US leadership of the Western alliance, and to the economic health of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan.”

11 Ibid, 165.
14 Ibid, 169.
words, U.S. leaders believed that by gaining control over a substantial part of the world energy order, and by supplying that energy through its private industry to national economies abroad, they would be able to greatly enhance America’s ability to protect the “free world” against the “enslavement” of Soviet communism. Washington officials saw this protectorship as resting, by and large, on the backbone of Middle East oil.

As a result, oil was viewed by Washington as a powerful tool that promoted American political values not only in Europe, but throughout the rest of the world. Thus, U.S. grand strategy was intricately connected to the energy reserves of the Persian Gulf and to the stable access to oil-rich nations in the Middle East; these countries would become an indispensable part in achieving American foreign policy objectives during the rest of the Cold War.

**Getting to Know the Place**

Although the United States wielded unrivaled power in the world, its ability to secure a strong foothold in the Persian Gulf was complicated. The White House had held no official stance on energy policy until World War II. Before then, energy policymakers in Washington were virtually nonexistent, thereby compelling American oil companies to become the de facto formulators of U.S. energy policy.\(^\text{15}\) Also, the vast distance between the United States and the Middle East limited U.S. power projection capabilities. Since America’s chief ideological rival was positioned so close to the oil reserves of the Persian Gulf, “it was feared

that if the oil fell under Soviet control,” two Middle East geopolitical analysts write, “Moscow would be in a position to dictate economic terms to Europe and Japan and significantly change the global balance of power.”

Another very real concern regarding U.S. oil interests was the Anglo-American relationship. Due to its prior imperial ambitions, Great Britain controlled a large part of the Middle East, lending it a commanding position. During the 1920s, a time when U.S. oil companies served as privatized extensions of American policy in the region, the British and the Americans vigorously contested the rights to oil concessions in the Middle East. Though each side of the Atlantic pursued parallel interests, they both harbored suspicions of each other’s actual intentions and a quasi-great power competition ensued in the Middle East. The Americans, being in the weaker position, claimed their economic rights through the Open Door policy, an innovative diplomatic tactic former Secretary of State John Hay under President William McKinley proved effective in securing equal access to Chinese markets among the great powers of the late-19th century. Meanwhile, British policy planners for the Middle East viewed the United States’ ploy as no less than another imperial nation vying for the region’s immense oil reserves.

By 1928, the two nations, along with their respective oil companies, came to terms in what was called the Red Line Agreement. The British granted American firms access to oil fields in Turkey and Iraq. However, from the


American perspective, the agreement did not explicitly prohibit U.S. oil firms from pursuing their interests in Saudi Arabia, whose oil fields the State Department described as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history."  Recognizing this extremely lucrative prospect, the California Arabian Standard Oil Company attempted to align itself alongside the Saudi royal family, which it had done by 1933. A decade later, when the U.S. officially made Saudi Arabia a part of the Lend-Lease Act, an American program to support the Allied war effort against Germany and Italy, the British began to realize the political power the United States would possess if it was to control its petroleum imports after the war.  Though, eventually, Great Britain’s oil interests in Saudi Arabia were blocked as their struggle to retain “their very economic and strategic independence” was overrun by the superiority of the American oil industry and U.S. international power.

Lastly, an issue that was of prime concern to the Arab nations, Great Britain, and the United States was, and still is, Zionism, a political movement for the reestablishment, development, and protection of a Jewish sovereign state. The movement began in Europe in the mid-19th century due to a potent strain of anti-Semitism that was sweeping across the continent. By the mid-1940s, as the proportions of the Holocaust were becoming fully realized, Zionist claims to a Jewish state gained sympathy around the world, and especially in America.

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Zionists wanted to establish this state in a territory known as the British Mandate for Palestine, a land that had ties to their Jewish biblical roots, but which had also witnessed the origins of Christianity and Islam.

A central problem with Zionism, however, was that the Arab nations were strongly opposed to it. This was because the British Mandate was already inhabited by over a million Arabs, the majority of them being Muslims (86%) with a very small minority being Arab Christians (10%) and Jews (4%). Because of this, many Arabs believed the land was to be designated as an Arab nation after the British relinquished control of the territory. For example, Arab rulers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt jointly declared in January 1946 that “Palestine is an Arab country and that it is the right of its people and the right of Moslem Arabs everywhere to preserve it is as an Arab country.”

But Arab nations world were not the only group opposed to the creation of a national state for Jews. In the U.S. State Department, several officials were against an American endorsement for the Zionist cause. Many believed it would undermine fundamental U.S. economic and strategic interests in the Middle East. These major figures included Secretary of State James Bynes, his undersecretary, Dean Acheson, and Bynes’ successor George Marshall under presidents Roosevelt and Truman. Truman’s Secretary of Defense James Forrestal and George Kennan also held similar views. The creation of Jewish state, they thought, “threatened to ruin American relations with the Arab world.


and disrupt oil supplies to the West.” It would also hinder U.S. oil companies operating in the region and possibly prevent the United States from obtaining military basing rights to the area, especially at Dhahran in Saudi Arabia (the center of the Saudi oil industry). Moreover, policymakers were apprehensive about the formation of a Jewish state because it would increase the Soviet Union’s ability to exploit the Arab countries politically. Other concerns consisted of a Jewish state having the potential to radicalize the politics of the Arab world given that the problem of Palestine was likely “to become a permanent feature of international politics.”

Notwithstanding, U.S. credibility was also at stake in the Muslim world, and especially in Saudi Arabia. Prior to Truman taking office, Roosevelt pledged to King Ibn Saud that the United States had no intention of supporting the Zionist movement. At the same time, the State Department was easing Arab trepidations about the creation of a Jewish state, saying that it would “work to maintain the status quo” in the Middle East. As many in the Truman administration knew, for the U.S. to renege on its promise would not only be unpopular among Arab oil-producing states, but would promote the spread of anti-American sentiment throughout the region.

On the other hand, arguments for the Zionist movement in the United States were just as persuasive since “the passion and numbers of Zionist

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23 Ibid, 24. **look up quote in spegeil


activists weighed heavily in favor for their cause.” These arguments mainly came to the Oval Office from two key pro-Zionist officials working in the Truman White House. They were Special Counsel Clark Clifford and Special Assistant to the President for Minority Affairs David Niles who functioned as a counterweight to the State Department’s anti-Zionist stance. As such, the two would help shape Truman’s thoughts about Zionism along other notable individuals such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Reinhold Niebuhr and Zionist leaders Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion. They believed that establishing a Jewish state in Palestine could solve the Jewish refugee problem in Europe and protect holy sites in Jerusalem for people of all religions. In contrast to the State Department, some pro-Zionists officials encouraged the idea that a Jewish state could serve to promote the United States’ interests in the region.27

Weighing the pros and cons of each position, Truman’s personal views on the status of Palestine were mixed. He did not seem to think it was a crucial issue for American foreign policy especially since he had other pressing matters that were more pivotal for the future global security of the United States. Though he understood the State and Defense Departments’ strategic logic about the importance of the Middle East for its energy resources, he was also strongly influenced by domestic politics. Truman’s trusted friend and advisor David Niles helped persuade him on a number of occasions that his support for Zionism would help him gain special political advantages at home. In 1947, American

26 Speigel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 18.

27 Ibid.
public opinion supported a sovereign Jewish state in a two-to-one ratio with 80 percent of the American Jewish population in favor as well.28

The Creation of a Sovereign Jewish Nation

Time, however, was not a luxury Truman could afford. Palestine was quickly evolving into a crisis as violence intensified the conflict with each passing day. Worse still, Great Britain’s ability to police the area was diminishing greatly. Soon after, the British handed over responsibility of the area to the recently established United Nations in February 1947 and announced the withdrawal of all British troops from Palestine by the following year. As a consequence, the United States inherently assumed a more dominant role in the matter of Palestine. Nevertheless, Truman hoped that the U.N. would be able to produce a fair resolution without having to involve himself directly or the U.S. military.

In efforts to reach a solution to the problem, the U.N. appointed an eleven-member Special Committee on Palestine to investigate Jewish and Arab rights to the land there. What the members came back with were two reports; the minority report called for an extension of the British Mandate for three more years, which would eventually culminate in an Arab and Jewish federation there. The other, the majority report, outlined a partition of Palestine into two politically independent Arab and Jewish states with Jerusalem established as an international zone protected by the oversight of a U.N. trusteeship. This recommendation was accepted by a large segment of the Zionist movement, but

it was unanimously rejected by the Arabs in Palestine because it had granted a larger portion of the land to the minority Jewish population.\textsuperscript{29} Although the majority plan was never fully realized, it is important to note that the U.N. recommendation of mandatory partition shows that, as early as 1947, the international consensus supported the partitioning of Palestine into two separate and sovereign states -- one Arab and one Jewish. Unfortunately, subsequent events would overrule the U.N.’s implementation of partition and a decision made by President Truman would forever alter the history of the region.

In November 1947, when Truman announced his support for the partition plan, Palestine then broke out in a bloody civil war with violence emanating from both sides. The vehement fighting had revealed to many policymakers, including Truman, that implementing partition was unlikely to be successful. In an act to avoid putting American troops on the ground, Truman advocated the previous plan of a binational trusteeship that, by its design, suspended the establishment of both a Jewish and a Palestinian state. This caused a strong backlash among pro-Zionists at home and even more so among of Zionists fighting in Palestine. In indignation, Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion “formally rejected” the U.N. trusteeship and announced his plans to organize a Jewish provisional government by the time British troops withdrew in May 1948.\textsuperscript{30}

As the U.S. presidential election loomed, Truman’s political advisors encouraged the president to immediately recognize Israel when it announced

\textsuperscript{29} The majority report granted a Jewish state 56\% of the land in Palestine with the Arabs receiving the remaining 43\%.

\textsuperscript{30} Douglas Little, \textit{American Orientalism: America and the Middle East since 1945}, (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 85.
statehood in order to “win back the support of unhappy American Zionists by
election day.”\(^{31}\) As in the past years of his presidency, the basic arguments
usually came down to the national interests that “virtually every senior career
official in the State Department and the military” saw as grounds to advise
against the recognition of a Jewish state and the domestic political, cultural, and
humanitarian reasons for recognition, which had been communicated to Truman
by his close friends, trusted advisors, and leaders of the pro-Zionist community.\(^{32}\)

This time was no different, except for the fact that Truman’s political career
was on the line. On May 14, 1948, Truman decided to recognize Israel eleven
minutes after the Zionist declared independence. Since then, historians and
other experts on the subject have debated the motivations that drove the
president to make this controversial proclamation. On the one hand, some
academics point out that Truman indeed had the national interest in mind when
he made his decision; this is evident in a speech he gave at Madison Square
Garden earlier that year in 1948, stating: “I have refused consistently to play
politics with the question of Israel. I have refused, first, because it’s my
responsibility to see that our policy in Israel fits in with our foreign policy
throughout the world.”\(^{33}\) Understanding the Cold War atmosphere of the time, this
also demonstrates that Truman believed he was responsible to recognize Israel
before the Russians had the chance to do so. It was in this way that Truman

\(^{31}\) Ibid.


\(^{33}\) Speigel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 44, also found in the Public Papers of the President
thought he could steer Zionists away from soliciting Soviet support of a nascent Israel.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, by Secretary of State, 12 May 1948, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States, The Near East, South Asia, and Africa 1948}. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), V, Pt. II: 974.} However, as we will see, this logic would backfire as Arab states sought ties with the Soviet Union to counterbalance the region’s geopolitical scale that the United States had offset by endorsing the creation of Israel.

On the other hand, a speech about the “national interests” and Cold War politics does not skirt the issue that Truman, without his recognition of Israel, was not favored to win the 1948 elections against New York Governor Thomas E. Dewey -- though the degree to which Truman’s recognition decision affected the outcome is difficult to determine. Nevertheless, some experts on the subject do find that the influence of domestic politics played a more significant role in Truman’s decision-making process. For instance, in the book, \textit{The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy}, John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt state, “President Truman’s decision to support the UN partition plan and to recognize Israel was based not on strategic imperatives but on his genuine sympathy for Jewish suffering, a certain religious conviction that permitting Jews to return to their ancient homeland was desirable, and an awareness that recognition was backed by many American Jews and would therefore yield domestic political benefits.”\footnote{Mearsheimer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy}, 51.} In the same vein, political scientist Cheryl A. Rubenburg writes, “It cannot be denied that the [U.S.-Israeli] relationship had its genesis in American domestic politics...Truman’s motivations were clearly and overwhelmingly related
to domestic political calculations.” However, others like Steven Spiegel claim that although domestic politics may have affected the timing of the recognition announcement, “the records clearly show that Truman insisted privately as well as publicly that he would not be influenced by domestic politics.” What Truman did do, Spiegel says, was give Israel a “legitimacy and prestige it might otherwise have lacked. He did not create the Jewish State.”

Whatever the case may be, it is hard to overlook the contradiction between Truman’s recognition of Israel and preserving American interests in the Middle East. At the time, Truman certainly did not lack a shortage of contemporary critics in the State Department who pointed out the harmful ramifications recognizing Israel would impose on achieving U.S. foreign policy goals in the region. Loy Henderson, an official in the Office of Near East and African Affairs, predicted the grave consequences of an American sanctioned Jewish state: “We are not only forfeiting the Arab world, but we are incurring long-term Arab hostility towards us...it is quite clear that there will be wide-scale violence in that country, both from the Jewish and Arab sides with which local authorities will not be able to cope.”


The First Arab-Israeli War and Shifting U.S. Policy

As Loy Henderson foreshadowed, the American political endorsement of Israel sparked Arab protests across the Middle East. The State Department hurried to contain the damage, but was unable to prevent surrounding Arab nations from mobilizing their military forces to confront the Zionist army already fighting in Palestine. This would become known as the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. The government in Israel has called this the Israeli War of Independence -- but independence from whom still remains an open question.

The original historiography of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, some contemporary historians argue, helped create a “false orthodoxy” that portrayed Israel fighting for their independence in the face of “superior and determined Arab armies.” According to historians critical of Israel, the Jewish state was “neither as weak nor as benevolent as the early state leaders portrayed it to be. Nor were the Arabs unprovoked by aggressive military actions.” The “new” historiography of Israel describes the Arab militaries of being deeply suspicious of one another’s regional ambitions and thus “refrained from coordinating military tactics” against Israel. The advantage of the military conflict was, in reality, on the side of the “better-organized” Zionists whose armies had advanced into the Sinai Peninsula and took control over territory designated to the Palestinians. Today, though, it is

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40 Isacoff, *Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 11.

41 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 52.
“the record of Arab violence that remains in popular consciousness,” but that too is not the whole story.42

Before, during, and after the 1948-1949 war, Israeli brutality against Arabs in Palestine was widespread. This was later brought to light by testimonials from commanders of the Zionist operations who eventually became the political leaders of Israel.43 Their military accounts assert that the “the majority favored eliminating whoever stood in their way, including women and children,” a policy that is attributed to flight of tens of thousands of Arabs from Palestine.44 Examples of this brutal behavior are illustrated in the various massacres of mostly defenseless Arabs at the hands of Zionist commandoes. One of the worst such instances was the Deir Yassin massacre of April 1947 where 250 Arabs were murdered, including children, and the rape and death of more than 100 women. These atrocities along with the “liquidation of 416 Palestinian towns and villages” that turned hundreds of thousands of Palestinians into refugees have been largely absent from the earlier historiography of the 1948-1949 war.45 The impact of this slanted historical record has often shrouded the exact origins of the


43 Ibid.

44 Ibid, 95-96. More contemporary information and a detailed account of this massacre can be found in Matthew Hogan, “The 1948 Massacre at Deir Yassin Revisited,” Volume 63, no 2 (December 2001): 309-334.

Arab-Israeli conflict, portraying it as one between Israel and Arab nations and not between Israel and a displaced Palestinian people.\textsuperscript{46}

When the war died down, the United States, unlike Israel, saw the importance in trying to quickly solve the question about what to do with the Palestinian refugees. For American policymakers, the hundreds of thousands of displaced Arabs represented a threat to regional stability. Unfortunately, for the United States, the four separate American initiatives between 1949 and 1953 failed to accomplish any type of repatriation or compensation for the refugees. In a \textit{New York Times} article dated February 17, 1949, American Red Cross Delegate William L. Gower “held out little hope for a quick solution of the refugee situation,” and stated that “Israel had shown little interest in the suggestion that refugees be permitted to return to their homes.”\textsuperscript{47} In stark contrast to that article, Israel’s Prime Minister at the time, David Ben-Gurion, chiefly denied the existence of the approximately 726,000\textsuperscript{48} refugees, insisting that “there are no refugees. There are only fighters who sought to destroy us, root and branch.”\textsuperscript{49} This statement is predominately according to the “old” historiography of Israel that Ben-Gurion had helped write himself. He depicted Israel in such a way as to

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47} “Arab DP Problem Held Increasing; Red Cross Official, Here Aboard the Elizabeth, Sets Gaza Deaths at 230 a Day,” \textit{New York Times}, 17 February 1949.

\textsuperscript{48} This number is according to a 1949 U.N. estimate. Arabs in the Gaza were dying up to 230 per day while “eighty to 85 per cent of the displaced persons consisted of children, old women, pregnant women and nursing mothers” as quoted in the February 17, 1949 \textit{New York Times} article. According to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, these were not refugees but people who wanted to destroy Israel “root and branch.”

“legitimate and reinforce the Zionist state-building project,” which portrayed all Arabs as enemies of the Israel intent on destroying it by whatever means possible.50

In the book, *Caught in the Middle East*, which details American policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict through the years 1945 to 1961, Peter Hahn shows that it was in this period that U.S. policy toward the Palestinian refugees “experienced a palpable shift” that eventually “evolved toward the more balanced view” of the Palestinian issue. As State Secretary John Foster Dulles conveyed reassurances to the Arabs that U.S. Middle East policy “should be impartial,” Israel’s strong opposition to repatriation slowly pushed Washington officials to see that the “only realistic solution” to a settlement was one more in line with the Israeli position.51

This, however, does not mean that the United States’ turn toward the Israeli view conceded diplomatic favoritism. It was in fact the opposite. Israel’s refusal to solve the refugee situation and its inflexibility to draw Israeli boundaries more equitable to the Arabs created a rather discordant relationship between Washington and Tel Aviv. This was further compounded by the 1948 assassination of U.N. Palestine mediator Count Folk Bernadette by Israeli extremists and followed the next year by Israel’s refusals to abide by Truman’s personal directives.52 In contrast to the present relations between America and Israel, the U.S.-Israeli relationship during the Jewish state’s early development

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50 Isacoff, *Writing the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 11.

51 Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 111.

seemed to one diplomatic historian as a “power struggle between a domineering stepparent and a rebellious stepchild.”

Moreover, Hahn observes that the origin of Washington’s frustrations with Israel was that U.S. officials naively assumed that they could coerce Israel into doing what they wanted. They soon realized though that the new state had the “means to resist” influence from Washington. Thus, the policy that began to slant towards Zionist views on the Palestinian refugee issue was amended not out of partiality, but “modified to take into account this new reality,” a reality in which Israel could shape, if ever so slightly, American policy from the depths of the Middle East.

The Eisenhower Years and the Second Arab-Israeli Conflict

Significant changes had been taking place in the Arab world, and especially in Egypt. Gamal Abdel Nasser, a colonel in the Egyptian army, led his country to revolution and seized executive power in 1952. In his charismatic speeches, Nasser inspired a movement of Pan-Arabism that strove for the political unification and cooperation of the Arab world against its perceived enemies. As the President of Egypt, Nasser never forgot his participation in the 1948-1949 Arab-Israeli war against Zionist forces in the Sinai Peninsula and used his ideology to incite Arab hostility towards Israel.

53 Ibid, 88.
54 Hahn, Caught in the Middle East, 111.
While Israeli officials were very concerned about Nasser’s regional aspirations, the United States, under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, still held out a chance to cultivate a working relationship with Egypt. The regional objectives of Eisenhower and his Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, were quite like their predecessor’s: to prevent the spread of Soviet communism, maintain strong economic relations with oil-rich Arab states such as Saudi Arabia, and avoid any conflicts that could lead to a U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the Middle East. This could be done, they believed, by aligning the United States with strong Arab regimes and forming a strategic defense organization known as the Bagdad Pact with Iran, Iraq, and Turkey who would then act as agents in blocking the Soviets from penetrating the region.

In 1955, Eisenhower proposed to fund the multimillion dollar Aswan Dam project in Egypt and offered to sell Nasser American military weapons and equipment. These security and financial enticements bestowed on Nasser were meant to steer Egypt away from entering the Soviet orbit. But due to a series of reversals, the military and economic rewards presented to Egypt in return for assisting the United States in its global containment policy never developed. Infighting between pro-Israel and pro-Arab constituents in Congress prevented Nasser from receiving such aid.\footnote{Nasser Aruri, \textit{Dishonest Broker: The Role of the United States in Palestine and Israel} (Cambridge: South End Press, 2003), 16.} As one consequence, Egypt turned to the Soviet Union for military support through a backchannel in Czechoslovakia. Known as the Czech arms deal, Nasser exchanged 100,000 tons of Egyptian cotton for $86 million worth of Soviet weaponry. The Soviets also offered Nasser
financial assistance to construct the Aswan Dam, which was seen by Washington as an affront to their own similar proposal. Still, Eisenhower continued to entice Cairo to enter into an alignment with the United States because Egypt fit into his regional framework, namely as a “pivotal” country that could serve American interests by containing communism and helping the U.S. sustain friendly relations with other Arab oil-producing states.\textsuperscript{56}

However, by the end of 1955, Eisenhower and Dulles were suspicious of Nasser’s motives and disapproved of his “dangerous” rhetoric. By then, Nasser had already become a powerful voice and leader throughout the Arab world. His strain of Arab nationalism was seen by U.S. officials as profoundly weakening both Western oil interests and the ability of pro-West Arab nations to resist Soviet political influences.\textsuperscript{57} In addition, Nasser’s constant refusal to enter American-sponsored peace initiatives with Israel, his formal recognition of communist China, and his diplomatic engagement with the Soviet Union gave Washington and British policymakers sincere doubts about lending their support to Egypt. In the end, Eisenhower and Dulles had to withdraw all previous offers to Nasser, which included the $70 million for the Aswan Dam, and began working on a new anti-Nasser strategy. According to a British official at the time, “Nasser had reached the point of no return” which made continued Western support for Egypt no longer a viable course of policy.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 17.

\textsuperscript{57} Little, \textit{American Orientalism}, 169.

\textsuperscript{58} Quoted in Ibid.
After the U.S. officially revoked its aid to Egypt, Nasser immediately nationalized the French and British owned Suez Canal Company and took control over that international waterway. Infuriated by Nasser’s actions, Great Britain and France began contemplating a military option while they also secretly contacted the Israelis whom they presumed would help them attack Egypt. As this was happening, Eisenhower and Dulles advised each respective party against military intervention by advocating compromise and negotiations to solve the situation. Eisenhower then sent two personal letters to Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion warning him not to take any hostile measures toward Egypt that could damage the emerging relationship between the U.S. and Israel.\(^{59}\) Unfortunately, Eisenhower’s efforts to stop Great Britain, France, and Israel from coordinating an offensive strike against Egypt proved futile.

The three countries’ assault on Egypt began on October 29, 1956 when Israeli forces invaded the Sinai and the Gaza Strip. Eisenhower was outraged when informed of the attack and quickly condemned Israel through the United Nations. The U.N. then passed resolutions and imposed diplomatic sanctions on Israel to force their immediate withdrawal from Egyptian and Palestinian territory. The French and the British, who launched their own military campaigns days after the Israelis, were also reprimanded for their actions by the United States. Their militaries eventually withdrew from the conflict after a concerted effort by the Arab nations placed an oil embargo on Great Britain and France. British and

\(^{59}\) Mose Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign* (Jerusalem: Steinatzky Agency Ltd., 1966), 72.
French influence thereafter was greatly reduced in the region and the United States then assumed a greater role in Middle Eastern affairs.

With only Israel left in the conflict, Eisenhower sent another note to Prime Minister Ben-Gurion and demanded that he abide by the U.N. resolutions by promptly removing his army from Egyptian and Palestinian territory or risk harsher U.N. sanctions. After four months of hassling between the two countries and the U.N., Israel finally complied and withdrew its troops from the Sinai and the Gaza Strip, but only after the United States promised, however reluctantly, to uphold Israel’s right to protect itself by force should its naval shipping rights be revoked again by Egypt.

Conceiving a Strategic Partnership

During those dramatic times, American and Israeli relations had been brought to the “diplomatic equivalent of absolute zero.” Nevertheless, the two nations still sought to preserve ties because of mutually perceived strategic interests. Diplomatic historian Douglas Little points out that “neither the United States nor Israel was willing to demand a divorce because each side believed that the only winner in an American-Israeli breakup would be anti-West radicals like Egypt’s Nasser.”\(^6^0\) Likewise, the developing nature of Nasser’s political involvement with the Soviet Union produced a shift in the perception of Israel and how that country could now serve American objectives in the region. Accordingly, Israel could be tied to American interests through its ability to serve as a “barrier

\(^{60}\) Little, *American Orientalism*, 90, 93.
against indigenous radical threats,” which were “infecting” the politics of the Arab oil states.\footnote{Chomsky, \textit{The Fateful Triangle}, 20.}

Hence, the end of the Suez Crisis marked a steady process to rekindle a relationship between Washington and Tel Aviv. With the growing power of Arab nationalist forces spearheaded by Nasser and his call for Pan-Arabism, the U.S. saw in Israel a way to prevent both the Soviet Union and Arab radicals from gaining a political advantage. In addition, Washington’s strategy included the continued support of pro-West Arab dictatorships such as Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as other smaller Arab oil-states. This would be done by supplying their governments with military assistance programs “at levels adequate to ensure internal security.”\footnote{National Security Council Report 24 January 1958, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960} Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office) XII: Document 5. \url{(http://www.history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d5)} (Accessed January 20, 2011).} These pro-West Arab regimes, however, would not be able to achieve the political “stability” needed to ensure American interests in the long-term because a policy of using Arab proxy states was presumed to be unpredictable and likely to fail over time.\footnote{“A Report to the National Security Council,” 7 April 1952.} Thus, a U.S. priority concerning the future of Israel was to strengthen its military capabilities since the Jewish state could potentially become “the only strong pro-West power left in the Near East.”\footnote{National Security Council Report 24 January 1958, \textit{Foreign Relations of the United States 1958-1960} Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office) XII: Document 5, \url{(http://www.history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d5)} \url{http://www.history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1958-60v12/d5} (accessed January 20, 2012).}

This new adjustment of U.S. policy was fashioned into a new policy doctrine in which Eisenhower was authorized to use military force and $200
million in aid money to support American interests in the Middle East.\(^{65}\) Originally proclaimed to combat “overt armed aggression from any nation controlled by international communism,” the Eisenhower doctrine was put into effect on March 7, 1957 and “made rather clear that revolutionary Egypt was the principal target.”\(^{66}\) It was also the first time that the United States officially recognized the Middle East as being “vital” to its national interests.\(^{67}\) In addition, the doctrine would justify American military interventions in the Middle East when its oil interests were threatened.\(^{68}\) This was indeed evident in the United States’ first ever invasion of the region when American forces intervened in Iraq in 1958. Washington officials also implemented the doctrine when it used aid money to prevent political turnovers in Jordan and in Lebanon that were deemed hostile to American interests and their pro-West political constituents in power there. Although this caused significant popular unrest in those countries, it was certainly viewed by U.S. officials as necessary to ensure the political “stability” of the region.

For Israel, the Eisenhower Doctrine was important because it gave its leaders and pro-Israeli groups in the United States the ability to apply pressure towards acquiring more favorable economic and military assistance from the United States. Though Eisenhower was at first hesitant to grant Israel the


\(^{66}\) Aruri, Dishonest Broker, 18

\(^{67}\) Ibid.

antiaircraft missiles Prime Minister Ben-Gurion had requested, he did agree to
give Israel $100 million in financial and technical aid with an additional $10
million in advanced radar equipment, the most aid Israel had received since its
inception in 1948.69

The reluctance of the former five-star general to provide Israel with more
sophisticated military weapons abated when John F. Kennedy took office in 1961.
It was during this time in particular that “a tendency to identify United States
security interests with a militarily strong Israel began to take hold in Pentagon
circles.”70 Pentagon officials believed Israel could be used “as a U.S. surrogate”
that would help them acquire “certain advantages” in the region 71 During the
next decade, American arms steadily flowed into Israeli arsenals, much to the
displeasure of the Arabs and certainly the Soviets as well.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union was assuming a primary role of weapons
supplier to Middle Eastern countries such as Iraq, Sudan, Libya, Algeria, and
especially Egypt and Syria.72 With its relatively new political leverage in the
region, the Russians believed it was in their interests to support Arab nationalism
and fuel Nasser’s ideology in an attempt to either counterbalance or, if possible,
eliminate Western “moderate” influences from the Middle East.73 The Soviet’s

69 Little, *American Orientalism*, 94
70 Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 19.
73 Office of Soviet Analysis, “Soviet Policy Towards the Middle East,” Directorate of Intelligence,
15 2011).
Middle East strategy is cited in a National Security Council document of the time. An Office of Soviet Analysis document states that the U.S.S.R “has managed successfully to represent itself to most Arabs as favoring the realization of the goals of Arab nationalism and as being willing to support the Arabs in their efforts to attain those goals.”

Likewise, the Israelis understood the importance of influencing the United States to support their own goals as well. In Washington, pro-Israel members in Congress and the Israel lobby worked hard in the American political scene to make sure the Jewish state was more than sufficiently supplied with some of the most advanced U.S. weapons and military equipment. This was not very difficult since the Soviet Union’s military assistance to its own Arab clients justified the arming of Israel in U.S. Congress.

The United States’ military aid and protection of Israel was symbolized in a conversation between President Kennedy and Foreign Minister of Israel Golda Meir. Kennedy told the future prime minister of Israel that the United States has a “special relationship with Israel.” He then went on to say, “I think it is quite clear that in case of an invasion the United States would come to the support of Israel. We have that capacity and it is growing.” The growing capacity Kennedy was referring to was the Sixth Fleet stationed recently in the Mediterranean Sea that would act as first-responders in the Middle East should any conflicts arise.


With the assassination of Kennedy in November 1963, his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, would carry on the emerging “special relationship” between America and Israel. In 1966, Washington sold 210 M-48 tanks and forty-eight Skyhawk jets to Israel. These weapons sales were meant to dissuade Israel from achieving its goal of becoming a nuclear armed state even though Israel consistently denied accusations that they were attempting to develop such a capacity. While U.S. policy unequivocally opposed nuclear proliferation and tried to deter the Jewish state from building an atomic bomb, Israel had developed its first nuclear device as early as 1970, although the exact date remains classified.

Also deeply suspicious of Israel’s nuclear aspirations, the Arab countries began exerting pressure on Israel in the mid-1960s. For instance, groups of Palestinian and Syrian guerillas attacked the outskirts of Israeli border towns. In response, the Israelis sent their fighter jets into the sky to repel advancing Arab guerilla forces while also engaging in dogfights with the Syrian air force. Then, on May 16, 1967, Nasser ordered a withdrawal of all U.N. peacekeeping forces along the Egyptian-Israeli borders, a sure sign of the mounting hostilities. A few weeks later, Nasser further escalated tensions between Egypt and Israel by announcing a blockade on all Israeli shipments through the Straights of Tiran. For Israel, these actions were essentially an act of war and the last remaining straw before tensions exploded into a well-carried out Israeli military campaign.

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76 Little, American Orientalism, 102.
On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive attack against the surrounding Arab nations and demonstrated to the Arabs its military superiority. In the six days of fighting, the Jewish state acquired control over key territories such as the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights, and East Jerusalem. According to Israeli leaders, these lands provided Israel with a military “buffer zone” that they deemed essential for the state’s future security. As a consequence though, Israel’s acquisition of these lands and their use of a preemptive strike increased Arab resentment towards Israel and the Jewish state’s primary supporter, the United States. After 1967, the newly altered Israeli borders, stretching into Egypt and Syria as well as parts of Palestine, would be held under Israeli military occupation and control. However, the Johnson Administration, unlike Eisenhower’s in 1956, would not call for a unilateral Israeli withdrawal from the Arab territories, or even call for a full investigation into Israel’s controversial attack on the USS Liberty that occurred during the war. This failure to condemn Israel for its actions would seem to reveal a new testament to the U.S.-Israeli strategic relationship.

In Washington, the Six Day War was viewed as a success. Israel had tested American weapons on the field of battle, gathered intelligence from captured Soviet weaponry, and defeated two Soviet client states in the region. At the same time, exultant media coverage of Israel in the United States galvanized support for the Jewish state, which represented Israel as a “civilizing democratic

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78 Ibid.
force” in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{79} In turn, this reinforced the belief held by U.S.
policymakers and politicians that Israel was a “strategic partner” in America’s Cold War against the Soviet Union.

However, the reality on the ground was quite different. Instead of diminishing Soviet influence in the Arab states, Israel prompted countries such as Egypt and Syria to substantially increase their dependence on the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{80} After his defeat, for example, Nasser welcomed thousands of Soviet military advisors into Egypt and negotiated with the Kremlin over more lucrative arms deals to rebuild his shattered military.\textsuperscript{81} Moreover, U.S. interest in maintaining friendly relations with the Arab world was significantly undermined when six Arab states cut off diplomatic relations with the United States after the war. In addition, the Israeli invasion into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip increased the numbers of Palestinian refugees by approximately 200,000, adding to the region’s instability. In the aftermath, the refugees’ revolutionary resistance group, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), also began receiving aid packages from the Kremlin.\textsuperscript{82} With this newfound support, the PLO gained international recognition and initiated a guerilla attack campaign against Israel from inside pro-West Jordan and southern Lebanon.


\textsuperscript{80} Rubenburg, \textit{The United States and the American National Interests}, 128.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 125.

In an attempt to mute the antagonisms in the region and placate Arab regimes, the United States enacted an arms embargo on the Middle East. This was in the hope that the Soviet Union would respond in kind, but the Kremlin refused to take such a course of action and, as a consequence, the U.S. was forced to cancel its arms embargo.\textsuperscript{83} Afterward, this enabled Israeli officials to apply more pressure on Johnson through the pro-Israel lobby and other like-minded American political supporters. This helped lead to the sale of the F-4 Phantom supersonic jets to Israel. The sale of these much coveted fighter jets personified the perceived U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership that had been developing since the late 1950s. The arms sale also showed that the U.S. would continue to categorically support Israel even as it exhibited aggressive behavior towards nations with which the United States had sought to develop friendly relations.\textsuperscript{84} President Johnson’s policy towards Israel and his subsequent military sale of Phantom jets to Israel came to symbolize the new U.S.-Israeli relationship of building Israel into an unsurpassed military power in the region. By 1968, the United States had become Israel’s “undisputed ally and major arms supplier.”\textsuperscript{85}

\textbf{Conclusion}

American foreign policy in the Middle East from the end of the Second World War to when Johnson left office can be characterized by its devotion to its “vital interests” in the energy reserves of the region. The energy resources in the

\textsuperscript{83} Stephens, \textit{U.S. Policy Towards Israel}, 117.

\textsuperscript{84} Mearshiemer and Walt, \textit{The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy}, 42.

\textsuperscript{85} Stephens, \textit{U.S. Policy Towards Israel}, 118.
Persian Gulf were viewed by policymakers in Washington as a lever for international power and an effective tool for containing the Soviet Union. In the two decades after Israel was established, the United States’ growing support for the Jewish state had polarized the region into roughly two separate superpower factions. These were American backed pro-West Arab dictatorships along with Israel and Soviet sponsored “radical” Arab regimes, which, through these Cold War camps, each side sought to undermine each other’s interests and influence in the region.

When Truman announced his recognition of Israel, there was essentially no turning back to the U.N. recommendation of a Jewish and Arab mutual partition plan. During the subsequent tumultuous period, the United States continued its goal of limiting the damage its support for Israel caused throughout the Arab world. This is seen through the U.S. effort to rectify the Palestinian refugee situation after the 1948-1949 war, but Israel’s consistent refusal to do anything about the Palestinian refugee issue, combined with a powerful pro-Israel influence in the United States, had gradually altered America’s policy into one more in line with Israeli attitudes than with those of their Arab counterparts.

The evolution of the US-Israeli relationship is evident when comparing the Suez Crisis in 1956 to the Arab-Israeli War in 1967. In 1956, the United States condemned the Israeli attack on Egypt at a time when Nasser was viewed by the West as the main enemy in the region. Though Nasser proved to be an obstacle to overall U.S. policy goals, it was a long-standing American objective to transform Egypt from a Soviet client into an American one. The difficulty in this
plan arose from the fact that America’s support for Israel increased Nasser’s dependence on the Soviet Union. A decade later, U.S. relations with Israel had substantially changed from an insubordinate client state into a “principal U.S. surrogate entrusted with blunting the nationalist tide in the West’s favor.”86 For example, when Israel attacked Egypt for the second time in 1967, the United States refrained from condemning its actions. Never confirmed by official government records pertaining to the Six Day War in 1967 - many are still classified -- but some historians argue that the United States “did next to nothing to discourage the Israelis and may actually have encouraged them through the back channel to hit Nasser hard.”87

If true, these actions indeed strengthen the thesis that Israel was fast becoming a U.S. strategic asset in the Middle East. In light of American actions during this period, policymakers in Washington sought to realize their goals in the region by aligning Israel’s interests with their own while simultaneously transforming the Jewish state into a top-rate military power. Not surprisingly, as we shall see, this idea struck a dominant chord in the articulation of Richard Nixon’s and Henry Kissinger’s new foreign policy initiatives in the 1970s. The two statesmen would chart a course toward a major revamping of American diplomacy in the Middle East.

86 Aruri, Dishonest Broker, 20.

87 Little, 101.
Chapter 2
Turning Point: Nixon, Kissinger, and the 1973 October War

When Republican Richard M. Nixon moved into the White House in January 1969, he began to disassemble the foreign policy bureaucracy of the State Department and consolidate decision-making power within the White House. Nixon, who served as vice president under General Eisenhower, understood that America’s policymakers had made serious errors in the past notably concerning the Vietnam War, in realizing the fissure between the China-Soviet communist bloc, and in correctly interpreting American interests in the Middle East. Seeing international affairs as his strong suit, Nixon developed an active global policy that was viewed fundamentally through the prism of the Cold War superpower rivalry.

As president, Nixon also hired individuals who held similar views when it came to developing an effective foreign policy. These were based on the “national interest” and an accurate assessment of American power in the world. A key individual in his cabinet was Henry A. Kissinger who Nixon appointed as National Security Advisor in 1969. Prior to assuming his new government position, Kissinger had developed close political connections with Washington and other influential political figures during which time he had become a part-time foreign policy advisor to Kennedy, Johnson, and Nelson Rockefeller.

Born a German Jew, Kissinger had escaped the death camps of Nazi Germany with his immediate family in 1938 and moved to New York City; thirteen of his relatives who remained in Germany would later perish in the Holocaust.
Revisiting his home country as an American soldier during WWII, Kissinger was recognized by his superiors for his “unique intellectual abilities” and was assigned to a position within the U.S. Army’s counterintelligence program. His task was to track down, arrest, and interrogate members of the German Gestapo. On his return to the United States, he attended Harvard University, obtained a Ph.D. in political science, and then received a professorship at the college. His academic interests focused chiefly on philosophy and history. He was also drawn greatly to the thought of Immanuel Kant and the “balance of power” statesmanship of Otto Von Bismarck and Prince Von Metternich who believed that peace could only be achieved by creating a legitimate equilibrium of power between states based on a common interest to maintain the status quo.

Kissinger’s biographer, Walter Isaacson, describes his diplomacy as “based on bold new approaches, secrecy, and tactical maneuvering.” This style fit nicely with Nixon’s own “paranoid” personality and tendency towards political and private dealings. Though not friends, Nixon and Kissinger became close on a professional level because of their like-minded ways of thinking. They both believed that America’s influence in the world depended on its “credibility,” its perceived power, and the presumed willingness to use that power. Relatively unconstrained by moral principles in their foreign policy, or their politics for that matter, Nixon authorized Kissinger to use diplomatic “backchannels” to bypass the State Department when communicating with governments abroad. This

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became a central element of Kissinger’s diplomatic style and a tool of secrecy that allowed the two men to consolidate foreign policy control in the White House.

With foreign policymaking almost completely monopolized, Nixon and Kissinger adjusted their outlook on world affairs through their keen analysis of a transforming international structure. This was due to the reemergence of burgeoning economic centers such as Japan and Western Europe. In relation to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), these economies were gradually approaching the United States’ GDP in size as America experienced a steady, but relative, economic decline. The prodigious drain on the nation’s resources because of the Vietnam War ushered in a new reality in which the United States could no longer maintain the level of economic invulnerability it had once possessed. In realizing this, Nixon and Kissinger developed a plan to slow down the rapidly growing economies of America’s allies to protect the unparalleled global economic position the United States had acquired since the end of WWII.  

With their particular view of world affairs, Nixon and Kissinger considered the United States' relative economic decline when formulating their new approach to the Cold War. This became known as detente, or the easing of tensions between the two superpowers. Similarly, Nixon’s famous opening of China also introduced a triangular diplomacy to the conventional bipolar world of the Cold War. The opening of China allowed the United States to further leverage its power against the spread of the Soviet Union because China’s interests were also grounded in containing Russian expansion. Isaacson writes, “Suddenly,  

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foreign policy involved something quite different: not a Cold War confrontation between good guys and bad guys, but an intricate web of morally ambiguous relationships that the U.S. would have to balance to preserve international stability.\(^90\) Though Nixon still had to maneuver his foreign policy in the atmosphere of the superpower rivalry, unlike other Cold War presidents, the diplomatic opening of China added a new player to the international game that allowed the United States to implement a great-power strategy of balance and cooperation. Nixon and Kissinger’s strategy was shaped concerning this international approach and was updated and articulated in a new presidential foreign policy doctrine.

The Nixon Doctrine, formulated in an era characterized by a powerful backlash to the Vietnam War, was a policy devised to greatly reduce U.S. military involvement abroad, but still remain committed to exerting American power throughout world affairs. Through the extensive allocation of military assistance to America’s allies, or what Nixon referred to as an “invigorated partnership,” the United States could use the Nixon Doctrine as a substitute for actual American military power. In this way, the United States could avoid the political and economic risks that were brought upon by the American military disaster in Vietnam. In his book, *Weapons for All*, William Hartung describes the Nixon Doctrine as “a leaner, meaner strategy for exerting global U.S. military influence by recruiting key regional powers to serve as junior partners in a U.S.-dominated anticommunist coalition. These military surrogates would receive unprecedented

\(^{90}\) Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 354.
levels of U.S. arms and training in return for doing the U.S. government’s military bidding in their area of responsibility.”  

In the Middle East, the Nixon administration wanted to use the Nixon Doctrine to support “Israel and moderate Arab states at the regional level and, at the same time, use it to restrain the Soviet Union at the global level.” Not only would this offer partners in the Middle East an alternative to Soviet arms, it would help them resist Soviet influence and put down internal uprisings in their countries. This would also provide United States with a means to achieve its security objectives and assert significant political leverage and influence over those states receiving American aid. Not surprisingly, Israel and Saudi Arabia, along with Iran under the Shah (and later Egypt), would become key arms beneficiaries under the provisions set forth by this doctrine.

The Early Years

From the outset of the Nixon administration, the State Department had been given the responsibility of conducting policy in the Middle East. There were a few reasons why Nixon kept Kissinger excluded from the essential tasks of this region. First, Nixon perceived Kissinger’s Jewish background as an obstacle to mending U.S. relations with the Arab world. Second, Nixon also worried that Kissinger’s Jewishness would prevent his National Security Advisor from


obtaining the status of honest broker in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Third, Kissinger’s expertise was not in the Middle East. His specific abilities resided in his skill as a negotiator, a role that was more timely suited to extracting the United States from the debacle in Vietnam. Lastly, with most of the foreign policy responsibilities being coordinated by the White House, Nixon felt that “the Mideast problem could be dealt with by the State Department ... after all, the secretary of state needed some special area of foreign policy.”

Even so, Kissinger paid close attention to the affairs of the region; this is because his regional concerns in the different parts of the world had been strategically linked to his global foreign policy of containing the Soviet Union. During his time, Kissinger was concerned about the Soviet’s growing strength in the Middle East. Consequently, this reality did not sit well with Kissinger who in 1971 had promised to kick the Soviets out of the region. Furthermore, since the Middle East was such a vital area for American interests concerning the energy reserves there, Kissinger feared that the United States’ commitment to Israel and the Soviet Union’s commitment to the Arab nationalists had the potential to pull the two superpowers into a direct, and possibly nuclear, confrontation.

Likewise the State Department was increasingly apprehensive about Soviet political gains in the area; militant nationalists led by Muramar Quadaffi had overthrown the pro-West monarchy of Libya in 1969, a political coup had taken place in Sudan, and Lebanon was in a declared state of emergency.

93 Speigel, The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict, 176.
94 Kissinger, Diplomacy, 737-738.
Moreover, following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, Egypt and Israel had become engaged in a war of attrition, a “mini-war,” which was being fought along the banks of the Suez Canal and in the Sinai Peninsula. Also, the impact of the 1967 war had left the pro-West Jordan monarchy severely unstable. Within Jordan, there remained a large population of Palestinians and the PLO declared Amman their de facto capitol in 1969. By then, the PLO had essentially become a “state-within-a-state” that used Jordan’s location to launch cross-border raids into Israel. At the same time, the PLO was threatening King Hussein’s reign in Jordan, much to the concern of the United States.

The situation greatly intensified in September 1970 when the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the pro-Communist faction of the PLO, “embarked on a spectacular multi-plane highjacking” and landed those planes at an airstrip close to Amman. With over 500 hostages on three Western commercial airliners, the PFLP demanded the release of their constituents from Jordanian prisons and hoped that other Arab nations, particularly Syria, would come to the aid of the Palestinians in a battle to overthrow the Jordanian monarchy. Undoubtedly, fears over the prospects of a toppled pro-West Jordanian monarchy were strongly expressed in the inner circles of Washington.

Under the spotlight of the international media, the PFLP freed all the hostages and detonated the planes in front of a live TV audience. Nixon then

95 Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 200.

apparently gave King Hussein the green light to attack and repel the Palestinian guerilla forces. As King Hussein's assault was underway, Syrian tanks mobilized and invaded Jordan to support the Palestinians. Nixon pressed for an American unilateral military option to protect Hussein's rule, but was rebuffed by Defense Secretary Melvin Laird and Joint Chiefs of Staff Thomas Moorer. The two men had opposed such stringent actions because American forces were bogged down in Southeast Asia and it was purported that transporting military units to the Middle East would be a logistical nightmare.\textsuperscript{97} In these circumstances, American interests in preserving the Hussein Monarchy would have to rest in the hands of the Israelis, which had earlier that month received a delivery of F-4 Phantom Jets from the United States.

Without the capability to intervene in the conflict using a unilateral American military move, Nixon and Kissinger arranged with the Israelis to mobilize their air and ground forces to help King Hussein maintain his authority in Jordan. With a presidential guarantee of Israeli security in case the Soviet Union became militarily involved, Israel agreed to the U.S. request and prepared to send its military force into Jordan. In the end, the Israelis mobilized but were ultimately not needed to intervene; King Hussein was able to defeat the Palestinian commandoes, and with the Soviet Union urging restraint on its respective parties during this pivotal time, Syria withdrew its tank battalions from the area of conflict, but only after taking major blows from King Hussein's military.

\textsuperscript{97} Ibid, 138.
Although the Israelis never engaged in the conflict, the 1970 September crisis had made “official” Israel’s role as an American strategic asset. It was also the first time that Nixon and Kissinger had personally dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict. International relations professor Cheryl Rubenburg writes, “In the aftermath of Black September, Israel was said not only to be containing the spread of Soviet influence in the Middle East, but also to be providing the critical support that kept conservative pro-American governments in power.”

After the crisis, Kissinger told the Israeli Ambassador Yitzhak Rabin that “the president will never forget Israel’s role in preventing the deterioration in Jordan.” This role was then rewarded the following year when Nixon and Kissinger agreed on the first long-term arms deal between America and Israel. In addition, the events of September 1970 had proven the effectiveness of the Nixon Doctrine. Evidently, this is exactly what Nixon and Kissinger planned to do the Arab states in the region, in particularly with the governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran who would soon be referred to as the “twin pillars” of American strategy in the Middle East.

Importantly, the Jewish state’s ability to preserve American interests by protecting pro-West Arab regimes altered the relationship between the Nixon administration and Israel. This relationship established “new precedents” that deepened the divide of Middle East policy between the White House and the State Department.

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100 Speige, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 211.

101 Ibid, 201.
the State Department and Kissinger’s secret backchannel talks with countries in the Middle East. While State Department officials discussed peace proposals openly such as the Roger’s plan and the Jarring Initiative to establish a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement, Nixon and Kissinger avoided the discussion of any peace deals that would pressure Israel to concede its occupied territories to the Arabs.102

By the end of 1970, Nixon and Kissinger had become content in their belief that Israel’s military superiority could deter any Arab nation from attacking Israel in the future. As the Nixon Doctrine proved to be a success, Israel was seen as a key player in thwarting Soviet advances into the region. Furthermore, the diplomatic waters of the Middle East seemed to be in a calming period since one of the most menacing enemies of the United States, Gamal Nasser, had died suddenly of a heart attack on September 28, 1970. His successor, Anwar Sadat, who Kissinger once admitted underestimating, was portrayed at the time as a president who lacked the fervor and charisma of his revolutionary predecessor. Unbeknownst at the time, but Sadat would become one of the most audacious leaders of modern Egypt. After Nasser’s death, Nixon and Kissinger’s assessment rested in maintaining the status quo of the region, which was perceived as beneficial to American and Israeli interests.

For the next three years, Nixon and Kissinger turned most of their attention away from the Middle East because of the more pressing matter of seeking an “honorable peace” in Vietnam. In doing so, they left much of the

diplomatic responsibility to the State Department, although not without insuring that their own divergent policies would be kept intact. Soon, however, Nixon and Kissinger’s faulty assessment would return to haunt them as the harsh reality of another Arab-Israeli war hit Washington’s doorstep three years later.

Kissinger’s October War

Early In the morning on Saturday, October 6, 1973, Joseph Sisco burst into Henry Kissinger’s suite at the Waldorf Towers in New York City burdened with the distressing news of war. He forewarned his superior that Egypt and Syria were mounting a surprise attack against Israel’s occupied territories on the holiest days for Jews – Yom Kippur. Israel’s defenses, caught off guard, would not be able to repel the initial assault. With the outbreak of this Middle East crisis, Kissinger foresaw a major opportunity awaiting American diplomacy. His task in the ensuing nineteen days of the conflict was to reshape the United States’ diplomatic role throughout the region.

There are several factors that, in coming together all at once, built the foundation for Kissinger to become such a central player in expanding the United States’ involvement in the Middle East. After Nixon’s incumbent victory in the 1972 election and two weeks before the October War in 1973, Kissinger was sworn in as the fifty-sixth Secretary of State while still holding onto his position as the National Security Advisor. As time approached toward the Arab attack against Israel, Kissinger, outfitted with the powers of both the White House and

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the State Department, was then thrust into the forefront of an American initiative that let him pursue a course that suited his own personal design.

Importantly, during those days in October, President Nixon had become increasingly distracted with domestic issues and scandals. What would occur at home during the fourth Arab-Israeli war in twenty-five years would occupy most of Nixon’s time and mind: the release of the White House tapes, the resignation of Vice President Spiro Agnew, and the Saturday Night Massacre during which Nixon dismissed one government official whereupon two others resigned in a single night. A Middle-East expert on the National Security Council, William B. Quandt, asserts that during this time the president “showed little interest in the details of policy, leaving the task of day-to-day diplomacy to Kissinger.” With his dual functions in the Nixon White House, compounded with the president’s domestic distractions, Kissinger found himself in a “chance occurrence in history” in which he wielded almost complete control over the American foreign policy decision-making machinery.

Ripening the Fruits of War

The groundwork for Kissinger’s diplomatic adventure had not yet fully ripened until the outbreak of the October War. In a bitter reaction to their losses arising out of the 1967 war, the Arab leaders decided on a continued state of belligerency against Israel at the Khartoum Summit in August of that year.

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104 Quandt, Peace Process, 112.

Reinforced and backed by Soviet military equipment, they developed their own policy dubbed the “three no’s” – no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel, and no recognition of Israel. The Arab leaders decided that under no circumstances should Israel be recognized as a legitimate state. If Israel was not recognized, then it could not be negotiated with, and without negotiations, there could be no peace.

In his memoirs, Years of Upheaval, Kissinger reflects upon the standoff:

“Israel chased the illusion that it could acquire territory and achieve peace. Its Arab adversaries pursued the opposite illusion, that they could regain territory without offering peace.”

What further perpetuated the impasse after the Six Day War was the United Nation’s Resolution 242 in November of 1967. The resolution was supposed to become the building block for an ongoing settlement that strived for “a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security.”

Unfortunately, the ambiguous phrasings of the resolution led Kissinger to refer to it as “the symbol of the deadlock.” Because of the failure to define precisely the wording in the resolution, each side determined its own interpretation to fit its own demands. Ironically, Resolution 242 had worked in reverse of what it was planned to achieve. In Kissinger’s perspective, it had, in actuality, diplomatically incapacitated the region. Nevertheless, the oncoming

106 Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 199.


Arab attack in October 1973 created a new opportunity to unlock the political deadbolt that was set solidly in place. The new situation produced by the October War was one of flexibility that provided the initial framework for Kissinger to enter the Middle East equipped with the tools of American power and diplomacy.\textsuperscript{110}

To encourage stability, Kissinger believed American interests were found in the path of sustaining strong ties with Israel.\textsuperscript{111} However, unlike previous policymakers, Kissinger was not encouraging a peaceful agreement -- though not publicly -- between the Arabs and Israelis before the start of the war. When former Secretary of State William Rogers put forward a proposal called the Roger’s Plan to institute an Arab-Israeli peace agreement, Kissinger strongly disagreed with the approach. The new U.S. Secretary of State believed that if Israel was pressured to give up some of the occupied lands, it would appear as a triumph for the Soviets and the Arab groups they supported. Also, in realizing that each failed American initiative for peace in the Middle East gave the edge to the United States’ enemies, Kissinger wanted to let U.S. peace plans “run out of steam rather than give a clear cut order.”\textsuperscript{112}

In his book, \textit{The Price of Power}, Seymour M. Hersh goes so far as saying that “Kissinger’s function throughout this period soon evolved into a familiar one:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Ghanayem and Voth, \textit{The Kissinger Legacy}, 194.
  \item Kissinger, \textit{The White House Years}, 374, 378.
\end{itemize}
to quietly sabotage Roger’s efforts.” But this was not done without reason. Nixon and Kissinger had devised their own strategy and had been pursuing it all along. They believed that the stalemate produced after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war was a disadvantage to the Soviet position. In fact, Kissinger noticed that over time the Arabs “were bound to conclude that friendship with the Soviet Union was not the key to realizing their aims” if the pattern of the stalemate continued.

Moreover, Kissinger understood the Soviet dilemma in opening an Arab-Israeli peace agreement. Because Arab goals could not succeed militarily, Moscow could neither support nor dissociate itself for fear of losing influence among its Arab friends. In Kissinger’s book, *Diplomacy*, he makes the dilemma clear:

> The key to the Middle East peace, therefore, resided in Washington, not in Moscow. If the United States played its cards carefully, either the Soviet Union would be obliged to contribute to a genuine solution or one of its Arab clients would break ranks and begin moving toward the United States. In either case, Soviet influence among the radical Arab states would be reduced. This is why, early in Nixon’s first term, I felt confident enough to tell a journalist that the new administration would seek to expel Soviet influence from the Middle East. Though that incautious remark created a furor, it accurately described the strategy the Nixon Administration was about to implement.

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113 Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power* (New York: Summit Books, 1983), 406. Note, Hersh goes even further, saying that Kissinger had in actuality made the oncoming October War unstoppable because of his “need to dominate” foreign policy and his misunderstanding of Soviet influence in key Arab nations.


115 Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 737-738.
Thus, Kissinger’s stall strategy of prolonging the stalemate focused on moving “the Arabs toward moderation and the Soviets to the fringes of Middle East diplomacy.”\textsuperscript{116} In retrospect, this policy, if permitted to run its course, may have produced positive results. In the book, \textit{The Kissinger Experience}, Gil Carl Alroy says that as early as the spring of 1972, Sadat saw in Kissinger as the only way to achieve his goals. Furthermore, Alroy points out that Sadat by 1971, “identified America as the only power capable of forcing Israel to submit to Arab terms.” Following this line of thought, it is probable that Kissinger could have realigned Egypt politically with the United States without having to use the oncoming Arab-Israeli crisis to achieve the same objective.\textsuperscript{117}

But the October War changed the situation drastically. The war did not alter U.S. policy for the Middle East so much as it had accelerated Kissinger’s strategy and redirected its tactics to make it work. Kissinger, as both the National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, could no longer sit back and wait, but had to engage actively in seeking peace in the midst of a war. For Kissinger, the new crisis served as a catalyst for his overall plan for the Middle East and now permitted him the opportunity to check Soviet power in the region by moving America into the diplomatic center of a postwar peace process.

Nonetheless, when the Arabs unleashed their offensive in October 1973, it came as an enormous surprise to both the United States and Israel. No one had seen the attack coming even though all the information was there to conclude

\textsuperscript{116} Kissinger, \textit{Years of Upheaval}, 196.

that Egypt and Syria were on the verge of an offensive. Kissinger held the
preconceptions of Israeli invincibility responsible in misleading American and
Israeli intelligence reports.\textsuperscript{118} These reports indicated that an Arab attack was
both impossible and suicidal considering Israel’s superior military capabilities.

In hindsight, it is almost unbelievable that American and Israeli
intelligence could not grasp the true intentions of Egypt and Syria. In \textit{Détente and
Confrontation}, Raymond L. Garthoff writes “Sadat made his intentions so open
that they became generally disbelieved” by continually repeating in public
speeches his desire for war against Israel.\textsuperscript{119} Kissinger had also thought the
same. In a private conversation with Prime Minister Golda Meir, Kissinger
referred to Sadat as “a buffoon who goes on stage every other day to declare a
war.”\textsuperscript{120} Moreover, at a U.S.-Soviet summit meeting in Washington in June 1973,
marking the second year of détente, Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev warned
Nixon about the Arab preference for another war with Israel. However, Nixon
balked at Brezhnev’s cautious remark believing it to be a Soviet ploy to make the
United States pressure Israel to concede a portion of their occupied Arab
territories.\textsuperscript{121} Also, even days before the Arab strike against Israel, Moscow
evacuated 3,700 Soviet dependents from Egypt and Syria but still Israel had not
deduced the possibility of war. Apparently, American and Israeli intelligence

\textsuperscript{118} Kissinger, \textit{Diplomacy}, 739.

\textsuperscript{119} Raymond L. Garthoff, \textit{Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to

\textsuperscript{120} Matt Golan, translated by Ruth Geyra stern and Sol Stern, \textit{The Secret Conversations of Henry
Times Book Co.), 145.

believed Sadat not bold enough to carry out his threats and perceived his military movements as sheer psychological warfare. However, this was less true of the Soviets who knew at least two days before the oncoming war and whose supply of Soviet weaponry made it possible for the Egyptian-Syrian attack.\textsuperscript{122}

Nonetheless, a different version of the story covering the run-up to the war was put forth by historian Richard C. Thornton. Thornton posits that before the war the United States was having problems within the Western alliance because of the fast growing economies of Western Europe (West Germany especially) and Japan. These countries’ newly acquired economic power was putting them gradually on a more independent trajectory away from the United States’ grand strategy for the world. It was Kissinger’s diplomatic stalling, Thornton writes, that “purposefully set Egypt on a course whose logical culmination would be war.”\textsuperscript{123} Unlike the United States, since Europe and Japan’s economies were so heavily dependent on Middle East oil, Kissinger presumed that a potential conflict in the region would “precipitate a sharp rise in the price of petroleum, which, it was hoped, would at last cause the desired slowdown in allied wealth accumulation as well as reinforce the political-economic role of the United States.”\textsuperscript{124} Thornton explains that “because oil was priced in dollars, the rise in energy costs would also strengthen the dollar’s role in the international monetary system, undercutting the drift toward separate monetary blocks. The overall anticipated-

\textsuperscript{122} Victor Israelyan, \textit{Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War} (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 2, 16.

\textsuperscript{123} Thornton, \textit{The Nixon-Kissinger Years}, 233.

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 227, 233.
for-effect was to strengthen the position of the United States within the Western alliance in terms of energy, finance, trade and, ultimately, to bring the alliance itself into stable equilibrium.” Considering the designs of American foreign policy after WWII explained in the previous chapter, which described the United States’ goal to dominate its allies’ economies through the control and access to Middle East oil, this argument does seem quite plausible.

Furthermore, taking into account Kissinger’s secret meeting with Egypt’s National Security Advisor Hafez Ismail in a quiet New York City suburb on February 23, 1973, helps confirm Kissinger’s aim to produce a crisis. The Egyptian official, like the Soviets before him, warned Kissinger about the possibility of another war if a serious American peace initiative was not considered. He told Kissinger that if the United States chose not to move, the diplomacy in the Middle East was likely to remain at a standstill and that Sadat was not one to sit idly while the Israelis occupied Egyptian territory. Months later, in a conversation with Prime Minister of Israel Golda Meir, Kissinger reminisced of the meeting with Ismail: “I played with him. I toyed with him. My aim was to gain time and postpone the serious stage for another month, another year...Ismail told me several times that the present situation could not continue. He asked me whether the United States did not understand that if there weren’t some agreement then there would be war.”¹²⁵ Committed to his stall strategy, Kissinger refused to heed Ismail’s warning. Less than a year later, there was indeed a war.

¹²⁵ Golan, The secret conversations of Henry Kissinger, 145.
Wartime Maneuvering

When the recently appointed Secretary of State was awakened by Joseph Sisco on the morning of October 6, he quickly manned the phone lines. He first called Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin at 6:40 A.M. telling him, “We have a special responsibility to restrain our respective friends,” and “if the Egyptians and Syrians do attack, the Israeli response will be extremely strong.” Then, minutes later, Kissinger called Israeli Deputy Chief of Mission Mordechai Shalev and informed him of the following: “We are in touch with the Soviets and the Egyptians, urging the utmost restraint...we would like to urge you not to take any preemptive action.”

One question arises from these phone calls. Why was Kissinger advising against an Israeli preemptive attack such as the one they carried out in the June 1967 war? This was because his opposition to Israeli military preemption was rooted in his strategy for the crisis. He could not allow Israel to attack first because the Arab world would perceive Israel as an aggressor directly connected to the U.S. through American arms. One historian writes, “It was thus absolutely necessary that Israel accept the first blow to give Cairo the opportunity to cross the canal.” In addition, a preemptive strike by Israel would benefit Soviet influence and create a more cohesive Arab world, something Kissinger was trying to avoid. Significantly, it was important for Kissinger that Israel was seen by the

126 Henry Kissinger, Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 16 and 18. This is Kissinger’s edited account of his diplomacy during the October War which was done mostly over the phone.
international community as the victim, and then later, as the defender against Arab aggression.\textsuperscript{127}

It is also important to understand that Sadat did not have total victory in mind when he started planning for the war in July 1972 and when he met with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad in April of 1973 to lay the groundwork for their assault. In his memoir, \textit{In Search of Identity}, Sadat makes clear that his main objective in the war was “to shatter the Israeli theory of security,” regain respect for Egyptian military prowess, and provide room for diplomatic flexibility with the Israelis.\textsuperscript{128} For Sadat and his advisors, breaking the notion of Israel’s military invincibility was irrevocably connected to the Arabs’ willingness to negotiate for peace with the Israelis.

Sadat records in his memoirs that his initial attack was a “complete and stunning success.”\textsuperscript{129} At 2 p.m., he directed his first wave of 222 supersonic jets to strike strategic Israeli targets, an attack that cost Sadat his brother’s life. During the initial phase of the war, Sadat and his Egyptian army used German engineered high pressure water pumps that sliced through the sand to establish bridges, which enabled Egyptian tanks and infantry to cross the Suez Canal in swift fashion. Using speed and surprise, Sadat and Assad were able to severely damage Israeli forces and their defense systems in the first several days of the


\textsuperscript{129}Ibid, 249.
war, which, according to Sadat, “exploded forever the myth of an invincible Israel.”

In Washington, however, Kissinger, among other officials, believed that Israel would have little trouble in defeating Egypt and Syria after the initial stages of their charge. The Soviet Union must have believed that as well. Eager to end the war early to prevent an Arab military defeat and a superpower confrontation in the Middle East, Moscow contacted Cairo at the end of the first day of fighting to persuade the Egyptians to accept a cease-fire to capitalize on their political and territorial gains. If this happened, the Israeli defeat would be viewed as an American loss against the Soviet Union. In Kissinger’s mind, an Arab victory due to an early cease-fire would give precedence and the diplomatic edge in the region to the Soviet Union, which had the potential to block the United States from the subsequent peace negotiations after the conflict subsided.

On the other hand, Kissinger believed that time was on his side. In his memoirs, he writes, “Our aim was to slow down diplomacy without appearing obstructionist, to urge a speedup of [Israeli] military operations without seeming to intervene, and then to force a ceasefire before the impatience and frustration of the parties or unforeseeable events could rip the whole finely spun fabric to smithereens.” According to this statement, it seems that the pressure was on the Israeli counteroffensive to push back the Arab forces both in the north and

130 Ibid.
131 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, 489.
132 Quandt, Soviet Policy in the October 1973 War, 15.
133 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, 503.
south so Kissinger could use the Israeli reversal in postwar negotiations to his
advantage. Beneficial to Kissinger’s strategy, both Egypt and Syria rejected
Moscow’s plea for the early cease-fire both in part due to their initial military
successes and the belief that they could continue pushing the Israelis beyond the
lines of the June 1967 war.

As Kissinger was calling the shots at the start of the war, Nixon had been
in Key Biscayne, Florida, and was seldom informed about the details of the war.
He was retreating from the many domestic pressures taking form against him.
What was consuming most of Nixon’s time and energy were the criminal charges
filed against his hand-picked Vice President Spiro Agnew and the recent
exposure of the White House tapes which implicated Nixon’s involvement in the
Watergate scandal. In fact, Kissinger did not consult with Nixon until three and a
half hours after he had himself found out about the war, which was the first time
Nixon was made aware of the ongoing Arab-Israeli war.134

The American Airlift to Israel

Back in the Middle East, the war was not turning toward Israel’s favor as
quickly as was originally anticipated by American and Israeli intelligence. On the
battlefield, Israel remained on the defensive and sustained heavy casualties and
military losses due to a new concept of Arab infantry tactics against Israeli tanks.
Also, Soviet surface-to-air missiles recently bought by Egypt and Syria provided
a protective shield from Israeli rocket fire and helped take down a number of

features/2007/05/kissinger200705?currentPage=3; Internet; accessed 30 October 2009. For
Israeli aircraft. While the Syrians penetrated deep into the Golan Heights, the Egyptians advanced their armies into the Sinai.

By the end of the fourth day, Israeli officials were in serious trouble and asking for a cease-fire and military aid from the U.S. to save their country from annihilation. The Israelis were in such a perilous state that through the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, Prime Minister Meir requested an emergency meeting with President Nixon at the White House to secure a substantial arms package to use in the war. Kissinger, never conferring with the president over this issue, immediately refused the request because he believed it would create a panic and entice Arab nations on the sidelines to usher in an all-out Israeli knockout blow. The Arab leaders’ ability to win a decisive victory was relatively possible in the incipient stages of the war because Israel had not been able to mount an effective counteroffensive as quickly as Kissinger, Nixon, and other military intelligence reports assumed. As a result, the issue over how to turn the tide of war by resupplying Israel militarily became an urgent subject of debate in policymaking circles in Washington.

On October 10, the first delivery of Soviet equipment arrived in Damascus to support the attacking Syrian front. On the same day, the United States’ delivery to Israel was a relatively modest supply compared to the arms received by Syria. Evidently, the airlift to Israel confronted a temporary roadblock and was unable to reach full potential. To keep a low American profile in the war and

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135 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 493.

136 Ibid, 489.
prevent upsetting the Arab world, Kissinger had first decided to use only El Al planes (Israel’s national carrier) to move American arms.

In his memoirs, Kissinger notes that the delay was because of infighting between his colleagues and bureaucratic confusion.\textsuperscript{137} However, Quandt, who was on Kissinger’s staff at the time, states on the contrary in his book, \textit{Peace Process}, that it was Kissinger who “held back on a full-scale commitment of American resources to the resupply effort until the fate of the cease-fire-in-place initiative was clear and the scope of the Soviet resupply effort made further delay politically difficult.”\textsuperscript{138} This scenario is more likely when reviewing a top secret Washington Special Action Group (WSAG) meeting on October 14 that is now available to view at the National Security Archives. Kissinger admitted himself that the airlift was purposefully not running “on schedule.”\textsuperscript{139} Primarily, Kissinger was focused on restraining Israel from obtaining a total Arab defeat. He was also trying to limit the chances of an Arab oil embargo. He had received repeated warnings from Saudi Arabia that the Organization of the Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC) would implement an oil embargo on the West if American support for Israeli was too overt.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[Ibid, 515.]
\item[Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, 110.]
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Meanwhile, the fighting intensified between the belligerent parties and, for the first time since the start of the war, Nixon used his presidential authority to make a decision that critically affected the pace of the American airlift to Israel. When he learned about the problem concerning what kind of aircraft to use in the resupply mission, Nixon yelled to Kissinger, “Goddamn it, use every one we have. Tell them to send everything that can fly.” Although Kissinger may not have agreed with an all-out overt airlift to Israel, he followed orders and began to prepare ways to deflect anti-American Arab sentiment because of the now direct American support for Israel in the war.

In a WSAG meeting on October 14, the first day U.S. military cargo planes landed in Israel, Kissinger and other key employees debated how to spin the Israeli resupply mission to the Soviets and the Arabs. The Director of Central Intelligence, William Colby, said, “We can say 200 Russian planes landed first.” To which Kissinger replied, “We can take the position that they fouled us up on negotiations and brought in airplanes.” Later in the meeting, he summarized their plan. “We can now say there was a Russian treachery on negotiations. They have made an abortion of our peace move and sent in 200 flights ... Can we agree on what we are saying? The Russians have begun a massive airlift and we are responding in kind.”

In the book, Heroic Diplomacy, Kenneth Stein states that in the largest military airlift in history, “neither Cairo nor Moscow perceived it as an American support.”

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provocation, but rather as a response to the Soviet resupply.”142 Beneath the Cold War façade, however, Kissinger soon realized he could play the airlift to his strategy’s advantage. In a now declassified conversation, Kissinger states that the shipment of arms to Israel could be used to “prove to the Soviets that we could match strategically anything they could put in the Middle East, and that we could put it into more capable hands. And that the longer the war would go on, the more likely would be a situation in which they would have to ask for a cease-fire rather than we.”143 The resupply of Israel would also become a helpful function for postwar diplomacy proving to the Arabs that only American power was strong enough to stop the war and influence Israel into making territorial concessions.144

Unfortunately, the airlift to Israel also had drastic consequences for the West. The American delivery of arms triggered the feared OPEC oil embargo that skyrocketed oil prices, created a global petroleum shortage, and inflicted a damaging economic toll on the United States, but more so on Europe and Japan who had a heavier dependency on oil from the Middle East. For OPEC, its oil embargo was meant to sway nations towards a more pro-Arab stance, which had worked to some extent. Japan and European countries began to distance themselves away from the more pro-Israel U.S. policy. At the same time, the Arab


144 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, 534.
oil states received an unprecedented transfer of wealth from the industrialized world as the West was forced to buy oil at extraordinarily high market prices.

The Diplomatic Battlefield

Over the period of October 14 to 19, major battles had taken place in the Sinai and along the Syrian border that turned the war in Israel’s favor. On October 14 the largest tank battle since World War II took place and resulted in the destruction of 264 Egyptian tanks compared to Israel’s loss of a mere 66 tanks. This crucial Egyptian defeat, created a situation favorable for Israeli forces to retake the Golan Heights in the north and push across the Suez Canal toward Egypt in the west.

Realizing this and wanting to prevent an Arab defeat, on October 19, Moscow sent an invitation to Kissinger to come discuss a cease-fire. Kissinger accepted, but still believed Israel needed to make gains on the battlefield to use as bargaining leverage against the Arabs. He would again stall to give time to the Israelis on the ground by taking a dinner appointment with the Chinese premier. Kissinger arrived in Russia the next day on October 20 and received a letter from Nixon, which would be the second and last time the president would make a major executive decision during the October War. In short, Nixon bestowed on Kissinger full authority to make decisions on behalf of the United States. Normally, Kissinger would welcome such a grant of power, but his reaction was quite the opposite. In his memoirs concerning Nixon’s order, he wrote, “I was
horrified. The letter meant that I would be deprived of any capacity to stall.”

The directive also implicitly told Kissinger to agree with the Soviets on a comprehensive Mideast settlement, which fundamentally conflicted with Kissinger’s overall strategy. To increase American influence in the region, it was his primary objective during the war to seek a peace settlement in the region that excluded the Soviet Union.\footnote{Ibid.}

In reply to Nixon’s letter, Kissinger sent a cable to General Brent Scowcroft, reaffirming his approach and denouncing Nixon’s. Then, shortly after, in a telephone call from Kissinger to Chief of Staff Alexander Haig, the secretary vented his animosity toward the Nixon directive. “Will you get off my back?” Haig retaliated, “I have troubles of my own.” Kissinger was perplexed, “What troubles can you possibly have in Washington on a Saturday night?” Haig then replied, “The president has just fired Cox. Richardson and Ruckelshaus have resigned and all hell has broken loose.”\footnote{Ibid.} This is how Kissinger learned about the Saturday Night Massacre where Nixon ordered Attorney General Richardson and Deputy Attorney General Ruckelshaus to fire special prosecutor Archibald Cox. When both men refused the president’s order, they resigned in protest so that Nixon had to fire Cox himself.

Due to these domestic circumstances, Kissinger believed that it was now urgent to end the war before the Soviets could exploit Nixon’s new political hurdle. On October 21, Kissinger sat with Secretary General Leonid Brezhnev to

\footnote{Ibid, 547.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

\footnote{Isaacson, \textit{Kissinger}, 525.}
develop a proposal for a cease-fire between the Israelis and the Arabs, which
would be presented to the United Nations. To Kissinger’s surprise, he was able to
piece out a plan which he thought was to his maximum advantage. The
agreement comprised three main points. First, there would be a cease-fire in
place, meaning that each side would remain where they were at the time the
cease-fire would take hold. Second, U.N. Resolution 242 would be
reestablished. Importantly, for Israel’s sake, there was no mention of a military
withdrawal linked to the cease-fire, which Kissinger helped procure for them and,
after the cease-fire took place, Egypt and Israel would be required to enter direct
negotiations. Last, Kissinger achieved a key point in his list of diplomatic
objectives, which was rendering the Soviet Union irrelevant to the peace
process. Significantly, there had been no official compromise over a joint U.S.-
Soviet peace initiative.

However, little did Kissinger know at the time, but Brezhnev was eager to
end the war and prepared to take an extreme position. Both the Soviets and
the Americans possessed a shared interest in preventing the military defeat of
both Arab parties fighting Israel. The jointly sponsored ceasefire called
Resolution 338 was passed by the United Nations at 12:50 A.M. on October 22,
and would be put in place exactly twelve hours later. In the meantime, Kissinger
was invited to Israel. At 10:00 A.M. he was airborne, flying directly into an
ongoing war zone. While there, Kissinger explained to Prime Minister Meir what

148 Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, 552.
149 Garthoff, Défense and Confrontation, 373.
150 Israelyan, Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War, 134.
he had accomplished in Moscow and assured her of Israel’s future national security. Meir, apparently, reluctantly agreed to Kissinger’s plan.

**Unexpected Events**

“The Middle East never fails to teach one the limits of human foresight,” Kissinger wrote in his memoirs.\(^{151}\) Only hours after the cease-fire had taken place, fighting between the two sides erupted. Both the Israelis and the Arabs blamed the other for breaking U.N. Resolution 338. Meanwhile, the Egyptian position was becoming extremely vulnerable. The Israeli army assembled across the Suez Canal in an attempt to encircle Egypt’s third army entrenched on the other side and continued their march into Egypt in direct violation of the ceasefire. In his memoirs, Kissinger notes that he “might have emboldened them.”\(^{152}\) Before leaving Israel he told officials that he did not mind if there was a few hours “slippage” in the cease-fire time deadline.\(^{153}\) Not only that, but Israel was further encouraged to keep fighting in a top-secret message sent from the State Department. It read:

> In the circumstances we would understand if Israelis felt they required some additional time for military dispositions before cease-fire taces [sic] effect. We still want to shoot for target of 12 hours time span between Security Council decision and beginning of cease-fire but could accept Israelis taking slightly

\(^{151}\) Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 568.

\(^{152}\) Ibid.

\(^{153}\) Ibid, 569.
longer for reasons stated above. This communication for obvious reasons requires total discretion.\textsuperscript{154}

Moreover, in a declassified conversation with Prime Minister Meir, Kissinger told her rather explicitly, “You won’t get violent protests from Washington if something happens during the night, while I’m flying. Nothing can happen in Washington till noon tomorrow.”

Meir said, “If they don’t stop, we won’t….”

Kissinger then replied, “Even if they do….”\textsuperscript{155}

During this time, it appears that American foreign policy was being almost exclusively dictated by Kissinger. Ironically, however, he had delayed achieving his policy goals when he covertly permitted the Israelis to fight past the cease-fire deadline. But he did this because he wanted the Israelis to have the upper hand in postwar negotiations. During the time the cease-fire was supposed to be enforced, Israel had captured an Egyptian naval base along the Suez Canal and destroyed a number of Egyptian surface-to-air missile sites. The Israelis, spurred by Kissinger’s remarks, had sought “more than the effort to obtain an advantageous bargaining position,” and instead targeted the destruction of the Egyptian Third Army instead.\textsuperscript{156} By that time, the Egyptian Third Army, consisting


\textsuperscript{156} Thornton, \textit{The Nixon-Kissinger Years}, 273.
of 25,000 men, was located in the southern area of the eastern bank of the Suez Canal and had been logistically cutoff and trapped by Israeli forces.

Worse, Kissinger had just left Israel and to the Arabs and Soviets he looked as if he may have been in collusion with them -- which indeed he was! To save American-Arab relations, Kissinger now had to stop the Israelis from inflicting any further damage upon the Egyptian army, Richard C. Thornton comments, “The danger here for American strategy was that Israel might do what the Soviet Union could not – edge the United States off center and deny Washington the opportunity to restructure the region through an Israeli-Egyptian settlement.” 157 As for the Soviets, they could not stand by and let their Arab friends be defeated. It was in this context that Kissinger became apprehensive about Soviet intervention and a possible superpower showdown as each side became directly involved in enforcing the cease-fire they had just jointly sponsored.

The day the violation of the cease-fire took place President Sadat, apprehensive about his own defeat, asked for a unilateral American intervention force to pressure the Israelis to stop fighting. That was out of the question. Kissinger knew he could not use American troops against Israel, a country the U.S. had just given $2.2 billion worth of military supplies. But Kissinger also realized he could not just stand by and watch the destruction of the Egyptian Third Army by recently delivered American arms. This could greatly jeopardize

157 Ibid, 274.
his role as future peacemaker in the region and be a major deterrent toward improving relations with the Arab world.¹⁵⁸

By the end of the next day on October 23, Kissinger had worked alongside the Soviets to put together another cease-fire. Egypt and Israel agreed to U.N. Resolution 339, which reinstated a cease-fire and “urged” parties to return to the previous cease-fire lines. The crisis seemed to be averted, but then again, as Kissinger came to know, the Middle East is a volatile and unpredictable place where its ties to the superpowers could lead to a very precarious situation.

**Nuclear High Noon**

Despite the second cease-fire a day earlier, October 24 began with a resurgence of fighting. By midday President Sadat issued a public statement that called for both superpowers to intervene militarily to guarantee the cosponsored cease-fire. Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin called Kissinger on the evening of October 24 informing him that the Soviet Union would support a resolution in the Security Council for Soviet and American troops to be sent to the area to ensure the ceasefire. Kissinger was strategically opposed to the proposition: “We had not worked for years to reduce the Soviet military presence in Egypt only to cooperate in reintroducing it as the result of a U.N.

¹⁵⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 120.
On the phone he told Dobrynin that the U.S. would veto any such resolution if it was introduced.

Shortly after, the White House received an alarming letter from Brezhnev threatening a Soviet unilateral intervention in the Middle East. At the same time, Soviet naval forces had been assembling in the Mediterranean, helping to convince Kissinger that the Soviet threat was indeed genuine. In addition, transport planes for flying Soviet arms into the Middle East were grounded, presumably to be used as transporting troops and at least seven Soviet airborne divisions had been placed on high alert. Haig, in his memoirs, describes the looming danger of the Soviet threat: “Their weapons of mass destruction were capable of laying waste the territory of the United States and Western Europe, and their conventional forces and lines of supply were much closer to the site of the crisis and in a more advanced state of alert than ours.”

At this moment, the Secretary of State received a call from the president “as agitated and emotional as I had ever heard him,” Kissinger would later write of the episode. According to Kissinger, Nixon was apparently intoxicated and greatly troubled by his exposed involvement in the Watergate affair. Kissinger tried to put Nixon at ease “but for once he was not to be reassured.” Not wanting to alert the distraught president of a possible unilateral Soviet move into...

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159 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 579.


162 Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 581.
the Middle East, Kissinger and Haig took it upon themselves to arrange a special
actions meeting with top officials in the White House.

Before the WSAG meeting convened, Kissinger took a firm stance against
a unilateral Soviet move: “There was no question in my mind that we would have
to reject the Soviet proposal. And we would have to do so in a manner that
shocked the Soviets into abandoning the unilateral move they were threatening –
and, from all our information, planning.” Present with Kissinger (who was acting
as chair) at the WSAG meeting were Director of Central Intelligence William
Colby, Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, White House Chief of Staff
Alexander Haig, Deputy Secretary of State Brent Scowcroft, and Joint Chiefs of
Staff, Admiral Thomas Moorer, who all agreed that the only way to circumvent
Soviet intervention in the Middle East was to threaten it themselves.

These six men -- none of whom were elected to office -- decided on
elevating the American military alert status to Defense Readiness Condition III or
DEFCON III. This involves the activation of American strategic nuclear forces all
over the world. Other divisions were also placed on high alert and aircraft
carriers, the Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the John F. Kennedy, were moved
into the Mediterranean to join the Independence. There was to be no message
or explanation from the U.S. to the Soviets of what was happening. Kissinger
intended for Moscow’s intelligence corps to pick up Washington’s alarm signals.

The alert proved to be a shrewd decision and, importantly, it prevented the
unilateral Soviet force from entering the area. In Détente and Confrontation,
Garthoff illustrates that Kissinger wanted to “show an American ability to face
down the Soviets…But above all Kissinger was applying his customary
diplomatic jujitsu – using the Brezhnev ultimatum publicly as a foil to demonstrate
American will and capacity to face down any Soviet threat, while privately using it
as leverage in pressing the Israelis into stopping their advance.”\textsuperscript{163} Furthermore,
this act demonstrated to the Arabs the American dominance over the Soviet
Union since the U.S. was able to dictate the outcome of events in the Middle
East, which had subsequently increased American power and prestige in the
region.\textsuperscript{164}

Nonetheless, the alert did not resolve the situation on the ground. The
Israelis were still insistent on the surrender of the Egyptian Third Army while
Kissinger was committed to preventing such an occurrence. In Nixon’s name,
Kissinger threatened Israel to provide nonmilitary supplies to the starving
Egyptian troops or American relations with Israel would be gravely
reconsidered.\textsuperscript{165} With growing American pressure weighing heavily on Israel’s
shoulders, the Israelis finally agreed to stop their advance. Subsequently, the
U.N. passed cease-fire Resolution 340 and the main military operations of the
1973 October War had ended.

The New Sole Intermediary of the Arab-Israeli conflict

Though some historians contribute Kissinger’s diplomatic success to his
ability to produce a “balanced” military outcome during the October 1973 war, the
\textsuperscript{163} Garthoff, \textit{Detente and Confrontation}, 384.
\textsuperscript{164} Stein, \textit{Heroic Dipomacy}, 96.
\textsuperscript{165} Hanhimaki, \textit{The Flawed Architect}, 316.
recently declassified government documents show that Kissinger’s true intentions aimed to keep the postwar negotiations in Israel’s favor. Important for the success of his strategy, the conflict gave Kissinger the opportunity to undercut Soviet influence in Arab countries while, at the same time, it strengthened America’s ties to Israel and increased American power in the region. Essentially, Kissinger had developed a complex strategy that, when the dust settled, left him in a “commanding position.”\textsuperscript{166} Significantly, by the end of the war, Kissinger had situated the United States in a new and dominant diplomatic role -- as leader of the Arab-Israeli postwar peace negotiations.

\textsuperscript{166} Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, 128.
Chapter 3
Kissinger’s Shuttle Diplomacy and the Creation of America’s Framework for the Middle East Peace Process

After the war ended, Kissinger’s task as principal peacemaker was far from over. In the months and years to come, the U.S. Secretary of State would embark on a step-by-step method of diplomacy to usher in a series of military disengagement agreements in the effort to build a long-lasting peace between Egypt and Israel. But before this could be achieved, Kissinger’s famous “shuttle diplomacy” would deepen the ties between America and Israel and restructure the power in the region, placing the United States and the Jewish state in an advantageous position in contrast to the Soviet Union, Israel’s Arab adversaries, and the Palestinian peoples’ quest for self-determination.

The October 1973 war effectively changed the politics and views of the participants and those on the sidelines. Significantly, the war had shown that Israel was not the invincible military power in the Middle East most Western intelligence agencies deemed it was before the war. In the United States, the Arab surprise attack and its ability to inflict heavy Israeli casualties in the preliminary stages of the conflict depicted Israel as the victim of Arab aggression. This was further exacerbated by the Arab oil embargo on the West that added to the Arabs’ villainous portrayal in American mainstream media. For the Arabs, the Egyptian and Syrian attack had, in the words of Sadat, “shattered the Israeli theory of security,” that, at the very least, brought the Israelis to the negotiation
table with the Arabs. In addition, the 1973 Arab offensive altered Israeli politics.

Israel’s reaction to the near destruction of their society produced a new political party called the Likud. Members of this party represented a right-of-center politics whose leaders publicly opposed the creation of a Palestinian state and supported the continuation of building Israeli settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, and the annexation of East Jerusalem.

In the United States, the war, having brought the superpowers to the brink of a possible nuclear catastrophe, caused many politicians as well as the American people to become critical of Nixon and Kissinger’s policy of detente. As in Israel, the war also added a new dimension to U.S. politics. America’s historic $2.2 billion airlift to aid Israel during the war had not only made the Jewish state into one of the United States’ closest allies, but also into an American financial asset. In the book, *U.S. Policy Towards Israel*, Elizabeth Stephens states, “The sentimental or moral commitment towards Israel was elevated to top priority of US foreign policy through the sheer power of the marketplace. By transforming America into Israel’s largest investor, Kissinger guaranteed that Washington would stand by Jerusalem, if only to protect its investment.”\(^{167}\)

Because of the now large sums of aid being annually poured into Israel, the pro-Israeli lobby such as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) was promoted “to the status of a major player in Washington.”\(^{168}\) The pro-Israeli lobby was further aided by the establishment of Jewish military think tanks such as the Jewish


\(^{168}\) Ibid.
Institute for National Security Affairs (JINSA) as well as many others. Paraphrasing the words of Kissinger, Israel’s strategic interests would be greatly enhanced by anchoring those interests to those of the United States. At the same time, JINSA would seek to intellectually link Israeli regional security to the framework of America’s global defense policy.

Thus, it is not surprising that Kissinger’s postwar diplomacy was connected to bolstering both American and Israeli interests that had been very much aligned by the early 1970s. The first objective of Kissinger’s post-October War diplomacy was shaped by U.S. Cold War policy; it aimed to minimize the Soviet Union’s influence in the region by excluding it from participating in the postwar peace negotiations. Kissinger’s second objective, however, encompassed a more regional approach. This particular goal aimed to produce a political settlement between the Arabs and Israelis. However, as Quandt writes in his book, *Peace Process*, Kissinger was more “committed to a process, not an outcome.” He further states that the Nixon administration made a “major effort” but never guaranteed to the Arabs that it would force the Israelis to withdrawal from all Arab lands or that “Palestinian rights would be restored.”

The October War changed many things in the Middle East, one diplomatic historian noted, but it “did not alter Nixon’s and Kissinger’s disdain for the Palestinians.” Their “disdain” most likely stemmed from the PLO’s ties to the Soviet Union and to the trouble the PLO had caused in Jordan during the September Crisis in 1970.

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170 Little *American Orientalism*, 287.
Hence, Kissinger’s postwar diplomacy in the Middle East sought to marginalize America’s enemies, most notably the Arab radical states supported by the Soviet Union and the PLO, whose policies, as seen by Washington, were pro-Soviet and anti-Israel.\footnote{Kissinger, \textit{Years of Renewal}, 352.} According to the book, \textit{Dishonest Broker}, Nasser Aruri posits that Kissinger sought “to obtain a political settlement capable of creating a transformation of the very nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a settlement that would remove the conflict from its ideological context and transform it into a simple conflict over territory. Such an approach was inherently detrimental to the Palestinians and Arab nationalists, who viewed the struggle as one against settler colonialism and imperialist penetration.” This would become a crucial part of Kissinger’s postwar aims. His negotiations for peace were based on undermining Arab nationalist struggles, redefining the Arab-Israeli conflict, and coercing the Arabs to make more “significant concessions to Israel.”\footnote{Aruri, \textit{Dishonest Broker}, 21-22.}

Kissinger’s third objective was to remove Egypt from the Arab front against Israel by brokering a peace between the two countries. By doing this “Kissinger can be seen as Israel’s greatest friend” concludes Stephens because he was attempting to secure for the Israelis “the peace they had so desperately sought.”\footnote{Stephens, \textit{U.S. Policy Towards Israel}, 155.} This would be accomplished by pursuing a military disengagement pact between Egypt and Israel that could eventually lead to a formal Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. In the process, Egypt’s political allegiance would be realigned to embrace the United States. Though Sadat already believed the U.S.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[171] Kissinger, \textit{Years of Renewal}, 352.
\item[172] Aruri, \textit{Dishonest Broker}, 21-22.
\item[173] Stephens, \textit{U.S. Policy Towards Israel}, 155.
\end{footnotes}
to be a primary component in achieving his own regional objectives, Kissinger sought to reinforce his assumptions by luring the Egyptian president with the sale of high American technology and, especially, military technology. In his memoirs, Kissinger writes, “Our own strategy relied on Sadat as the key to Middle East peace. He was, after all, the most moderate leader and at the helm of the largest country in the region.”  

Referring to Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy in his book, *The Fateful Triangle*, Noam Chomsky summarizes the Secretary of State’s goal to reorient American and Israeli relations with Egypt. This was found in the path, Chomsky says, of transforming Egypt into “a U.S. client state while effectively removing it from the Middle East conflict with a Sinai agreement. Then Israel would be free to continue its policies of integrating the occupied territories -- and to concentrate its forces for war on the northern border.”  

These objectives, as we will see, would be evident in the wake of Kissinger’s postwar diplomacy.

The strategy that Kissinger orchestrated to attain these goals would be through a step-by-step process that would prevent the first steps of negotiations from being connected to a final settlement. This was partly “meant to reassure Israel that a settlement would not be imposed against its will.”  

During this time, Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy would grant him the opportunity to rearrange the political makeup of the region by being the only one to meet with all the parties involved. Before all this took place, however, Kissinger first had to head to Cairo.

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174 Kissinger, Years of Renewal, 359.
to meet with Anwar Sadat and see if the Egyptian president would agree to his plans.

**Round One in the Middle East**

When the U.S. Secretary of State landed in Cairo on November 7, 1973 to speak with Sadat, the “odds were hardly in Kissinger’s favor.”\(^{177}\) The previous American airlift to Israel during the war had left a bad taste of American influence in the region. Moreover, the Arab oil embargo against the West was still in full effect and continued to damage industrialized economies from Western Europe to Japan. The Japanese and the Europeans, who were (and still are) more dependent on Mideast oil, were pressing for Israeli withdrawals from the occupied Arab lands meant to encourage OPEC to lift the embargo. This inherently isolated and weakened Israel internationally, placing the Jewish state “in the awkward position of being heavily dependent on Washington for arms, economic aid, and diplomatic support.”\(^{178}\) Meanwhile, in the U.S. domestic political scene, Nixon was being called by Democrats as well as a handful of Republicans to resign from his presidency due to his alleged involvement in the Watergate scandal. With the national spotlight on him, the American president was urging Kissinger to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough in the Middle East quickly that could divert attention away from his own political problems in Washington.


Sadat was in a precarious position as well. The Egyptian Third Army remained surrounded by Israeli forces, leaving left Sadat with a dearth of diplomatic options. He could either hold tight and wait for Israeli clemency to be bestowed on his encircled army or he could offer a concession to the Israelis to begin the disengagement process. When he met with Kissinger, Sadat chose the latter of his two choices, but had to accept on the conditions that his army remained surrounded and that Kissinger became the sole international player responsible for brokering an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement.\textsuperscript{179} With this decision, Sadat essentially accepted Kissinger’s postwar peace plan for the region.

Still, Kissinger could not establish formal U.S.-Egyptian relations because of political circumstances in Egypt that had the potential to undermine Sadat’s authority. Consequently, Sadat’s decision to work with the Americans and make steps towards peace with Israel was against the views of many high ranking Egyptian officials, would later instigate protests among the Egyptian population, and even lead to Sadat’s eventual assassination on October 6, 1981. This is why Sadat’s strategy, as described by Kissinger, had to be “extraordinarily subtle and ambiguous.” Kissinger admits that Sadat had to “pay his Arab dues” by speaking “passionately on behalf of the Palestinians,” while he “urged us to negotiate with the PLO, which he knew from conversation with me would not happen.” Importantly, Kissinger continues, Sadat “needed to keep up the facade of Arab

\textsuperscript{179} Hanhimaki, \textit{The Flawed Architect}, 319.
unity” until the United States was “quite certain” that it could broker a bilateral deal between Egypt and Israel.\(^{180}\)

In the book, *The Flawed Architect*, Jussi Hanhimaki demonstrates the impact of Sadat’s choice to follow the American lead: “The Egyptian president’s decision was both a courageous reversal of policy and a calculated move to pass the onus of responsibility for the potential failure of peacemaking to Kissinger’s shoulders.”\(^{181}\) Also, Sadat’s decision, Hanhimaki says, effectively removed Sadat from the pan-Arab movement which his predecessor, Nasser, had been so instrumental in inspiring. By relying on America’s diplomatic leverage with Israel, Sadat was putting his cards in the hands of the United States, or rather, into the hands of Kissinger, and thereby set the Secretary of State on a course to exclude the Soviet Union from the substance of the Arab-Israeli peace process.

During this brief trip, Kissinger also flew to Jordan to meet with King Hussein to persuade the monarch into joining peace negotiations with the Israelis. King Hussein was hesitant to make any commitments, telling Kissinger about his sensitivity over how the Palestinian question in the West Bank would be handled in the negotiations. The West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem were lands previously held under Jordanian sovereignty before the Israelis had taken them in the 1967 war. King Hussein wished the negotiations could ultimately return the West Bank to Jordan, however, the Saudis and Syrians were

\(^{180}\) Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 356-357.

pushing for Palestinian autonomy and self-determination there.\textsuperscript{182} Though this trip could not be counted as a success, Kissinger remained determined to bring Egypt and Israel to the negotiating table while keeping Jordanian peace talks ready for the later stages of his diplomacy.

After Jordan, Kissinger went to Saudi Arabia to meet with King Faisal to ask for support in his negotiation process, but under the diplomatic veil, Kissinger was really asking the Saudi monarch to alleviate some of the strains the oil embargo was having on the United States’ diplomatic flexibility. Kissinger told King Faisal that the United States “could handle an oil shortage economically, but that its real significance was political and psychological.”\textsuperscript{183} Making his point clear, Kissinger advised the monarch that the embargo only served to strengthen those in the U.S. who oppose a peace settlement between the Arabs and Israelis. While expressing his friendship with the United States during this difficult time, King Faisal said he had no choice but to continue the embargo until an Israeli withdrawal from Arab lands began showing clear signs of progress. Before leaving Saudi Arabia, Prince Fahd, the Second Deputy Prime Minister, assured Kissinger that he would “do his best to get the oil flowing again.”\textsuperscript{184}

When Kissinger was in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Israel were making agreements on a cease-fire plan and a POW exchange. Then, two days later,

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\textsuperscript{184} Ibid.
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Egyptian and Israeli military representatives convened at Kilometer 101, a road marker in the Sinai desert, to sign a pledge to begin disengagement negotiations. With the weight of making peace in the Middle East now upon Kissinger’s shoulders, his plan for an American-led peace process was effectively underway -- besides one minor detour -- a Soviet Union cochaired U.N. conference to broker a significant peace deal between the Arabs and Israelis.

**Faking it at Geneva**

Serious negotiations over Israeli withdrawals from Egypt had to wait until after the Israelis completed their national elections in late December. For the time being, however, it was important for Kissinger to appear as if he was working with the Soviet Union and the U.N. to achieve a “just and durable” peace between the Arabs and Israelis. This would be seen in Kissinger’s participation at the Geneva Conference. William Quandt, still among Kissinger’s staff at the time, describes that the Geneva conference was for Kissinger a negotiating framework that provided him with “the symbolic umbrella under which various diplomatic moves might be made.” Essentially, Kissinger’s appearance at Geneva would “legitimize the settlement process,” and give the Soviets a “sense of participation to prevent them from disrupting the [U.S. unilateral] peace effort.”\(^{185}\)

Quandt could not have been more correct. In one of the many similar messages from Kissinger to President Nixon, Kissinger states, “They [the Soviets] want to work with us in arranging joint U.S.–Soviet auspices, and we are

being careful to consult generally with them while pursuing our more substantive efforts bilaterally with the parties.”\textsuperscript{186} In contrast, Soviet officials viewed it as in their interest to keep the disengagement process under Geneva auspices for two main reasons: first, it would “forestall Egypt’s shift away from Moscow” or, if nothing else, it would create a diplomatic obstacle for the United States. And second, the Geneva conference was the only source of communications the Soviet Union had with Israel.\textsuperscript{187} Without the conference, the Soviets would have zero leverage in negotiations with the Israelis, thus limiting their influence with their Arab clients.

The Israelis, however, were also concerned about the ability of the international conference to undermine their occupation of the Arab territories. As a result, they listed a number of conditions that had to be met before they would agree to attend the conference, which included this statement in a telegram to the U.S. State Department: “Israel may just refuse to attend any peace conference at which there will be a separate Palestinian/Fedayeen delegation.”\textsuperscript{188} But Israeli participation in the conference, Kissinger argued, was imperative for his plan to work, otherwise it would just be another summit composed of Arab leaders. To persuade Israel to attend, Nixon and Kissinger used the carrot and stick approach. On the one hand, Nixon pressured the


\textsuperscript{187} Thornton, \textit{The Nixon-Kissinger Years}, 282.

Israelis by threatening to rethink American support for Israel, while Kissinger, on
the other hand, assured the Jewish state that his plan at the conference was “to
focus on the question of disengagement of Egyptian and Israeli forces as a first
step, and to avoid ... the fundamental issues of territory and the Palestinians.”
Nixon and Kissinger likewise agreed with Israel on its opposition to Palestinian
representation at the conference. Israel, though remaining hesitant, reluctantly
agreed to send its representatives to Geneva.

The Geneva conference eventually took place on December 21, 1973
under the aegis of the U.N. Secretary General. The United States and the Soviet
Union, acting as cochairmen, oversaw the representatives of Egypt, Israel, and
Jordan. Syria had refused to participate in the conference and was remembered
by a nameplate which rested at an empty chair among the delegates. The
country’s absence was due to the United States and Israel’s views against
allowing the attendance of Palestinian representatives.

During the conference, Kissinger gave a speech and followed through with
his plan. He played to his audience, telling the representatives that the ultimate
goal of the conference was peace, but to continue “the first step” must be
towards strengthening the U.N. cease-fire that would serve as a foundation to
realizing U.N. Resolution 242 and 338. These resolutions were the blueprints
to begin the process of a comprehensive settlement that essentially put forth the

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189 Memorandum from Secretary of State Kissinger to President Nixon 10 November 1973,
1973), XXV, 953-957.

diplomacy in the Middle East (New York: Crowell, 1976), 107.
idea of trading land for peace. After the conference ended, there had been no established date to reconvene. This essentially lent Kissinger the flexibility he needed to impose his bilateral track of diplomacy in the Middle East. 
Significantly, the Geneva conference set a precedent under which the United States could avoid, dismiss, or veto forums of international scope that aimed to discuss questions over Palestinian representation and their rights to a sovereign state. As one historian later put it, “Geneva was from Washington’s point of view no longer useful.”

Disengaging the Enemies

By the end of December 1973, Israel’s national elections were over. Yitzhak Rabin of Israel’s labor party (also the former ambassador to the U.S.) was the new Prime Minister of Israel. Kissinger now believed that the time was politically ripe to seek a disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel, which he began in January 1974. During this period, Kissinger would fly back and forth from Aswan, Jerusalem, and Tel-Aviv to negotiate with each side over the size of their forces, the area between Egyptian and Israeli borderlines, and each army’s withdrawal to their proper side of the Suez Canal (Egyptian forces on the east side were to be relocated to the west side and Israeli forces vice-versa). 

After less than a week of negotiations, the Egyptians and Israelis came to an agreement on January 18, 1974 to be known as the “Egyptian-Israeli Agreement on Disengagement of Forces in Pursuance of the Geneva Peace

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Conference,” or, for short, the Sinai I accord. However, as stated in the agreement, this was not to be “regarded by Egypt and Israel as a final peace agreement.” It only constituted a “first step toward a final, just and durable peace according to the provisions of Security Council Resolution 338.” With the first stage of Egyptian-Israeli disengagement plans complete, Kissinger would have to embark on a second round of negotiations to return Sadat his lost land in the Sinai Peninsula. Until then, Sadat gave “no promise of nonbelligerency,” but did secretly promise to allow Israeli nonmilitary cargo to pass through the canal.

Sadat’s backchannel promise was not the only thing that remained undisclosed. Kissinger arranged a secret bilateral Memorandum of Understanding with Israel (MOU). In the MOU, Kissinger privately agreed to see that the United States would support Israeli interests in the United Nations Security Council. The significance of this first agreement was that Israel would now be able to weigh in on the decisions made by the five permanent members of the U.N. Security Council. The MOU also stated: “The United States will make every effort to be fully responsive on a continuing and long-term basis to Israel’s military equipment requirements.” This last particular commitment, a guarantee of American military aid to Israel, was hardly surprising, especially considering the history of relations between the two nations.

In Kissinger’s postwar negotiation process, guarantees of American military commitments and assistance were not only used to bring Israel closer to

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193 Ibid, 111.

194 Ibid, 111, 112.
the United States, but used by Kissinger as a tactic to persuade Israel into forging a peace with Egypt. It was in this way that Kissinger aimed to soften Israel's negotiating stance and achieve one of his goals in the peace process, which was to align Egypt politically with the United States. This could be done only if Israel made peace with Egypt.

Nevertheless, positive inducements to Israel were not exceptional. Sadat also expected Kissinger to reward Egypt with financial and military aid after the Sinai I accord concluded. This reinforced Sadat's decision to continue with the American peace plan, while Sadat agreed to help Kissinger persuade the Saudis to lift the oil embargo and warm relations between other Arab leaders and Egypt's new American financier.

In March 1974, Nixon and Kissinger kept to their word with Sadat and lobbied a bill through Congress that included an “unprecedented” $250 million worth of aid to Egypt. This was indeed “particularly remarkable,” states Scott Lasensky, since it was relatively clear in the last two decades that Egypt had been most hostile to American interests in the Middle East. Since the Sinai I accord, the granting of foreign aid to countries in the Middle East has played an integral part in the United States' effort to keep the peace between Egypt and Israel. For Israel, foreign aid represents America's long-term commitment to the

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196 Ibid, 173
Jewish state. For Egypt, U.S. aid was a way to entice the state to make peace with Israel and align itself with the United States.\footnote{Ibid, 174.}

Kissinger’s “swift success” in achieving an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement only made stronger his “belief that step-by-step diplomacy was the best -- indeed the only -- method for containing the Arab-Israeli conflict.”\footnote{Sheehan, \textit{The Arabs, Israelis, and Henry Kissinger}, 113.} In an attempt to keep the momentum in his favor, the U.S. Secretary of State then headed to Damascus to meet with President Assad, whose army was also entangled with Israeli forces along Syria’s southern border in the Golan Heights. Still, this was only a pre-negotiation negotiation, allowing Kissinger to gauge Assad’s stance on future disengagement plans. As Kissinger predicted, reaching an agreement between Syria and Israel would not be as easy as it was with Egypt. President Assad was one of the more inflexible Arab leaders towards making peace with Israel and often expressed the more radical views of the region. To start things off, Kissinger’s idea was to exchange a list of Israeli POWs captured by Syria for a tangible assurance of peace from the Israelis. After he stopped in Tel Aviv on his way back to Washington, both parties had agreed with this approach, giving Kissinger the chance to devise an Israeli-Syrian disengagement proposal to his liking.

Meanwhile, Sadat, as he agreed with Kissinger, went to Saudi Arabia and met with the King to pressure him into becoming the first member of OPEC to lift the oil embargo on the United States.\footnote{Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, 143-144.} At the same time, the Soviet Union was
becoming increasingly irritated about Kissinger’s unilateral moves in the Middle East, which were squeezing the Soviets out of the peace process and undercutting their influence in the region. The Soviet Union’s vexation was evident in a letter Brezhnev had sent to Nixon during Kissinger’s first round of shuttle diplomacy. Soon thereafter, Brezhnev was publicly accusing Kissinger of “hijacking” the peace process from Soviet diplomacy. By February 1974, the Russian Ambassador to the United States, Andrei Gromyko, was complaining directly to Kissinger in Washington, asking the Secretary of State about the supposed value of detente. Kissinger sidestepped his inquires over U.S.-Soviet cooperation and “defended his actions as being taken at the request of the regional parties.” In reality, though, Kissinger was really intent on expelling the Soviets from the region, but kept assuring Gromyko that “it was just a matter of tactics, the best way toward a disengagement of forces” until a full settlement could be obtained. Soon, however, it would be apparent that Kissinger had not only commandeered the peace process from the Soviet Union, but he had also seized control over its direction from the international conference sponsored by the United Nations.

Brushing off Brezhnev and Gromyko’s accurate claims about the intent of U.S. strategy in the Middle East was difficult, and required some finesse. The Soviet Union would not just fade off into the distance. Brezhnev and Gromyko

201 Ibid, 329.
202 Quandt, Peace Process, 147.
203 Hanimaki, The Flawed Architect, 326.
would frequently protest American moves in the region just as Kissinger understood that he had to be cautious not to squash detente, the larger aim of his foreign policy. He had once remarked to Nixon about his Middle East diplomacy, “It is not in our interests to drive them [the Soviets] to an explosion.”

Still, Kissinger was focused on obtaining bilateral negotiations with Israel and Arab countries whether or not the Soviets agreed with his approach. From Kissinger’s perspective, leaving the future of the Middle East in the hands of regional or global actors was too much of a risk for the strategic and economic security of the United States.

Though Brezhnev and Gromyko were aware of Kissinger’s strategy to force them out of the Middle East, Kissinger’s American-led peace process had been working because of the belligerents’ shared interests to deal with the United States. To begin with, the Egyptians, and even the Syrians, were not eager to have the Soviets meddling in their disengagement negotiations. For Egypt, Sadat no longer had any particular use for the Soviets now that he was to start receiving American aid in the form of money and arms. As for the Syrians, they marked Egypt’s success with Israel to the elimination of the Soviets from the negotiations, which lead many other Arab leaders to conclude that the United States was the only power capable of nudging the Israelis towards giving up their occupied Arab territories.

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204 Quoted in ibid, 328.

Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy between the Syrians and the Israelis began on February 26, 1974. After visiting Syria, America’s number one diplomat then stopped in Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan. In Egypt, Kissinger announced the reestablishment of formal U.S.-Egyptian diplomatic relations, a feat that suggested Egypt’s eventual transition into the American Cold War camp. While there, Sadat promised Kissinger to encourage Assad to “follow the Egyptian example in negotiations with the Israelis.” In Saudi Arabia, Kissinger pressed the King to end the oil embargo. Soon after, Syrian and Israeli representatives arrived in Washington to discuss their tentative disengagement proposals. During that trip, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC members started to believe in the legitimacy of the United States’ peace efforts, especially since it had brought the Syrians and Israelis to the negotiating table. On March 18, 1974, OPEC finally lifted the oil embargo on the West which had lasted a begrudging five months.

Nevertheless, the end of the OPEC embargo did not alleviate immediately the affects of the global oil shortage and nor did it ease the difficulties facing Kissinger in achieving an Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement. Throughout the duration of the negotiations, Syria targeted Israel’s forces in the Golan Heights with a steady barrage of artillery rounds. Although terrorizing, Kissinger understood Assad’s tactic. He was essentially in a very weak negotiating


position. Assad had lost territory in the conflict and held no Israeli lands. Also, he had little to no bargaining leverage besides the ongoing artillery bombardments and the sixty-five Israeli POWs his military had captured during the war. Even at the negotiations, Assad held a hard line for disengagement, and the Israelis did too. After an arduous month of shuttling, Kissinger brokered the first-ever Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement on May 31, 1974.

Modeled after the Sinai I accord, the Israeli-Syrian disengagement agreement separated the forces and gave Syria control of a town in the Golan Heights called Quneitra that had been historically under its rule. Though Syria was able to regain possession of this small town, it was more of a symbolic gesture made by Israel considering Israeli forces would remain entrenched on three of the town’s surrounding hills. There would also be a U.N. buffer zone with peacekeeping troops placed in between the two countries. And like the Sinai I accord, the Israeli-Syrian disengagement was “not a peace agreement,” but a “step toward a just and durable peace.” After each respective representative signed off on the Kissinger-mediated agreement, the October War, which began seven months earlier, was officially at a close.

Presidential Transitioning

Though a final peace between Syria and Israel would remain elusive, the disengagement was a major diplomatic achievement for Kissinger’s shuttle

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diplomacy. Basking in the praise of the media, Kissinger was publicly lauded by President Nixon for his historic accomplishment and privately thanked by him for taking the country’s focus away from Watergate -- if only for a moment. The New York Times even ran this headline on June 1, 1974, one day after the completion of the Israeli-Syrian disengagement accord: “Kissinger Takes Edge Off Watergate.”

In addition, the New York Times published an article underscoring the new American role in the Middle East that day. It read: “Secretary of State Kissinger’s persistence in bringing about the Syrian-Israeli disengagement will open the way for the United States to displace the Soviet Union as the major foreign influence in the Arab world.”

To highlight the occasion, the much beleaguered president took a trip through the Middle East, visiting Israel, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Egypt. His trip was to demonstrate the U.S. commitment to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, to ameliorate American relations with the Arab world and to tell President Sadat that the United States was going to build Egypt its first nuclear reactor. It would be one of his last times Nixon was outside the United States as president besides his final visit to Moscow later that month to discuss a strategic arms accord. Later that summer, on August 9, 1974, Nixon resigned. The “third-rate burglary” of Watergate had cost him the presidency.

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But just as Watergate extinguished Nixon’s political career, it had worked to benefit Kissinger’s diplomacy by giving him more free reign to conduct his foreign policy. With the domestic scandal roaring down on him, Nixon had become “obsessed” over containing the political fallout from Watergate, which was distracting him from overseeing Kissinger’s diplomatic maneuvering in the Middle East. In comparison to Nixon’s downward spiraling presidency, Kissinger’s “reputation soared” as 75 percent of Americans believed he should keep his position as the U.S. Secretary of State when the next commander-in-chief moved into the White House.\(^{213}\)

Unlike all the presidents before him, Nixon, because of the odd circumstances of the Saturday Night Massacre as discussed in Chapter 2, was able to appoint his own successor. This was Gerald R. Ford who replaced former Vice President Spiro Agnew. Ford had been an “unlikely president,” writes Quandt, and “foreign policy was obviously not his field of expertise.”\(^{214}\) Nevertheless, he was not a mediocre commander-in-chief. Kissinger portrays him as a president who guided America through one of its most tragic periods and contributes his presidency as a step toward “winning” the Cold War.\(^{215}\) Though Ford was a known friend of Israel, his lack of knowledge about foreign affairs, especially about the circumstances in the Middle East, made him largely depend on Kissinger, his joint Secretary of State and National Security Advisor, for advice on the region’s policymaking.


\(^{214}\) Quandt, *Peace Process*, 156.

\(^{215}\) Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 40.
Negotiations with Jordan, Egypt and Israel

As Ford stepped into his presidency, Kissinger was wary of events unfolding in the Middle East beyond his control. As in the past, Kissinger perceived his best option was to engage the United States directly in the Arab-Israeli peace process. This time, though, Kissinger would start with the Jordan-Israeli relationship and then work his way towards achieving the second step of the peace process between Egypt and Israel.

Jordan’s participation in Kissinger’s step-by-step diplomacy was more complex than that of Egypt and Syria. Though no disengagement was necessary because the two sides had not engaged in warfare, Jordan presented the additional obstacle of the Palestinian dimension. The country had become the unofficial home of the PLO and the growing legitimacy of the group constrained King Hussein’s chances of having the West Bank returned to his authority. The question of the future status of the Palestinians was so sensitive that, even in the United States, the pro-Israel lobby pressured Congress to block the sale of the Hawk antiaircraft missiles to pro-West Jordan.\(^{216}\) And this was despite the fact that King Hussein had previously accepted Israel’s right to exist and had many times offered the Jewish state direct peace negotiations. But because of the PLO’s presence in Jordan, Israel continually rejected talks with its northern neighbor.

Nevertheless, the momentum of Kissinger’s success in the region had enabled him at least to attempt to bring together the two parties. On August 18, 1974.

1974, Jordanian officials arrived in Washington to discuss tentative negotiation prospects. Many U.S. officials in the State Department presumed that these negotiations were going to cause the Israeli withdrawal of the West Bank.\(^{217}\)

However, as Quandt explains, “The unstated belief was that it was worth trying to bring Jordan into the diplomacy as a way of undercutting the more radical PLO.”\(^{218}\)

Kissinger aimed to do this by brokering a deal with the Israelis to reestablish the West Bank under Jordanian sovereignty -- if the Israelis would let him. Kissinger went to Amman and discussed with King Hussein the dim chances of reaching such an agreement with Israel, but still held out the possibility until after an Arab summit conference at Rabat in October 1974. During that conference, the Arab leaders unanimously voted to endorse the PLO as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.”\(^{219}\)

Unfortunately for Kissinger’s strategy, this decision made by the leaders of the Arab world effectively pushed King Hussein out of the peace negotiations since he was no longer seen as having any authority over the West Bank. That authority was now the PLO’s -- at least in the eyes of the Arab world and, shortly after, the United Nations as well.\(^{220}\)


\(^{220}\) On November 25, 1974, the General Assembly adopted a resolution by a vote of 95 in favor and 17 against (that included the U.S. and Israel), which granted the PLO observer status at the U.N. This was the first and only time a “non-nation” was bestowed with such a recognition. Accordingly, these U.N actions gave the PLO a great surge of international legitimacy. This would further be compounded by another U.N. General Assembly vote a year later which passed a resolution identifying Zionism as a form of racism and racial discrimination against the people of Palestine.
With Jordan now cut out of the peace process, Kissinger’s next main objective was furthering Egyptian-Israel peace. His approach was similar to his past efforts: “It began by eliciting proposals from each side, getting preliminary reactions, identifying obstacles, and then starting the diplomatic process that would eventually bridge the substantive gaps.”

In Egypt, on an “exploratory shuttle,” Kissinger discussed with Sadat the framework of another agreement. Sadat told Kissinger that he would accept nothing less than the recovery of the Milta and Giddi passes as well as the oil fields of Abu Rudeis and Ras Sudr in the Sinai. Israel held just as tough a stance as Egypt. In the second round of negotiations, Israel sought a declaration of nonbelligerency from Egypt and wanted to keep the lands in the Sinai that Sadat sought as his primary negotiating objectives. Kissinger passed the disengagement plan between both sides, but each rejected it outright.

In the face of this apparent deadlock, Kissinger did not think he could succeed in the disengagement negotiations until each side softened its bargaining demands, so he urged both sides to moderate their positions. Eventually, Sadat, although refusing to agree on nonbelligerency, expressed a desire to use terms in the negotiations such as the “nonuse of force” and a promise not to resolve the conflict by military means. On the Israeli side, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin publicly told Kissinger that Israel was ready to give up the passes and the oil fields if the Egyptians renounced war against Israel. With this,

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221 Quandt, Peace Process, 160.

222 Ibid, 163.
Kissinger perceived an opening in the negotiations and “became hopeful that an agreement would emerge.”

The Second Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement

Kissinger returned to the Middle East on March 8, 1974 for the fifth time in an eighteen-month timespan. With everything supposedly in place, he believed he could broker a deal between Egypt and Israel even in the face of serious opposition. Not only were both Egyptians and Israelis remaining obstinate, the Syrians and the Soviets were moving to block Kissinger’s peace moves as well.

In Syria, President Assad was nervous about Kissinger’s ability to achieve an Israeli-Egyptian rapprochement, which would leave Syria isolated to confront Israel’s better-equipped military forces. Assad was thus opposed to a second disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel since it was bound to weaken his position militarily. He demonstrated his opposition by placing his forces on high alert and even threatened another war against Israel in a private conversation with Kissinger. Though the military alert eventually dissipated, Assad had sent a clear message to Kissinger about his attitude towards future Egyptian-Israeli peace efforts.

On the Soviet side, General Secretary Brezhnev was constantly pressuring the United States to return to the Geneva format from which Kissinger had purposefully detached his diplomacy in December 1973. In addition, when

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223 Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 395.
224 Ibid.
Ford offered the Soviet Union a Most Favored Nation trading status, the Soviet Union rejected it because Kissinger was making unilateral moves in the Middle East among other factors. Detente was clearly beginning to unravel.

Kissinger’s March 8 trip to the Middle East would occur under a shadow of obstruction and failure. Writing in his memoirs, Kissinger says he undertook this particular round of shuttle diplomacy when “the disintegration of Vietnam was bringing American foreign policy to its nadir” and “the global economic recession triggered by the energy crisis continued to rage.” In hindsight, it may not be surprising that this set of negotiations was unsuccessful. American power in the world was ebbing and it reflected in Kissinger’s inability to pressure the Israelis into signing a disengagement agreement with Egypt.

After an eleven-day shuttle process, on March 19, 1975, Kissinger presented his plan to Prime Minister Rabin who refused to accept Sadat’s terms even though he affirmed the “nonuse of force” against Israel and promise to resolve the conflict peacefully. For Sadat, he could not commit to complete nonbelligerency with Israel for his own political reasons inside Egypt and in the broader Arab world. With Israel’s rejection, the disengagement plan Kissinger had been putting together meticulously for the last six months came to a standstill; Kissinger was furious. Even in his memoirs written over two decades later, Kissinger still expressed his resentment towards Israel’s refusal: “I could not imagine that the Israeli cabinet would have allowed me to embark on a

226 Ibid, 161.

227 Kissinger, Years of Renewal, 397.
shuttle unless it was prepared to settle within the general framework Ford and I had repeatedly described to Rabin (we counted a total of twenty-four times).”

Though Kissinger’s dogged attempt to reach a disengagement agreement seemed crushed, he still held one more diplomatic trump card. He sent a cable to President Ford describing the dangers the United States would incur if it was unable to achieve a breakthrough toward a second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement accord. It read: “The consequences of failure are so serious for both Israel and the US that it is essential that Israel reconsider its position.”

This cable, Kissinger points out, signaled his request that Ford admonish Israel in a private presidential decree calling for a U.S.-Israeli “reassessment.” Ford followed suit and sent this message to Israel, which, apparently, Kissinger had penned himself:

I wish to express my profound disappointment over Israel’s attitude .... Kissinger’s mission encouraged by your government expresses vital United States’ interests in the region. Failure of the negotiations will have a far-reaching impact on the region and on our relations. I have given instructions for a reassessment of United States’ foreign policy in the region, including our relations with Israel.230

But the reassessment strategy backfired. Rabin immediately leaked Ford’s message to the media and the domestic pro-Israel constituency went to work in Washington. In Rabin’s memoirs, he admits that he had helped launch a counteroffensive in America, which caused seventy-six senators to petition for

228 Ibid, 396.
229 Ibid, 416.
the elimination of Ford’s Israeli reassessment policy, marking a “new era of pro-
Israel interest group activism.”

Consequently, reassessment lasted a couple of months while Kissinger paid a political price for his decision. The Secretary of State came under heavy fire from his political opponents in Washington for what appeared to be an anti-
Israel stance. Consequently, they called for Kissinger to end his shuttle diplomacy. Nonetheless, at a moment when Kissinger’s step-by-step peace efforts seemed to be coming to an end, suddenly, Prime Minister Rabin met with President Ford in June 1975, and informed him that Israel was ready to broker a deal with Egypt.

In reality, Rabin had himself chosen to end his defiant stance toward the U.S. It was, he believed, against Israel’s long-term interests to remain on a poor footing with Washington. As a result, his noncompliance towards the disengagement agreement with Egypt actually helped him achieve his own strategic goals for the Jewish state. Evidently, Prime Minister Rabin had all along been pursuing a divergent strategy, which was aimed at drawing the United States “deeper into the process and obtaining greater US economic and security commitments.” Luckily for Rabin, his calculation was correct. After Kissinger threatened reassessment, he then reinstated his policy of positive inducements and promised Israel an additional $2 billion in aid as early the following month on


232 Ibid.
With America’s substantially increased financial commitment, Israel returned to the negotiating table.

It would take the rest of the summer to finalize the terms of the second Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement and one last Kissinger shuttle that August. On September 4, 1975, Egypt and Israel signed the agreement known as the Sinai II accord. The agreement was modeled after the previous disengagement pact, which clarified the United States’ and U.N.’s role to provide a military buffer zone between the two nations as well as the Egyptian-Israeli agreement to resolve their dispute by peaceful means only. As with the Sinai I accord, Kissinger also made secret agreements with Israel through another memorandum of understanding.

This new MOU ensured continued U.S. military assistance “on an ongoing and long-term basis to supply Israel’s military equipment and other defense requirements.” Kissinger also promised Israel that future aid to the Jewish state was to be conducted “through periodic consultations” between Congress and Israeli government officials. Furthermore, the U.S. granted the Jewish state protection from possible military moves made against it by the Soviet Union. Lastly, Kissinger guaranteed that the United States would now supply Israel's oil needs directly since relations between Israel and the oil-producing Arab world were unlikely to be reliable.234

233 Ibid, 178.

234 Quandt, Peace Process, 169.
Concerning the issue of Palestinian sovereignty, the MOU concluded that the United States would “not recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization so long as the Palestine Liberation Organization does not recognize Israel’s right to exist and does not accept Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.”

Significantly, the MOU brought the United States into a more dominant role in safeguarding Israel from the international consensus concerning its occupation of Arab lands and Palestine. It stated, “The United States government will vote against any Security Council resolution which in its judgment affects or alters this agreement” and that “all the substantive negotiations will be on a bilateral basis.”

In his book, *Dishonest Broker*, Aruri states, “The U.S. pledge that it would not negotiate directly with the PLO meant the Palestine question could be treated, at best, as a territorial and security-related matter rather than as a national question related to issues of self-determination.”

Without this capability to negotiate with the PLO, the “sole representatives of the Palestinian people,” Kissinger had actually prevented the United States from achieving one of its chief objectives in the region since the end of WWII: a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East.

**The Saunders Document**

After the Sinai II accord, not everyone in Washington perceived the Palestinians in the same light as Kissinger. Harold Saunders, a holdover from the

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237 Nasser Aruri, *Dishonest Broker*, 56
Johnson administration and a senior official among Kissinger’s staff on the National Security Council, produced a document that, when made public in the American press, was very controversial. Saunders, who specialized in Near East affairs, believed that there had been a fatal flaw in Kissinger’s peacemaking deliberations; the Palestinians had not been incorporated into a peace settlement between the Arabs and Israelis.

What Saunders wrote has become known as the Saunders Document, which, at the time was “the most comprehensive statements ever made by any U.S. Administration on the Palestine question.”

In a presentation to Congress, Saunders specified that “the legitimate aspirations or interests of the Palestinian Arabs must be taken into account in the negotiations of Arab Israeli peace.” Then, in the document itself, Saunders stated that the “Palestinian dimension” was at “the heart of the conflict” and the “final resolution” would only be possible when an agreement is reached that defines “a just and permanent status for the Arab peoples who consider themselves Palestinians.” Therefore, Saunders concluded, the Palestinians should not be viewed by “their function or situation such as that of refugees, terrorists, or occupied Arabs,” but as an integral part of a comprehensive peace plan. When the content of the document was revealed by the press corps, the Israeli government issued harsh protests and intense criticism spouted by powerful pro-Israel lobbying groups, pundits, and elite policymakers in the United States. Subsequently, Kissinger, under fire from both...

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239 ibid, 31
the right and the left for failing to oppose the release of the document, regarded it only as an “academic” and “theoretical exercise” that had in no way represented a change in U.S. policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict.240

Many scholars and policymakers involved in the study of this regional conflict, such as Noam Chomsky and Jimmy Carter’s former Secretary of State Cyrus Vance (under President Jimmy Carter), have pointed out that the primary reason the PLO could not accept Resolution 242 was the resolution’s reference of the Palestinians as “nothing more than refugees,” thereby implicitly denying them their rights of self-determination. In addition, one European diplomat stationed in the Middle East during the 1970s was quoted by the New York Times: “The Palestinians are a problem not in terms of refugees but of their national identity. The PLO has said time and again that 242 is totally unacceptable if their rights are not included.”241 Though Chomsky says this “may be a tactical error” made by the PLO, even so, there have never been any reciprocal agreements made by Israel to recognize the PLO or the Palestinian people’s right to exist as an independent state in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.242


Conclusion

It may be somewhat ironic that Kissinger’s “peace process” had deepened the divide between the Israelis and the Palestinians. However, when evaluating his own policy goals and achievements, Kissinger concluded that his strategy had led him to considerable success. He had contained the Soviet Union and even expelled the communist state from a large part of the region. Kissinger also officially ended the 1973 October War by using his negotiating skills to produce disengagement agreements between the belligerent parties. In addition, he removed Egypt from the Arab front against Israel, which, at the time, was the only country in the Middle East powerful enough to challenge Israel militarily. As this was done, Kissinger also diverted Egypt’s political allegiance from the Soviet Union to the United States, an accomplishment that was described as “one of the great reversals of alignment” during the Cold War. Moreover, the disengagement pacts Kissinger had brokered between Egypt and Israel would eventually help lead to the Carter administration’s own intense diplomatic undertaking of forging the monumental Egypt-Israeli Peace Treaty in 1979.

Lastly, Kissinger was able to claim unilateral responsibility of moderating of the Arab-Israeli conflict that strengthened the United States’ ties to the Arab oil-producing states while simultaneously increasing Israeli security and marginalizing Arab radical elements in the Middle East.

However, when taking into account the power relationships between the United States, Israel, and the greater Middle East, it would seem as though

Kissinger had squandered an extraordinary opportunity to achieve a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace after the 1973 October War. It also seems that, with American power backed by international support, Kissinger could have forced Israel back to the pre-June 1967 boundaries (as was specified in Resolution 242), but that was not a part of his strategy and may have been politically too risky for the Ford administration. Evidently, Kissinger opposed the Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 border lines. This is apparent when privy to a dramatic meeting between Kissinger and the Israeli cabinet during the Sinai II negotiations just before the Ford administration issued its controversial policy of “reassessment.” Kissinger scolded top Israeli officials, which included Prime Minister Rabin, for their obstinate stance towards a second disengagement accord with Egypt. “If we wanted the 1967 borders, we could do it with all of world opinion and considerable domestic opinion behind us,” shouted Kissinger, “The strategy was designed to protect you from this.”

Likewise, Kissinger’s own refusal to accept Israel’s portion of Resolution 242 is, again, revealed in a confidential memo dated in February 3, 1988, when he advised Israeli officials not to withdraw from their occupied territories unless they wanted to jeopardize the future security of the Jewish state.

Even in retrospect, it is difficult to pinpoint Kissinger’s exact motivations behind his policymaking. Some scholars posit that Kissinger’s Jewish

244 Sheehan, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Henry Kissinger*, 162.

background contributed to his bias in brokering a fair deal between the Arabs and Israelis (although that is not to say that Kissinger’s loss of thirteen family members in the holocaust did not have any impact on his sympathy for Israel). However, for this student of American foreign policy, the role of geopolitics and the international balance of powers played a heavier hand in Kissinger’s calculations. In the book, *The Soviet Union and Revolutionary Warfare*, Richard H. Shultz points out that, by the early 1970s, “The PLO-Soviet relationship had become increasingly close, with a steady intensification of cooperation and operational coordination.” Accordingly, since the Palestinian nationalists were intimately aligned and aided by the Kremlin, Kissinger connected the PLO and its quest to establish a Palestinian state to the Soviet Union’s own attempts to reduce American influence in the Middle East.

Furthermore, Kissinger’s views of the PLO were further revealed in an 1978 interview on NBC. When asked if he supported a state in Palestine, Kissinger replied, “I have repeatedly stated publicly that I do not favor a Palestinian state .... it is likely to become radical in orientation.” That statement -- “to become radical in orientation” -- can be viewed as Kissinger’s allusion to the Soviet Union, against whose interests he had been officially shaping U.S. policies for the past eight years. The United States, as Kissinger saw it, could not support the PLO because of the group’s perceived threat to radicalize the greater Middle East to subvert pro-West Arab regimes such as Lebanon and Jordan, as


well as Israel and not to mention greatly adding to the potential for a superpower confrontation in the region. In effect, Kissinger’s oppressive measures against the PLO and the Palestinian people’s right to national self-determination during his postwar diplomacy was aimed at containing the growth of an Arab-Soviet bloc from challenging U.S.-Israeli supremacy in the region. Hence, the foundation of the post-1973 American Middle East peace process was predominantly built upon Kissinger’s understanding of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the context of the United States’ ideological war against the Soviet Union.

Kissinger said it best in his book, *American Foreign Policy* (1977): “We will oppose the attempt by any country to achieve a position of predominance either globally or regionally.”248 With the Middle East designated as “vital” to America’s strategic and economic interests, Kissinger had essentially blanketed the region with a diplomatic Monroe Doctrine. In the aftermath of his step-by-step diplomacy in the Middle East, Kissinger had placed the United States in a position where it possessed the political muscle to curtail significantly the ability of any outside powers to undermine U.S. interests in the region. This would be accomplished, as Kissinger demonstrated, by maintaining a seemingly unbreakable grip on a long-term American-dominated Arab-Israeli peace process.

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Conclusion

Kissinger’s Legacy and U.S. Strategic Concerns in a Changing World

When Henry Kissinger returned to the United States after the completion of the Sinai II accord, he was, more or less, greeted with a hero’s welcome. Although he could not reach a comprehensive peace for the Arab-Israeli conflict for his generation, most observers believed he had accomplished the best that could be achieved. With the 1976 election year on the horizon, Kissinger was finished with his diplomatic charge in the region. When the elections passed, President Ford lost to Democrat Jimmy Carter by a narrow margin. Already a celebrity on a global scale, Kissinger relocated his career to the private sector and created his own international consulting firm, Kissinger Associates. His time as a public servant was officially at a close.

Nevertheless, Kissinger would remain at the center of U.S. diplomacy. Since he left the White House, he would be called on by every successive presidential administration for advice on how to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as other matters of American foreign policy. Interestingly, since Kissinger was national security advisor, every individual who has assumed that position over the past forty years has been in some way associated with the man. They have either worked for Kissinger, or worked for someone who had worked for him. Today, the ninety-year-old former diplomat still consults with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, a committed Democrat. Arguably, Kissinger has been the most influential policymaker in American foreign affairs in the past half-century, his policies traversing even the most hardened political party lines. And his efforts
to create an American monopoly over the Arab-Israeli peace process have resonated in the policies of his successors.

Ever since Kissinger extracted the United States’ Middle East peacemaking initiative from the U.N. Geneva conference in December 1973, every U.S. administration policy thereafter has consistently blocked the peace process from advancing under international auspices. As Kissinger was well aware, the dominant position the United States held on the United Nations Security Council allowed it the capability to act alone in canceling out all other votes made by other less powerful members of the U.N. General Assembly. Sometimes known as “the tyranny of the veto,” this is essentially what Kissinger gave to Israel in the MOU during the Sinai I and II accords.249

Tellingly, the record at the United Nations clearly shows the United States’ use of the veto is to maintain its control of the Middle East peace process and protect Israel from international criticism. Since Kissinger was Secretary of State, the United States has issued more vetoes than any other nation on the U.N. Security Council. Many of these U.S. vetoes have been cast against resolutions that condemn Israel for its practices in the occupied territories, for its offensive military operations against its Arab neighbor Lebanon, and for resolutions that attempt to restore the Arab-Israeli peace process under an international forum. Throughout the years since Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy, America and Israel have virtually stood alone in the face of U.N. resolution votes calling for a

249 To recall, the MOU explicitly stated, “The United States government will vote against any Security Council resolution which in its judgment affects or alters this agreement” (the agreement to not negotiate with the PLO) and that “all the substantive negotiations will be on a bilateral basis.”
settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict based on earlier U.N resolutions (Resolution 242 and 338). Providing just two examples among many: in 1988, the vote was 138-2; in 1990, it was 144-2.

Flash forwarding to the present day, the Palestinians, now led by President of the Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud Abbas, made a historic undertaking to advance their cause at the United Nations by submitting a bid for statehood. This is reminiscent of former PLO leader Yasser Arafat who almost four decades earlier arrived at the U.N. to make his own similar historic peace offering to Israel. Both men had received standing ovations from the U.N. representatives there, but, of course, American and Israeli representatives had abstained from doing so.

As in 1976, when the United States vetoed a resolution that affirmed the rights of Palestinians for national self-determination, Abbas’s 2011 monumental request to establish a Palestinian state was also vetoed by the U.S. representative at the U.N. In keeping with Kissinger’s policy of strict bilateral negotiations, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice issued a statement about Abbas’s bid: “It’s not going to happen at the United Nations unless and until there’s a negotiated settlement between the two parties.”250 This is in line with President Barack Obama’s “ironclad” commitment to Israel and his policy towards the Middle East peace process that calls for “direct negotiations” between the Israelis and the Palestinians with American diplomats acting as exclusive intermediaries.

The State Department press corps spokeswoman, Victoria Nuland, released a similar statement concerning President Abbas’s attempt to create a sovereign state in Palestine: “It should not come as a shock to anyone in this room that the U.S. opposes a move in New York by the Palestinians to try to establish a state that can only be achieved through negotiations.” And, in many ways, Nuland is right. When considering the American relationship with the Middle East since the end of World War II, it should not come as any surprise that the United States would prevent the future of the region, let alone the fate of the Arab-Israeli peace process, to be left in somebody else’s hands.

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The reality of American diplomacy in the Middle East could very well be close to the cynical appraisal of David Rothkopf, a former U.S. Undersecretary of Commerce for International Trade and Managing Director of Kissinger Associates: “If there were no oil in the Middle East,” Rothkopf asserted, “the United States wouldn’t care about the Middle East. It wouldn’t care about Israel, it wouldn’t care about Palestine ....” With many bloodier regional disputes taking place around the world, it is to some extent questionable whether the United States’ quest for Arab-Israeli peace would remain a central tenet of U.S. foreign policy objectives in the Middle East if another area of the globe with a comparable conflict was perceived as more vital to American national interests.


Though Rothkopf’s politically incorrect remark may contain some hints of truth, it certainly does not consider the American people’s almost natural affinity for the Jewish state of Israel.

Nevertheless, oil has indeed played a significant role in shaping American relations with both the regional and global players in the Middle East and is underscored when reviewing the policies and actions taken by Washington since 1945. After World War II, one of the United States’ main global objectives was to prevent the Soviet Union from acquiring control over the Middle East’s energy resources, which, if the situation occurred, had the potential of tipping the international power scale in its favor. By 1979, the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty had eliminated Egyptian military threats against Israel while it had also transformed Egypt into an American client state. At the same time, the governments of Saudi Arabia and Iran were key players in the U.S. “twin pillar strategy,” which had designated the two large Arab oil-producing states as America’s regional policemen, thus reassuring Washington officials that U.S. oil interests in the Middle East were well protected. Soon thereafter, however, events in the region would strike new fears in Washington as the 1980s witnessed a set of unforeseen circumstances that the United States was forced to confront.

The year 1979 was a crucial time that would alter greatly U.S. relations with the Middle East. Major events would occur that would redirect American strategy in the region. The 1979 Iranian Revolution that overthrew the pro-West Shah and put in power the Ayatollah Khomeini caught the United State by
surprise. This had dismantled the U.S. strategic consensus in the region, as the 
fall of the Shah increased the United States’ reliance on Saudi Arabia and Egypt 
who would continue to help serve the United States as moderating Arab 
influences in the region. Also, in 1979, Saddam Hussein had risen to power in 
Iraq and nationalized the country’s oil industry. Understanding that Iran was 
severely unstable politically because of the revolution, Hussein sought to exploit 
this opportunity by launching a decade-long war against the new Iranian regime 
that ended in a virtual stalemate. Moreover, that same year, the Soviet Union 
decided to invade Afghanistan. This was of primary concern for U.S. 
policymakers since they saw the Soviet provocation as a new wave of communist 
penetration into the Middle East.

During this period, President Ronald Reagan reignited the Cold War 
animosities of the past and set out to devastate the Soviet Union economically by 
compelling its leaders to keep up with U.S. military expenditures. In turn, these 
new circumstances placed the Arab-Israeli conflict and the American 
peacemaking process on the back burner during which time Israel consolidated 
its control over its occupied territories. Being the only democratic country in the 
Middle East, Israel remained a staunch American ally in the United States’ 
ideological struggle against Soviet communism. Throughout the 1980s, U.S.- 
Israeli relations would reach new heights in diplomatic support, foreign aid, and 
strategic cooperation.

In 1989, the unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union revived the notion of 
Roosevelt’s Pax Americana, which was perpetuated in the manifestation of a
“New World Order.” The United States had won the Cold War and the world was perceived by many officials in Washington as ready to roll back the authoritarian governments of the Soviet Empire that could now embrace the liberal democratic values of America and the West. This had lead political scientist Francis Fukuyama to argue in 1992 that the political evolution of humankind had reached “the end of history,” claiming that governments everywhere would, once and for all, come to rest as peace-loving liberal democracies.

With this newfound feeling of triumphalism vindicating for Americans their political-economic model for the world, the United States presumed that it now possessed a significant degree of political influence in the Middle East. Washington officials were no longer preoccupied with ensuring U.S. oil interests from being threatened by the communist behemoth behind the Iron Curtain. Still, American policymakers made it rather clear that they would continue to prohibit any regional or global actors from acquiring control over the oil reserves in the Persian Gulf. This is apparent in light of Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 when he attempted to increase Iraq’s geopolitical power by securing the oil fields on his southern flank, an area which had been historically viewed by many Iraqis as their own. However, a U.S. coalition of forces intervened in the Iraqi dictator's ambitious plans and prevented him from endangering American and British oil interests in Kuwait.

Without the Soviet Union to help justify U.S. intervention in the Middle East to secure access to Persian Gulf oil, America’s perceived enemies in the region have become much more pronounced. The removal of the U.S.-Soviet
rivalry from the center of global affairs created a vacuum of power in the Middle East that has shifted America’s regional antagonists into the spotlight. The United States’ new enemies are similar to its old enemies during the Cold War, although the names and the places have changed. These enemies are, in general, Arab nationalists who aim to drive out foreign powers that they see as corrupting their political, cultural, and religious institutions.

In the post-Cold War era, U.S. policy in the Middle East has followed a dual track approach, each intricately connected to one another. One track being the preservation of Western oil interests and the other track being the suppression of indigenous nationalism, which has now taken the form of Islamic fundamentalism or radical Islam. This increase of religious extremism in the Middle East can be viewed as an outgrowth of Pan-Arabism and a reaction to U.S. policies in the region during of the last half-century. Samuel P. Huntington’s hypothesis in 1992 about post-Cold War conflicts becoming a “clash of civilizations” has, in a sense, come to fruition. The dominant conflict of today’s age could be viewed as between the Islamic Arab world in the East and the Judeo-Christian world in the West.

By the end of the Cold War, American and Israeli strategic ties of containing the communist threat were beginning to unravel. However, the bombing of New York City’s World Trade Center in 1993 highlighted the “growing phenomenon” of this Islamic strain of religious extremism. During the decade after the Soviet Union’ collapse, the United States and Israel sought to realign their interests towards combating this rising tide of international terrorism.
Likewise, the resurgence of regional conflicts and ethnic nationalism in the post-Cold War period have helped resurrect the U.S. mediated Arab-Israeli peace talks during President Bill Clinton’s time in office. The 1993 Oslo Accords underscored America’s willingness to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict and that willingness has lasted into the present day, though not without facing substantial setbacks and extraordinary political obstacles. A successful conclusion to the American-led peace process is in no way, shape, or form a magic bullet that will solve all the problems in the Middle East, but it would certainly facilitate both regional and global U.S. strategic considerations.
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