
A Chess Game in the Middle East: Dr. Kissinger's Diplomacy against the Ussr during the Yom Kippur War

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FOREWORD

«So that puts us into a position where if behave wisely and with discipline in the months ahead, we are really in a central position»¹. This is how Henry Kissinger described the American situation in the Middle East after the war Egypt and Syria had waged against Israel on October 6, 1973. The fourth Arab-Israeli war was turning into a chance the Americans could not afford to miss. Washington could not tolerate an Israeli defeat, but at the same time it was extremely important to avoid another Arab humiliation, and the White House could not become hostage to the Israeli Government. Therefore, the Americans were staying in close touch with all belligerents. Finally, the war had also been a good test for *détente*, for Kissinger thought that tension in the Middle East could easily escalate towards superpower confrontation without the new relationship with the Soviet Union. What the Americans really pursued, however, was to show the Arabs that Soviet weapons were useful to start a war, but not to regain territory. This could have been achieved only through a negotiation process with the Jewish State and with the United States playing the role of mediating power². Dr. Kissinger's aim was to remove – or at least to undermine – Soviet influence from the Middle East by detaching Moscow's main ally in the area and turning it into the mainstay of the new Us Middle East policy.

¹ *Secretary's Staff Meeting*, October 23, 1973, 4:35 p.m., in National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter Nara), College Park, Md, Transcripts of Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger Staff Meetings (hereinafter Hak Staff Meetings), 1973-1977, Box 1, Secret/Nodis.

² *Ibidem*.

This project was consistent with the plan the Professor had had in mind for a few years. What worried Washington in the late 1960s and early 1970s was Moscow's growing expansion in the Mediterranean basin. Such an outlook had to be contained. As an evidence of this, in 1968 the Cia had studied the situation in the aftermath of the Six-Day War. Following the humiliating defeat, Syria and Egypt had immediately turned to Moscow to rebuild their destroyed arsenal. In exchange for that, the Soviet Navy had substantially increased its presence in Mediterranean harbours³. However, due to the Vietnam tangle and the necessity to start a process of *détente* with the communist rival, it was indispensable to avoid an internalization of the Arab-Israeli dispute, in order not to involve the superpowers directly. Nevertheless, the growing Russian influence in the region was regarded as a threat to American national interests⁴. In this context the Cia thought the Soviets would help the Arabs in case of another conflict with Israel, but at the same time Moscow had no intention to be directly involved. Hence, it was possible for the Cold War rivals to cooperate and reduce tensions in the area⁵.

On the American side, Nixon was persuaded that the settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict was as important as the end of the war in Vietnam. Moreover, the President agreed with Kissinger that it was necessary to contain the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean. At first, however, he had assigned that area to the Department of State, led by William Rogers. Instead, Kissinger was in charge of the Far East and the managing of *détente*, which had priority on the White House agenda. Both statisticians, however, were aware that the Middle Eastern area was pivotal and that the danger of collision with Moscow was becoming too high. Thus, Washington's aim was to regain the lost ground and make sure that some Arab State loosen its relationship with Moscow. In spite of that, Kissinger's methods to pursue such a goal were different from those

³ See *Memorandum to Holders-National Intelligence Estimate N. 11-6-67, Soviet Strategy and Intentions in the Mediterranean Basin and Special National Intelligence Estimate N. 11-9-68, Soviet Interests and Activities in Arab States*, May 16, 1968, in www.foia.cia.gov.

⁴ According to Henry Kissinger, Washington's indifference towards the Middle East in the previous years had been a serious mistake. The European powers' decline had left a vacuum that not only Arab radical regimes, but also the Soviet Union could have filled. See H.A. KISSINGER, *White House Years*, Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1979, p. 347.

⁵ See *National Intelligence Estimate N. 11-69: Basic Factors and Main Tendencies in Current Soviet Policy*, February 27, 1969, in www.foia.cia.gov.

of the State Department. Secretary Rogers, in fact, believed that the White House could not afford to watch events without doing anything. Hence, the Americans had to cooperate with the Soviets to seek an overall settlement to Middle Eastern issues. Kissinger, instead, wanted to follow the opposite way. He thought that there was no need to rush and that any early initiative would produce no effective outcome. In short, he wanted to freeze the situation and let the Arabs realise the Soviet assistance's ineffectiveness⁶. Overall speaking, the American Administration's task was the alteration of the superpowers' position in the Middle Eastern region, thus undermining Soviet influence. A further Russian expansion would have affected the African continent, too; hence, it was of paramount importance for the Americans to improve their relations with the main and most strategic States in the area. For that purpose, however, Washington was obliged to start a kind of *détente* with some Arab States⁷.

Concerning this, the State Department pointed out that a persisting stalemate would damage Us interests and push the Egyptians towards even more radical positions. According to that thesis, Washington needed Russian collaboration in order to improve relations with the Arabs. On the contrary, Kissinger thought that Moscow needed American cooperation in order to get a satisfying outcome in the Middle East, for the only alternative was another disastrous war for its clients. With the passing of time Cairo was expected to realise that no peace was possible without the Americans⁸. The main point of friction within the Nixon Administration was the perception itself of the nature of the problem. The State Department thought that the root of American difficulties was the Arab-Israeli conflict over territory. Once resolved that, the influence of radical Arabs and the Soviet role in the area would dwindle. These views had led the Us approach to the issue in the first year of the Nixon Administration and had put pressure on Israel to accept proposals for comprehensive settlements. On the contrary, Kissinger's assessment was that Arab radicalism had five sources: 1) Israel's conquest of territory; 2) Israel's existence itself; 3) social and economic troubles; 4) opposition to Western interests, 5) oppo-

⁶ See R. DALLEK, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, New York, Harper Collins Publishers, 2007, pp. 169-172.,

⁷ See R.C. THORNTON, *The Nixon Kissinger Years: The Reshaping of American Foreign Policy*, New York, Paragon House, 1989, pp. 26-27.

⁸ See H.A. KISSINGER, *White House Years*, Boston, Little Brown and Company, 1979, pp. 378-379.

sition to Arab moderate regimes. He believed that a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute would affect only the first point, thus leaving all the others unsolved. Nor was he convinced that Soviet influence would inevitably be affected by a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The United States needed not only to work out a solution, but also and above all to teach a lesson that key diplomatic progress in the Middle East was in its hands and in those of moderate local regimes. The advantage for the Americans, Kissinger said in February 1970, was that sooner or later the Arabs would approach the Us in order to achieve their goals. Therefore, patience was supposed to be Washington's best weapon⁹. Once the breakthrough had occurred and moderate Arabs had turned their back on Moscow, the White House would have speeded up diplomatic progress. The breakthrough Kissinger had been hoping for since 1970 took place three years later. To sum up, for Kissinger the Middle East was a huge chess board where the United States had to play a diplomatic match against the Soviet Union.

I. KISSINGER STEPS IN

Kissinger's theses showed some positive results after Nasser's death, in September 1970. A few months later, in fact, the new Egyptian President, Anwar el-Sadat, started to pursue a policy of disengagement from Moscow. In May 1971 he dismissed his deputy, Ali Sabri, leader of the pro-Soviet wing of the Government. This not only made the Americans foresee a stronger flexibility within the Arab country's leadership, but it was also possible to perceive that Egypt would gradually abandon pan-Arab nationalism in order to carve out a better decision-making authority¹⁰. In order to prevent Egypt from changing its international position, the Soviet Union played its military and diplomatic card, signing with that country a treaty of friendship and cooperation on May 27, 1971. According to Kissinger, the Egyptian President had signed the treaty above all in order to appease the Army, on whose support his leadership depended. Once again the State Department and the National Security Advisor were following separate ways. Soon after the signature of the agreements, in fact, Rogers reported to the President that the treaty strengthened Sadat's position *vis-à-vis* his own

⁹ See *Idem*, pp. 558-559.

¹⁰ See *Memorandum for the President: Sadat Consolidates his Position*, May 16, 1971, Action 28529 S/S 7107286, in Nara, Npmp, Nsf, Middle East 1969-1974, Country File Egypt, Vol. VI, Box 636, Folder 2, Secret.

military, thus giving him more flexibility on a possible Suez Canal settlement. Instead, Kissinger was persuaded that the treaty could give the Ussr a kind of veto over future negotiations. The American response, Kissinger suggested, had to frustrate any Egyptian policy based on military threats and collusion with the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Soviet-Egyptian treaty reinforced the determination to further slow down the peace process in the Middle East in order to show that Soviet threats and treaties were not effective¹¹. Nixon was by then leaning towards Kissinger's position, but what involved the Professor in Middle East diplomacy was the President's will to avoid any risk of crisis in an election year. Therefore, he asked his main advisor to step in «[...] if only to keep things quiet»¹². Having gained his President's support, the National Security advisor intended to stop any State Department initiative until some Arab country changed its policy.

In early 1972 Cia reports seemed to confirm that the close relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union was living a difficult period, though the Arab military were still totally dependent on Soviet assistance. The Russians' refusal to supply offensive weapons to their Arab clients and the request to pay always with hard currency made the Soviet presence on the shores of the Mediterranean more and more unacceptable¹³, while the Egyptian overall dependence on Moscow in terms of military might and effectiveness was showing itself a double-edged weapon, since the Arabs blamed the Soviets for the stalemate in the Sinai¹⁴. When, in July 1972, Sadat decided to expel Soviet technicians and military experts from Egypt, the Russians were suddenly deprived of the military apparatus they had built in the previous years. At first the Americans did not understand Sadat's purposes so well, thus the National Security Council suggested a wait and see policy¹⁵, being

¹¹ See H.A. KISSINGER, *White House Years*, cit., pp. 1284-1285.

¹² *Idem*, p. 1285.

¹³ See *Intelligence Memorandum – Soviet-Egyptian Relations: An Uneasy Alliance*, March 28, 1972, Secret, in www.foia.cia.gov. In those months, the Soviet Union was trying to strengthen its position in the Middle East by establishing new bilateral relationships. On April 9, 1972, in fact, the Soviet-Iraqi Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in Baghdad. See *Memorandum for Mr. Henry Kissinger: Preliminary Analysis of Iraqi-Ussr Treaty*, April 13, 1972, 7206780, in Nara, Record Group 59 (hereinafter Rg 59), Central Files 1970-73, Pol Iraq-Ussr, Secret.

¹⁴ See *Intelligence Memorandum – Soviet Military Involvement in Egypt*, April 1, 1972, Sr Im 72-12, Tcs 1295/72, Top Secret, in www.foia.cia.gov.

¹⁵ See *Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger: Diplomatic Aspects of Sadat's Decision – The Need to Get a Grip on the Us Position*, July 20, 1972, Action 5636X,

confident that the Arabs would not wage another war¹⁶. Russia had lost part of its power in the Middle East¹⁷, but Washington had not realised that by expelling the Soviets Sadat had averted the risk for them to be involved in a conflict and, at the same time, had gained room for manoeuvre to trigger off the war¹⁸. The resumption of large scale hostilities was much likelier than the Americans thought.

II. THE ESTIMATED RISK OF WAR IN 1973

At the beginning of the second Nixon Administration, the Americans had not yet set up a precise Middle East strategy. They still believed that Sadat had no chance to wage a large scale war in the area. Though the Director of the United States Interests Section in Cairo¹⁹ believed that the Egyptian President was feeling so desperate that he had to do something in order to avoid social and political unrest in his country, at the same time it looked as if he were trying to distance himself from the Ussr²⁰. Despite several signals by the Arab leadership²¹, emphasis in Egyptian statements and arms

in Nara, Npmp, Nsf, Box 639, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt, Vol. VIII, Secret.

¹⁶ See *Memorandum for Mr. Henry A. Kissinger: Sadat's Anniversary Speech*, July 26, 1972, 7212554, *ibidem*.

¹⁷ The Kremlin had wrongly estimated that nationalist movements could be easily aligned to communist policy. See *Memorandum – The Expulsion from Egypt: Some Consequences for the Soviets*, August 29, 1972, Secret, in www.foia.cia.gov.

¹⁸ Moscow could not afford to lose naval bases in Egypt; hence, starting from Autumn 1972 the Soviets supplied the country of pyramids with huge quantities of heavy weapons. See W. BUNDY, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency*, New York, Hill and Wang, 1998, p. 428.

¹⁹ As an aftermath of the Six-Day War, Egypt had broken diplomatic relations with the United States. In circumstances like these there is always staff carrying out informal relations, though offices are no longer located in an embassy, but in an interests section within another nation's embassy. In Egypt American diplomats worked in the Spanish Embassy's buildings.

²⁰ See *Telegram 842 from UsInt Cairo to SecState Washington: Prospects for Peace and War in the Middle East*, May 4, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Nsf, Middle East 1969-1974, Country File Arab Republic of Egypt, Vol. IX, Jan-Oct 1973, Box 638, Folder 2, Action SS-25, R 040730Z, Confidential/Exdis.

²¹ In order to get the hard currency necessary to pay for arms supply, the Egyptian President made a deal with Saudi Arabia. The *de facto* alliance Sadat had achieved in Spring 1973 with the Saudis was a warning signal about the

movement were regarded only as an attempt to arouse international concern and put psychological pressure on Israel and the Us. In short, the Arabs had no «[...] rational basis for an attack at an early date»²². The Soviet role in that situation was also rather ambivalent. On one hand, the Russians had an interest in sustaining a high level of tension underscoring the seriousness of the situation and the need for Us initiatives towards Israel. On the other hand, however, Soviet leaders were counselling the Arabs against precipitate military action, as the Ussr position in the area «[...] would suffer if the Arabs, using Soviet weapons, were beaten again»²³. Moreover, while Moscow was under pressure from Arab clients to get the Us to approach Israel and gain some diplomatic results, at the same time Soviet leaders saw that area not only as the arena of Arab-Israeli struggle, but also as a main theatre of Soviet-American competition²⁴. Hence, as long as there was no large scale conflict, the situation of chronic tension gave the Ussr the opportunity to exercise some form of crisis management²⁵. As regarded the likelihood of a new war, finally, Brezhnev tried to sow a doubt on the Americans' mind by telling them that «If there is no clarity about the principles we will have difficulty keeping the military situation from flaring up»²⁶.

approaching war, but it was also a message to the Americans that he really had decided to burn all bridges with Moscow. See A.Z. RUBINSTEIN, *Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship since the June War*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1977, pp. 242-243.

²² *Memorandum from National Security Council Staff: Indication of Arab Intentions to Initiate Hostilities*, undated, in Nara, Npmp, Henry Kissinger Office Files (hereinafter Hakof), Box 135, Rabin/Kissinger (Dinitz) 1973 Jan-Jul (2 of 3).

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ Some Soviet leaders, like the Minister of Defence, thought that it was useless to pursue a joint Us-Soviet peace plan for the Middle East, in view of the sharp contradiction between the two superpowers' interests. As they considered Egypt as a vital area for Soviet strategic interests, they wanted to give priority to the Soviet-Arab alliance. See D.R. SPECHLER, *The Ussr and Third-World Conflicts: Domestic Debate and Soviet Policy in the Middle East, 1967-1973*, in «World Politics», April 1986, 3, pp. 441, 452.

²⁵ See *National Intelligence Estimate: The Soviet Approach to Summit II*, June 1, 1973, Nie 11-9-73, Secret, in www.foia.cia.gov.

²⁶ *Memorandum for the President's Files from Henry A. Kissinger: President's Meeting with General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev on Saturday, June 23, 1973 at 10:30 p.m. at the Western White House, San Clemente, California*, in Nara, Hako, Box 75, Brezhnev Visit June 18-25 1973 Memcons, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only/XGDS.

Achieving a strategic Us-Soviet agreement on the Middle East was practically impossible, and certainly Kissinger did not pursue it. The Soviets had more at stake in that region than in any other Third World area. This collided with Western economic and energy vital interests, while Moscow was trying to widen its political base in the Middle East by cultivating the friendship of other radical Arab regimes. Also for these reasons, the Cia believed that a new Arab-Israeli war was not so likely, for it would go against Soviet clients, unless the Russians were involved in a major way, which was exactly what the Kremlin wanted to avoid²⁷.

III. THE OUTBREAK OF THE WAR: SETTING THE STRATEGY

Henry Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State in August 1973. At that point his policy towards Egypt was already set: the Arab country had to detach itself from the Ussr and negotiate with the Israelis in order to have US diplomatic and economic support. Nevertheless, he was not in a hurry. He thought there was no real risk of war at least until the Israeli elections scheduled in late October. His target was to split the Arabs in order to have at least a separate peace with the Jewish State and thus start a partial settlement. Egypt was already willing to make a separate peace, such as Jordan, but it was also pivotal to keep the Saudis off the Arab-Israeli dispute. In a few words, the neo-Secretary of State was ready to exhaust the Arabs in order to achieve his purpose²⁸.

In the meantime, Sadat's aim was to get Saudi money to fund the war and the Emirates' commitment to use oil weapon against the West. In drawing up the general war plan, he took into account several things, but first of all he was aware that even by recapturing a few inches of Sinai territory and establishing troops firmly, the whole situation would change. The Arab leader had to restore first of all national pride and military self-confidence, and show this to the world²⁹. On October 1 Sadat summoned the Supreme Council of the armed forces and signed the war order for October

²⁷ See *National Intelligence Estimate: Soviet Military Posture and Policies in the Third World*, Volume I, August 2, 1973, Nie 11-10-73, Secret/Controlled Dissem, in www.foia.cia.gov.

²⁸ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, September 10, 1973, 6:03-6:45 p.m., in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 135, Rabin/Dinitz Sensitive Memcons, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

²⁹ See A. EL-SADAT, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, New York-London, Harper & Row Publishers, 1978, pp. 242-244.

6 at 2.p.m. Two days later he told the Soviet Ambassador that he and Assad had decided to break the deadlock and start military operations. The Soviets had not put any pressure on the Arabs to resume hostilities, though they did not alert the Americans once informed about that³⁰. The Kremlin decided to evacuate all Soviet civilian personnel on October 5, and this was another blow to Sadat's relations with Moscow. In fact, the Arab statistician wrote that this episode showed a total lack of confidence in Egyptian fighting abilities and was interpreted as a bad omen³¹.

Mossad agents had realised Egyptian intentions and warned about the imminent attack³², though they thought it would take place at sunset³³. The intelligence mistake was due to the Israeli stubborn conception of the Arabs. In fact, both the Government and the military and intelligence top brass believed that Egypt would never go to war until able to stage deep air strikes into Israel. At the same time, Syria would not launch any war unless Egypt was able, too. Hence, no one in Israel had realised that Sadat was going to make war aiming only at setting a diplomatic process in motion³⁴.

Kissinger was absolutely against an Israeli pre-emptive attack³⁵. He also believed that the Us and the Ussr had a special responsibility to avoid an escalation of violence in the area. During the Washington Special Action Group (WsaG) meeting at 9 a.m. everyone agreed that there was no evidence of a major and coordinated Syrian-Egyptian offensive against Israel. Instead, intelligence agencies thought that there was in the area an action-reaction situation

³⁰ See W.B. QUANDT, *Soviet Policy in the October Middle East War – I*, in «International Affairs», Jul. 1977, 3, p. 383.

³¹ See EL-SADAT, *Op. cit.*, p. 247.

³² Interviewed in 1999, Major General Zeira said that the top source was a young Egyptian, right-hand man of President Nasser and then Sadat. See E. KAHANA, *Early Warning versus Concept: The Case of the Yom Kippur War 1973*, in «Intelligence and National Security», Summer 2002, 2, p. 99n.

³³ See B. MORRIS-I. BLACK, *Mossad: le guerre segrete di Israele*, Milano, Rizzoli, 2003, p. 325.

³⁴ See A. SHLAIM, *Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War*, in «World Politics», Apr. 1976, 3, p. 352.

³⁵ See *Message from Secretary Kissinger, New York, to White House Situation Room, for Delivery to President Nixon*, October 6, 1973, Z 061250Z, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only, in Nara, Npmp, National Security Council Files (hereinafter Nscf), Box 664, Middle East War Memos & Misc, October 1-October 17, 1973.

with each side responding to perceived threats and thus increasing the risk of confrontation. No one dissented with this thesis and James Schlesinger, Secretary of Defence, said even that «[...] it would be the first time in twenty years that Israel had not started a Mideast war. I just don't see any motive on the Egyptian-Syrian side»³⁶.

Once the war had broken out, Kissinger had a very clear idea about Us aims. The main American objective was «[...] to prevent the Soviet Union from getting a dominant position in the Middle East». For him Israel was a secondary target with a domestic politics sphere. Whenever the Ussr was on the stage, the Us purpose was to demonstrate that whomever got help from Moscow could not achieve anything. Moreover, the United States did not want to create a situation in which a country could use international disputes and then ask for a ceasefire to gain some territory. Hence, the Administration advocated a return to the *status quo ante*³⁷. What worried Kissinger on the outbreak of the war was not its military outcome, but its political international aftermath. Like anyone else he was convinced that Israel would win very quickly³⁸, but the wars of the past had taught that local Middle East conflicts could constantly turn themselves into international crises. Arab frustrations could provoke a Soviet involvement and Europe could distance from the Us for energy reasons. Moreover, all this occurred when Nixon was politically weak, being deeply involved in the Watergate scandal³⁹. The situation for the Americans was not so easy. First of all there was the security of Israel to guarantee, but at the same time it was absolutely necessary to keep relationships with Arab conservative regimes, such as Jordan and Saudi Arabia. In case of Israeli crushing victory the Us had to avoid becoming the

³⁶ H.A. KISSINGER, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises*, New York-London, Simon & Schuster, 2003, pp. 33-34.

³⁷ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 6, 1973, 9:10-9:30 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Pps Records, Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, Box 328, China Exchanges July 10-October 31, 1973, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

³⁸ At first the Soviets had no confidence in Arab success, too. Ambassador Vinograd pressed Sadat to accept a cease-fire only six hours after the breakout of hostilities. After the initial successful Arab advance, however, Moscow issued a statement declaring that the responsibility of the war rested the Israeli aggressive policy. See K. DAWISHA, *Soviet Decision-Making in the Middle East: The 1973 October War and the 1980 Gulf War*, in «International Affairs», Winter 1980-1981, 1, p. 51.

³⁹ See H.A. KISSINGER, *Anni di crisi*, Milano, Sugarco Edizioni, 1982, p. 358.

goal of Arab resentment. Once sorted the military emergence out, however, the peace process was supposed to start. Nixon accepted this strategy and said that this time the Israelis should not do whatever they liked after a military victory, thus leaving the Americans in trouble with the Arabs⁴⁰.

All firm beliefs about an Israeli quick victory ended on October 9, when Ambassador Dinitz communicated that in three days the Idf had lost 49 planes and about 500 tanks⁴¹. In front of this emergency, Nixon immediately approved the replacement of all losses, besides the shipment of war equipments and consumables⁴². The question of arms supply to Israel had inevitable repercussions on the relations with the Soviet Union⁴³. Tactically speaking it was impossible not to cooperate with the Kremlin at all, though Moscow had chosen to support the Arab war effort through a massive air and sea arms supply, with the airlift starting on October 9⁴⁴. At the same time, Soviet leaders were urging Sadat and Assad to coordinate more closely their military actions⁴⁵. *Sic stantibus rebus*, the Nixon Administration had no choice but arranging a massive war airlift to Israel.

IV. THE AIRLIFT FOR ISRAEL

Knowing that such a massive support to Israel could jeopardise the relationship with moderate Arab kingdoms⁴⁶, Nixon sent a

⁴⁰ See *Idem*, pp. 368-369.

⁴¹ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 9, 1973, 8:20-8:40 a.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Records of Henry Kissinger, 25, Cat C, Arab-Israeli War, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

⁴² See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 9, 1973, 6:10-6:35 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol Isr-Us, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

⁴³ Nixon's appeal to Brezhnev to put pressures on the Arabs, apparently acknowledging him a diplomatic role in the question, was welcomed in the Kremlin. The Soviet leader considered Nixon's message as a good omen for Us-Ussr relations and cooperation during the crisis. See V. ISRAELYAN, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, p. 37.

⁴⁴ See F.D. KOHLER, L. GOURÉ, M.L. HARVEY, *The Soviet Union and the October 1973 Middle East War: The Implications for Detente*, Miami, Center for Advanced International Studies, University of Miami, 1974, p. 64.

⁴⁵ See W.J. BOYNE, *The Yom Kippur War and the Airlift that Saved Israel*, New York, Thomas Dunne Books, 2002, pp. 95-96.

⁴⁶ Nixon did not absolutely want to worsen relations with Arab oil producing countries, so much so that he stressed to Kissinger that American policy should not be pro-Israel too much. See *Telephone Calls between the President and Kissinger*, October 7, 1973, 10:18 a.m., in KISSINGER, *Crisis*, cit., p. 89.

message to King Faysal, stressing the objective to contain the USSR in the area⁴⁷, while Kissinger warned about the Soviet airlift to Arab radical regimes⁴⁸. In light of this, the State Secretary was pursuing his own agenda and wanted the fighting to carry on for a while before resupplying Israel⁴⁹. This seems confirmed by a statement of Kissinger's during the October 14 Wsag meeting. In that circumstance, he recommended not to step up the resupply to Israel, whose interests were not the same as those of the United States. Kissinger said that Israel would win without an intolerable financial effort and quite quickly, but «[...] we don't want Israel totally intractable»⁵⁰.

It was important for the White House not to face a wave of anti-Americanism in Muslim countries; therefore, as soon as the airlift started Nixon and Kissinger began to meet Arab leaders. This global diplomacy could not leave the Soviets unresponsive. As the Arab military machine began to lose ground, the Kremlin's propaganda struck the oil weapon issue. The Soviets were probably pursuing to strengthen the Arab front in order to avoid a total collapse leading to Moscow's direct intervention. Thus, Prime Minister Kosygin was sent to Cairo for talks with Sadat, perceived as the key Arab figure of the war⁵¹. The visit was decided during the October 15 meeting of the Politburo. The Premier was in charge to warn Sadat about the catastrophic consequences of a possible Israeli crossing of the Suez Canal. After all, Sadat's limited war aims had been achieved; therefore, it was better to consolidate them by ending the fighting. Moreover, Moscow was always available to send military supplies to Egypt, but could not afford to do it for ever⁵². Having said that, the Premier's main task was the cease-fire. Had

⁴⁷ See *Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco to Kissinger: Proposed Presidential Message to King Faisal*, October 12, 1973, with State Department cable routing message attached, in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol 15-1 Us/Nixon, Secret/Exdis.

⁴⁸ See *Telegram 203672 from SecState Washington to AmEmbassy Jidda: Message to the King from the Secretary*, October 14, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Nscf, Box 1174, 1973 Middle East War, File No. 9, Secret/Nodis.

⁴⁹ See P.J. HANEY, *The Nixon Administration and Middle East Crises: Theory and Evidence of Presidential Management of Foreign Policy Decision Making*, in «Political Research Quarterly», Dec. 1994, 4, p. 948.

⁵⁰ *Memorandum of Conversation: Wsag Meeting-Middle East*, October 14, 1973, Top Secret/Sensitive, in www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/.

⁵¹ See W.B. QUANDT, *Soviet Policy in the October Middle East War – II*, in «International Affairs», Oct. 1977, 4, pp. 593-594.

⁵² See ISRAELIAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 91-93.

Sadat rejected the Soviet proposal of immediate cease-fire, the situation would have become extremely dangerous for the Arabs, for they would have been defeated, Sadat himself would have been dismissed, but also Soviet-Arab relations would have deteriorated⁵³.

Had the Soviets been able to read Sadat's thoughts, they would not have been so confident about his friendship. His perception was that «[...] the Soviet Union stood behind me, ready to stab me in the back if I lost 85 or 90 percent of my arms [...]»⁵⁴. By mid-October Sadat had already reached the conclusion that the time was coming to search a political solution⁵⁵. He was ready to accept cease-fire on condition that Israel withdraw from all occupied territories till pre-June 5, 1967 lines⁵⁶. This was certainly not acceptable for the Israelis and the Americans, without a negotiation process leading to a peace treaty and a formal recognition of the Jewish State. Nevertheless, the fact that Sadat was by then ready to start discussions meant that the task to restore Egyptian national pride had been achieved and the time for negotiations was approaching. However, the military situation did not yet allow Jerusalem to seek a cease-fire. Addressing on October 16 the Knesset, Golda Meir said that the Arabs had not yet been beaten enough to show any desire for cease-fire⁵⁷.

Kissinger's strategy was achieving the first results, but now the Israelis were beginning to play the role of the intransigent. Us-Israeli relations were essential and consolidated, but nobody could afford to worsen those with the Arabs. As an evidence of this, while Kosygin was in Cairo Kissinger met the Foreign Ministers of some Arab oil producing countries. The Secretary of State said that the Us goal was to avoid the risk to expand hostilities by ending the war in a way leaving Us-Arab relations as friendly as possible.

⁵³ See *Idem*, pp. 95-97.

⁵⁴ EL-SADAT, *Op. cit.*, p. 263.

⁵⁵ On October 12 Sadat had ordered his troops to develop an offensive Eastwards in the Sinai peninsula. This caused an unbalanced position on the Western bank of the Suez Canal, for Egyptian tanks went beyond the Sam (Surface to Air Missiles) umbrella and became easy targets for the Israeli Air Force. See M.M. EL HUSSINI, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945-85*, New York, St. Martin's Press, 1987, p. 202.

⁵⁶ See M. HEIKAL, *The Road to Ramadan*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1976, pp. 235-236.

⁵⁷ See "Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Meir, 16 October 1973", and "Knesset Resolution", in *Israel's Foreign Relations: Selected Documents* (hereinafter *Ifr*), Vols. 1-2, 1947-1974, in www.mfa.gov.il.

Kissinger admitted that the pre-October 6 situation was intolerable for the Arabs and that any cease-fire now had to take into account the Arab soldiers' demonstration of efficiency and courage⁵⁸. The United States was ready to commit itself to a negotiation process in the Middle East⁵⁹. In order to have the influence necessary to bring Israel to a settlement, the Americans needed its confidence first, and that was another reason why the airlift had to proceed at full speed⁶⁰. Finally, Israeli strength provided national security, but it did not prevent the spread of communism in the Arab world. The best way to pursue that goal was to strengthen Arab moderate regimes. Hence, the Us attitude could not lean towards Israel too much⁶¹.

Meanwhile, Kosygin's mission had been far from successful. Despite Sadat's intention to end the fighting stage, the Soviet Premier was not able to persuade him about a cease-fire⁶². The Americans, instead, were almost in daily contact with the Egyptians. Sadat wanted the Us, and not the Soviet Union, engaged in the negotiations following the war⁶³. The Soviets perpetrated the mistake to

⁵⁸ Kissinger's goal was to exploit the fluid situation following the conflict to move the parties gradually towards an overall settlement. See A. SHLAIM, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York-London, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, p. 321.

⁵⁹ See *National Security Council Memorandum for Secretary Kissinger from William B. Quandt: Memoranda of Conversations with Arab Foreign Ministers*, October 17, 1973, in Nara, Sn 70-73, Pol 27 Arab-Isr, Top Secret/Sensitive/Nodis (Xgds).

⁶⁰ See *Memorandum of Conversation: Wsag Principals: Middle East War*, October 17, 1973, 4:00 p.m., in Nara, Npmp, Nsc Institutional Files, Box H-92, Wsag Meeting Middle East 10/17/73, Folder 6, Secret/Xgds.

⁶¹ See H. KISSINGER, *Conversation with Kissinger*, in «Journal of Palestine Studies», Spring 1981, 3, pp. 187-188.

⁶² According to Victor Israelyan, Sadat informed the Kremlin about his acceptance of a cease-fire-in-place only on October 21, while some scholars, like Raymond L. Garthoff, remind us that the Egyptian President accepted Kosygin's proposal on October 18, while he was still in Cairo. See ISRAELYAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 110-111; R.L. GARTHOFF, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon to Reagan*, Washington D.C., The Brookings Institution, 1985, p. 370. Sadat in person seems to prove Israelyan right, by writing that, when Kosygin was leaving back for Moscow, he said to him: «I won't have a cease-fire until the final stage of my War Plan has been carried out. I hope this is clear enough for you». EL-SADAT, *Op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁶³ See, B. REICH, «Crisis Management – P. Rodman's Intervention», in R.B. PARKER (ed.), *The October War: A Retrospective*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2001, pp. 179-180.

try to «educate Sadat» about American policy, or to speak to Washington on behalf of Cairo. Kosygin had the impression that Sadat was stubborn and irresponsible, and like Brezhnev he was convinced that the Egyptian President did not realise the real interests of his country, which could be achieved only by following Moscow's orthodoxy⁶⁴. Once the Premier was back in Moscow, the Soviets decided that it was impossible to manage the crisis without US cooperation. Worried about damage to relations with Washington and to Soviet prestige, and determined to play a role in any post-war settlement, Brezhnev explicitly demanded that Kissinger go to Moscow to conduct appropriate negotiations to reach a cease-fire⁶⁵. Nixon agreed and added that Kissinger would speak in Moscow with his full authority and complete support⁶⁶.

V. A TEST FOR DÉTENTE AND THE WINK TO ISRAEL

The reason why the Americans accepted the invitation so quickly was that it solved most of their strategic problems. It would have kept the issue away from the UN while Kissinger was discussing with the Soviets, and Israel would have gained two-three more days to improve its military situation. In the meantime, the Secretary of State had already contacted the Egyptians, offering them a truce linked to resolution 242. In order to show that Egypt now deserved respect, Kissinger underlined the fact that the situation had been altered due to the value the Arabs had shown on the battle field⁶⁷.

However, Kissinger did not appreciate Nixon's message granting him full powers. The President was under a heavy pressure due to the Watergate scandal and was thus trying to exploit foreign policy for domestic purposes. He wanted to reach a final settlement in the shortest possible time, but this collided with his advisor's delaying tactic. Being invested with full powers would have not allowed him to freeze a proposal before consulting the President and have his approval. Consequently, Kissinger did not respect Nixon's orders⁶⁸. He met Brezhnev as soon as he arrived at Moscow. The two statisticians showed no disagreement over the basic issue, that

⁶⁴ See ISRAELYAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 112-114.

⁶⁵ See *Breznev to Nixon*, October 19, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

⁶⁶ See *Nixon to Breznev*, October 20, 1973, *ibidem*.

⁶⁷ See KISSINGER, *Anni di crisi*, cit., p. 427.

⁶⁸ See *Idem*, p. 433.

is the imperative to bring an end to hostilities. They also agreed that there were two main and different problems, to be solved at different times: ending the fight first, for as long as the war was on there was always the possibility of some irrational acts; secondly, it was of paramount importance to remove the causes of war after reaching a cease-fire. The fact that there was an indirect Us-Soviet confrontation in the area did not affect the superpowers' national interests⁶⁹. Nixon's message, meanwhile, had disappointed the Secretary. According to the President, in Israel's best interests the Us had the duty to gain a settlement and cooperate with the Soviets to this purpose. American foreign policy weakness over the past was due not only to the unwillingness of the Arabs to engage themselves on realistic terms, but also on Israeli intransigence. That was why Nixon was ready to deliver commitments regardless of domestic political consequences⁷⁰. Kissinger had no intention to follow these instructions and conveyed to Scowcroft his shock. Any agreement reached independently of Israel was considered as a prescription for failure in future talks⁷¹. He thought that by respecting the President's instructions he would totally wreck what little bargaining leverage he still had. The goal of the conversations in Moscow was a cease-fire, not a global settlement. Only after the cease-fire it was possible to carry out Nixon's proposal. In short, the Secretary considered «[...] the tone and substance of his instructions to me to be unacceptable»⁷².

On October 21 Kissinger drafted with the Soviets the cease-fire resolution to be endorsed by the Un Security Council. He carefully drove the Soviets towards a language that did not give them a central role in any post-war negotiation. He argued that a resolution had to include language about negotiations between the parties under appropriate auspices, meaning that the superpowers would not

⁶⁹ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 20, 1973, 9:15-11:30 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol 7 Us/Kissinger, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

⁷⁰ See *Message Tohak 20 from the Situation Room to Peter Rodman for Dr Kissinger*, October 20, 1973, Z 201755Z, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 39, Hak Trip – Moscow, Tel Aviv, London – October 20-23, 1973, Tohak 1-60, Top Secret/Sensitive/Eyes Only.

⁷¹ See DALLEK, *Op. cit.*, pp. 525-526.

⁷² *Message Hakto 06 from Secretary Kissinger to General Scowcroft*, October 20, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 39, Hak Trip – Moscow, Tel Aviv, London – October 20-23, 1973 Hakto, Secto, Tosec, Misc., Secret/Sensitive.

take part in the process, but only in the opening stage and at critical points throughout⁷³. Kissinger was emerging as the only policy-maker with influence enough and something to offer Egypt, Israel and the Ussr. But first of all Israeli military achievements had to be strengthened. He had agreed with the Soviets to adopt the resolution very quickly, but he did not share the same interest in such speed⁷⁴.

Resolution 338 was to be adopted on October 22, 1973 at 00:52 a.m., New York time, and gave the parties twelve hours to implement the cease-fire in place⁷⁵. According to Kissinger himself, he did not manage to send any communication to Washington for a few hours after he had left the meeting with Brezhnev. This was due to a technological breakdown preventing the Israelis from having enough time to arrange the cease-fire⁷⁶. Whether true or not, the Secretary decided that this gave Israel the right to require some additional time for military dispositions before the cease-fire came into force⁷⁷. During the return trip, Kissinger stopped over in Tel Aviv. The Israelis were rather reluctant to stop fighting, now that they were consolidating their position on the Western bank of the canal and entrapping the Egyptian Third Army in the Southern sector of the Eastern side of the canal. Whatever the Arabs thought about the Us and Israel, Kissinger claimed, objective reality now forced them to talk to the Americans⁷⁸. Moreover, he said that the Israelis would not have violent protests from Washington if something happened during the night, while he was flying back to the

⁷³ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 21, 1973, 12 noon-4:00 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol 7 Us/Kissinger, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

⁷⁴ See K. STEIN, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*, New York-London, Routledge, 1999, p. 89.

⁷⁵ See *United Nations Security Council Resolution 338*, October 22, 1973, in www.un.org.

⁷⁶ See KISSINGER, *Anni di crisi*, cit., pp. 439-441.

⁷⁷ See *Telegram 13148 from AmEmbassy Moscow to SecState Washington*, October 21, 1973, Z 212105Z, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 39, Hak Trip – Moscow, Tel Aviv, London – October 20-23, 1973 Hako, Secto, Tosec, Misc., Nodis/Cherokee.

⁷⁸ The airlift had not burnt Kissinger's bridges to Sadat. A couple of weeks after it began, the Egyptian President said that American policy was constructive. Such a statement was the psychological breakthrough Kissinger was seeking. See E.R.F. SHEEHAN, *How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East*, in «Foreign Policy», Spring 1976, XXII, p. 14.

Us⁷⁹. Kissinger's message was simple: the formal agreement just reached was not so important. He was giving the Israelis green light to violate the cease-fire for a while⁸⁰.

Before leaving for Moscow, in fact, Kissinger had made it clear to Dinitz that the Israelis could assume they had enough time to achieve their military objectives. The Israeli Foreign Minister, Abba Eban, had also reported that the Secretary of State's trip to Moscow would not produce any initiative regarding the conditions for a cease-fire. When Israeli authorities were informed about the Us-Soviet agreement, Mrs. Meir was furious. She did not like the idea to put her signature on an agreement she had not even been consulted upon. Nevertheless, after the massive Us airlift the Government acknowledged it was not in the position to decline an explicit request from Washington⁸¹. Hence, Jerusalem accepted the cease-fire even before Kissinger's arrival in Israel⁸². The lines the Idf was holding on the Syrian front were better than those held on October 6. As regarded the Egyptian front, the Arab Army had been deprived of its capacity to threaten Israel, and the Idf formations on the Western side of the Suez Canal had become a strong military base for possible operations⁸³. At the same time, the Premier had ordered the troops to carry on fighting until and unless the Egyptians stopped⁸⁴. The American Ambassador, Keating, admitted he would not be surprised if the Israelis decided to launch an attack to wipe out the Egyptian Third Army⁸⁵.

⁷⁹ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 22, 1973, 1.35-2:15 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol 7 Us/Kissinger, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

⁸⁰ See J. HANHIMÄKI, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2004, p. 313.

⁸¹ See M. GOLAN, *The Secret Conversation of Henry Kissinger: Step-by-Step Diplomacy in the Middle East*, New York, Quadrangle, The New York Times Book Co., 1976, pp. 76-78.

⁸² See *Cabinet Decision: Israel Accepts the Cease-Fire*, 22 October 1973, in Ifr, Vols. 1-2, 1947-1974, in www.mfa.gov.il.

⁸³ See *Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Meir*, 23 October 1973, *ibidem*.

⁸⁴ By the time the cease-fire had come into effect, in North Sinai Sharon had brought the Ismailia-Cairo road under his fire, but had not captured Ismailia. In the South, Adan and Magen had cut off the Suez-Cairo road and reached the outskirts of Suez City, but had not captured the town itself. See N. SAFRAN, *Trial by Ordeal: The Yom Kippur War, October 1973*, in «International Security», Autumn 1977, 2, p. 164.

⁸⁵ See *Telegram 8513 from AmEmbassy Tel Aviv to SecState Washington: Conversation with Prime Minister Meir*, October 23, 1973, Z 231403Z, in Nara,

Hostilities resumed very quickly and this time the superpowers agreed that Israel had violated the resolution first. This was totally unacceptable for the Soviets, who urged another Un resolution calling the parties to stop fighting and withdraw to the positions they occupied when the first cease-fire had come into force⁸⁶. The Secretary had allowed the Israelis to ignore the cease-fire for a few hours, but now there was the serious risk for the Egyptian Third Army to be annihilated. This would have destroyed Kissinger's design for the Middle East. In fact, either the USSR would have entered the war, obliging the Us to do the same and thus escalating towards a world conflict; or the Russians would have not directly intervened, but would have entered Egypt without ever leaving⁸⁷. Therefore, another Un resolution was necessary to stop the fighting. Now it was time for the Nixon Administration to «[...] assume full responsibility to bring about a complete end of hostilities on the part of Israel»⁸⁸. The time had come for Kissinger to deal with the Israelis to persuade them not to destroy the Egyptian Third army or to let it starve. Despite the difficult days ahead, the United States had jumped on centre stage and the diplomacy of the Middle East had begun to rotate around the Washington axis.

By then there was a conflict of interests between Washington and Jerusalem regarding the ultimate purpose of the war. Though Israeli leaders had declared themselves in favour of a negotiated settlement, now that victory was in their hands they did not want to stop the troops until the Egyptian Army was encircled and possibly destroyed. The danger for American strategy was that Israel might do what the Soviets were not able to do, that is to deny Washington the chance to shape the region on the basis of an Israeli-Egyptian settlement⁸⁹. For all these reasons in the afternoon of October 23 a new Un resolution was approved, confirming the

Npmp, Nscf, Box 1175, 1973 Middle East War, 23 Oct. 1973, File No. 18, Secret/Nodis.

⁸⁶ See *Message from Breznev to Secretary Kissinger as Read by Minister Vorontsov to the Secretary on the Telephone*, October 23, 1973, 10:40 a.m., in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

⁸⁷ See H. KISSINGER, M.H. HAIKAL, *Kissinger Meets Haikal*, in «Journal of Palestine Studies», Winter 1974, 2, pp. 212-213.

⁸⁸ See *Hotline Message from President Nixon to Breznev*, October 23, 1973, 1:10 p.m., in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

⁸⁹ See R.C. THORNTON, *The Nixon Kissinger Years: The Reshaping of American Foreign Policy*, New York, Paragon House, 1989, p. 247.

decision for an immediate cease-fire and urging the forces to withdraw to the positions they occupied when resolution 338 had come into force⁹⁰. The Americans could not tolerate an Israeli defeat because it was not possible to let a Us-armed country be defeated by a Soviet-armed one and because this would have undermined the American position in the Middle East. Having said this, the White House could not make Us policy hostage to the Israelis. From an Israeli point of view, in fact, it was not a disaster to have a radicalized and anti-American Arab world, for that would have guaranteed support. From an American point of view, such an outlook was a disaster. Instead, it was the right moment to implement a cease-fire and initiate a settlement negotiation. The essence of a good settlement, Kissinger reflected, was that anyone could feel to gain something. In that circumstance, the Arabs had gained respectability and infringed the myth of Israeli invincibility. Israeli security now depended on a combination of military strength and diplomacy. On the other hand, the Israelis had gained another victory, this time literally avoiding precipice, another tangible evidence of American support and finally Arab recognition for direct negotiations. As regarded the Soviets, they had at least limited the extent of their allies' disaster. All this put the Us in a central position, for peace in the area depended by then on Washington and everybody relied on the Atlantic superpower to disentangle from the quagmire⁹¹.

However, Israeli successes were precipitating an international crisis. The Third Army was by then cut off from supply routes, with a serious risk to choose between breaking the encirclement and starving. At this time Brezhnev wrote to Nixon that he considered the United States as responsible for Israeli behaviour and asked him to put pressure on Jerusalem to stop fighting immediately⁹². To this Nixon replied that his Administration was devoting all its energies to reach a real cease-fire and that Israel was carrying out only defensive actions. Despite this, Nixon showed rather a certain disappointment towards the Jewish State, when he said that «[...] any further offensive operations would lead to a severe deteriora-

⁹⁰ See *United Nations Security Council Resolution 339*, October 23, 1973, in www.un.org.

⁹¹ See *Secretary's Staff Meeting*, October 23, 1973, 4:35 p.m., in Nara, Transcripts of Hak Staff Meetings, 1973-1977, Box 1, Secret/Nodis.

⁹² See *Dobrynin to Kissinger, Enclosing Letter from Breznev to Nixon*, October 24, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

tions of relations between the Israeli and the Us Governments»⁹³. The Americans strongly opposed the likelihood that Soviet troops be introduced into the area⁹⁴. Kissinger had no doubt on that, but it is interesting to highlight how ambiguous he was in his conversations with the Israelis. As regarded withdrawal to October 22 lines, in fact, he said that he agreed on the principle, but he did not know how to apply it⁹⁵.

The situation seemed to precipitate on October 24. In the afternoon Sadat had formally appealed to Brezhnev urging the dispatch of Soviet observers. The Egyptian President did not want to involve the Russians in the conflict, neither he wanted to increase his country's dependence on the Ussr. In a few words, he knew that the Kremlin did not want to jeopardise *détente* by intervening. Hence, Sadat's appeal to Brezhnev was only a way to make the Americans more cooperative. It was his 'Soviet card' to play with the United States⁹⁶. In the evening Ambassador Dobrynin called Kissinger and dictated the text of a letter from Brezhnev to President Nixon. The language was rather rude, addressing Nixon simply as «Mr. President», and indicated that the Israelis were violating the cease-fire and continuing to seize territory. To solve the crisis, Brezhnev proposed to send to Egypt Soviet and American military contingents, to ensure the implementation of the cease-fire. Finally, the Soviet leader threatened «[...] to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally»⁹⁷. The Americans strongly objected these proposals, for they had not worked for years to reduce the Soviet presence in the area only to cooperate in reintroducing it as result of a Un resolution⁹⁸. The Secretary summoned a

⁹³ Scowcroft *Letter to Dobrynin, Enclosing Message from Nixon to Brezhnev*, October 24, 1973, *ibidem*.

⁹⁴ See *Backchannel Message from Nixon through Ismail to Sadat*, October 24, 1973, in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol 27-14 Arab-Isr, Xr Def 6.

⁹⁵ See *Telephone Conversation between Dinitz and Kissinger*, October 24, 1973, 3:40 p.m., in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 136, Dinitz June 4, 1974 (sic)-Oct 31, 1973.

⁹⁶ See ISRAELYAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 165-166.

⁹⁷ See *Message from Brezhnev to Nixon*, October 24, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger, Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

⁹⁸ Kissinger makes clear that at no time he discussed the message with Nixon or even informed him about it. The Chief of the White House staff thought the President was too distraught by the Watergate scandal to participate in the discussions and decisions following Brezhnev's letter. See R.L. GARTHOFF, *Op. cit.*, p. 378. Walter Isaacson also affirms that Nixon was not part of the decision

Wesag meeting and said that if the Americans agreed to act jointly with the USSR, either they would pursue a power play against Israel, or they would end up in a clash with Moscow. Both options were unacceptable. Moreover, Washington's traditional Arab friends would not certainly appreciate a renewed Soviet presence in the area⁹⁹. The strategy the Americans had been pursuing for four years would collapse at a glance: Egypt would be drawn back into the Soviet orbit, Moscow and its radical allies would emerge as dominant factor in the region, while China and Europe would fear such a US-Soviet cooperation¹⁰⁰. The Anglo-Saxon power did not want to establish the principle that Soviet combat forces could be transported into distant foreign countries, but Kissinger agreed to establish formal cooperation with the Soviets in order to encourage negotiations in the Middle East. But since the latter could not deliver anything, the negotiation process to pursue was the one between Americans and Arabs¹⁰¹.

Meanwhile, American nuclear forces and troops world wide were put on what was called DefCon (Defence Condition) 3, an increase above normal to force readiness¹⁰². Afterwards, the Wesag prepared a letter to Brezhnev under Nixon's name rejecting the proposal for US and Soviet military contingents as not appropriate, stating the Government's guarantee to take every effective step to implement the cease-fire, and warning that a Soviet unilateral action would be «[...] a matter of the gravest concern involving incalculable consequences». The Americans proposed, instead, to send some US and Soviet non combat troops to augment the UN truce supervisory force¹⁰³. Moreover, the letter added that such a Soviet

making process that night, nor was he briefed. See W. ISAACSON, *Kissinger: A Biography*, New York-London, Simon&Schuster, 1993, p. 532.

⁹⁹ Sadat had ended the Arab cold war by accepting regimes different from his own as they were. Far from intriguing against them, he managed to establish areas of common interest. See E.R.F. SHEEHAN, *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976, p. 68.

¹⁰⁰ See KISSINGER, *Crisis*, cit., p. 348.

¹⁰¹ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, October 25, 1973, 4:45-5:25 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Pps Records, Director's Files (Winston Lord) 1969-1977, Box 374, China, July 1973-February 1974, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

¹⁰² See BUNDY, *Op. cit.*, p. 441.

¹⁰³ On October 24 Kissinger had informed the Egyptians that the Israeli Government had been warned that further offensive operations would lead to a deterioration of the relations with Washington. See M. HEIKAL, *Secret Channels: The Inside Story of Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations*, London, Harper Collins Publishers, 1996, p. 207.

unilateral action would violate the principles of *détente* signed in Moscow in 1972¹⁰⁴. Significantly, the exact wording of those agreements was not quoted, for this was a way to leave some room for manoeuvre and find a way out from the crisis¹⁰⁵. The Soviets understood that the conflict was leading towards a superpower confrontation. The question was whether Moscow was ready to engage in a large scale war. The American alert was regarded as irresponsible and not related at all with Brezhnev's letter¹⁰⁶. However, no one except the Defence Minister, Grechko, was willing to send troops to the Middle East or to face a superpower direct confrontation because of Egypt or Syria. Brezhnev himself suggested not to respond at all to the alert, in order for Nixon to cool down¹⁰⁷. Thus, the communist leader simply communicated that Moscow had dispatched seventy observers to Egypt and that it was ready to cooperate with the Americans on the implementation of the Security Council resolutions¹⁰⁸. Brezhnev's last message had broken out the deadlock.

On October 25 the Un Security Council voted resolution 340, demanding that cease-fire be observed and that the parties return to the positions they occupied on October 22. Moreover, it was decided to set up immediately a Un Emergency Force to be drawn

¹⁰⁴ See *Nixon to Brezhnev*, October 25, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

¹⁰⁵ «Both sides recognize that efforts to obtain unilateral advantage at the expense of the other [...] are inconsistent with these objectives. The prerequisites for maintaining and strengthening peaceful relations between the Usa and the USSR are the recognition of the security interests of the Parties based on the principle of equality and the renunciation of the use or threat of force». *Basic Principles of Relations between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics*, May 29, 1972, in Public Papers of President Nixon (hereinafter Pppn), 1972, Doc. 177, in www.nixonlibraryfoundation.org.

¹⁰⁶ The Cia had reported that the Soviets had seven airborne divisions on alert. See B.I. KAUFMAN, *The Arab Middle East and the United States: Inter-Arab Rivalry and Superpower Diplomacy*, New York, Twayne Publishers, 1996, p. 84.

¹⁰⁷ Both Soviet and Us key decision makers were aware that the alert was implemented to give a political signal, rather than a military one. However, American leaders had regarded Brezhnev's letter as a coercive manoeuvre requesting a firm response. See F. WEHLING, *Irresolute Princes: Kremlin Decision Making in Middle East Crises, 1967-1973*, London, Macmillan, 1997, p. 122.

¹⁰⁸ See *Dobrynin to Kissinger, Enclosing Letter from Brezhnev to Nixon*, October 25, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973).

from members of the United Nations, except the permanent members of the Security Council¹⁰⁹. The Secretary's chess game was becoming more and more successful. The tension with the Soviet Union had begun to de-escalate, the war was practically over, Israel had won another round, the USSR was less and less decisive, while the United States was starting to hold the balance of power in the Middle East. In spite of everything, however, the Israelis did not want to miss the chance to erase their enemies' capacity to attack any longer. Thus, by ignoring the cease-fire the IdF was trying to force the trapped Egyptian Third Army to surrender or to attempt another breakout the Israeli Army could use as a pretext to crush it. This option was against US interests, as the destruction or surrender of the Third Army could have caused a defeat mentality in Egypt, similar to that which had prevented the Arabs from negotiating with the Israelis in the previous six years. Moreover, all this could have jeopardised Sadat's position¹¹⁰. The Secretary suggested that Israel permit food, water and medicines to the beleaguered force while maintaining the encirclement. In this case, the Third Army remained Israel's hostage for future bargaining, without being forced to a humiliating surrender or withdrawal. He also told the Israelis that they were playing a dangerous game with superpower confrontation¹¹¹. Though the encirclement of the Third Army was a gift to American diplomacy, for it made Egypt at the total mercy of the United States, its survival was for Nixon and Kissinger the key to detach Egypt from the Soviet Union¹¹².

VI. TENSIONS WITH ISRAEL

The Secretary started a tough diplomatic pressure on the Government of Israel. By pushing towards a total confrontation,

¹⁰⁹ See *Security Council Resolution No. 340*, October 25, 1973, in www.un.org.

¹¹⁰ See *Telegram 3245 from UsInt Cairo to SecState Washington: Egyptian Third Army*, October 26, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Nsf, Middle East 1969-1974, Country File Arab Republic of Egypt, Vol. IX, Jan-Oct 1973, Box 638, Folder 2, Action SS-30, O 261120Z, Secret/Exdis.

¹¹¹ Kissinger observed that the US had supported Israel for many historical, strategic, and moral reasons. However, American interests did not embrace the elimination of the Egyptian Third Army. And it was also important that Washington, and not Moscow, save the Egyptians under siege. See D. SCHOENBAUM, *The United States and the State of Israel*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1993, p. 209.

¹¹² See A. RABINOVICH, *The Yom Kippur War: the Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*, New York, Schocken Books, 2004, pp. 483-484.

Kissinger stated, Israel was making a mistake, for it was not permitted to capture the Third Army¹¹³. The fact that the Egyptians were still fighting to try a breakout did not make any difference¹¹⁴. Kissinger was on the side of Israel, he had no personal interest in the Third Army, but the whole situation was becoming too big for the United States, too¹¹⁵. The Americans could not allow the Egyptian army to be destroyed, or captured, or starve. In that case, the Soviets would have sent supplies, thus blowing Us prestige and pushing the clock back to pre-détente times¹¹⁶.

Superpower prestige was at stake for the Soviet Union as well. Brezhnev wrote that if the Americans failed to influence the Israelis, Moscow would have serious doubts about Us intentions to carry on understandings on the cease-fire¹¹⁷. On the other hand Nixon had made absolutely clear that he could not permit the destruction of the Egyptian army. That option simply did not exist. Therefore, the Secretary practically gave the Israelis an ultimatum, saying that within October 27, 8:00 a.m., the Meir Government had to answer to the question concerning non military supplies for the trapped army. In case of negative reply, the Us was obliged to support a Un resolution dealing with the enforcement of the cease-fire. By being so stubborn, Kissinger added, the Israelis were pursuing a suicidal path, destroying any chance of negotiation and putting Sadat's regime in jeopardy¹¹⁸. Five hours before the expiration of the ultimatum Egypt accepted the Israeli proposal of direct talks¹¹⁹.

¹¹³ See *Telephone Conversation between Ambassador Dinitz and Secretary of State Kissinger*, October 26, 1973, 1:17 p.m., in KISSINGER, *Crisis*, cit., pp. 374-375.

¹¹⁴ Arab troops had fought hard against Israeli counter-attacks and ended the war with their morale intact. This was a key point in post-war negotiations. See F. BRENCHLEY, *Britain and the Middle East: an Economic History 1945-87*, London, Lester Crook Academic Publishing, 1989, p. 210.

¹¹⁵ See *Telephone Conversation between Ambassador Dinitz and Secretary of State Kissinger*, October 26, 1973, 8:41 p.m., in KISSINGER, *Crisis*, cit., pp. 387-389.

¹¹⁶ See M. DAYAN, *Story of My Life*, New York, William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976, p. 544.

¹¹⁷ See *Hotline Message from Brezhnev to Nixon*, October 26, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Hako, Box 69, Dobrynin/Kissinger Vol. 20 (October 12-November 27, 1973), Usa/Ussr 01, 270020R, Spec Cat/Eyes Only.

¹¹⁸ See *Telephone Conversation between Ambassador Dinitz and Secretary of State Kissinger*, October 26, 1973, 10:58 p.m., in KISSINGER, *Crisis*, cit., pp. 393-397.

¹¹⁹ See *Telephone Conversation between Ambassador Dinitz and Secretary of State Kissinger*, October 27, 1973, 1:15 p.m., in *Ibidem*, pp. 411-412.

The Egyptians set up two preconditions, that is a complete cease-fire and the passage of a convoy bearing non military supplies to the trapped army. Golda Meir accepted the compromise in order not to disappoint the powerful American ally. The United States, she said to the Cabinet, was the only real friend Israel had and there was nothing shameful for a small country to give in sometimes to such a superpower¹²⁰.

The armed conflict was over, but this did not ease tension yet. The Israelis were still reluctant to let convoys reach the Third Army and wanted their Pows back soon. Despite this, Kissinger's strategy was now reality. The Soviet Union had saved honour by doing its part to protect the Egyptian army, but the real arbiter was in Washington. As an evidence of this, the Americans immediately began talks with both sides, trying to achieve that breakthrough Kissinger had had in mind since the outbreak of the war. The fact that the Egyptians trusted the Americans and that Kissinger had planned a trip to Cairo in November was a real watershed¹²¹. Despite this, now it was time for the Americans to cool down the relations with Israel. The conversations taking place in early November 1973 with Golda Meir were rather bitter and mirrored all her resentment. The two countries' interests were divergent this time. The Premier complained that the Americans trusted the Egyptians too much, but Kissinger once again showed all his realism when he said that he was not so interested in the exact location of the October 22 cease-fire line. Israel could even take some more miles of territory, but the Third Army had to be rescued¹²². The problem was not how much territory Israel was keeping, but to left Egyptian honour intact in order to start negotiations with the Us as an arbiter¹²³. In order to achieve this, Sadat, and not another radical regime, had to keep power in Egypt¹²⁴.

¹²⁰ See G. MEIR, *My Life*, New York, G.P. Putman's Sons, 1975, p. 441.

¹²¹ See I.I. GHANAYEM, A.H. VOTH, *The Kissinger Legacy: American-Middle East Policy*, New York, Praeger, 1984, p. 127.

¹²² See *Memorandum of Conversation*, November 1, 1973, 8:10-10:25 a.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973-1977, Box 2, Nodis Action Memos, 1973-1976, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

¹²³ In his memoirs Nixon writes that he proposed Mrs Meir to be remembered in history as the Prime Minister who had prevented Israel from paying for a war every five years. See R. NIXON, *Le memorie di Richard Nixon* (volume 2), Milano, Editoriale Corno, 1982, p. 526.

¹²⁴ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, November 1, 1973, 12:10 p.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973-1977, Box 2, Nodis Action Memos, 1973-1976, Secret/Sensitive (Xgds).

One of the reasons why the Americans looked so inflexible was that in case of cease-fire breakdown the Soviets could send combat troops to the area, aiming at rescuing the Arabs from future military collapse¹²⁵. The Arabs had managed to globalize the problem with Israel. Something had to be done in order to avoid the return of the Russians, anxious to get back in¹²⁶. Kissinger's strategy was to make the Arabs think they could get some progress from the co-operation with the Us. This helped keep the Russians out of power plays and resist them when they made power plays. The issue, therefore, was to give the Egyptians something to carry on such a strategy for a while. Hence, Israeli forces had to disengage at least from the Egyptian ones¹²⁷. Alternative to American proposals was disaster. However Mrs Meir interpreted the words of the Secretary of State, the strategy was that the Americans had to deliver something to the Arabs. In short, Israel had to face reality and realise that it had militarily won the war, but diplomatically it had not. In case of resumption of fighting, Kissinger warned that the White House would not resupply Israel again. The Third Army met American strategic interests as it affected Us-Soviet relations and it made plenty of difference whether peace came through Us action or Soviet pressure¹²⁸.

The first meeting ever between the President of the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Us Secretary of State took place on November 7, 1973. The Arab leader stressed his distrust of the Soviet Union and his wish to work with the United States¹²⁹. After all, Kissinger's design was made possible by Sadat's willingness to elab-

¹²⁵ See *Soviet Military Options in the Middle East*, November 2, 1973, Snie 11/30-73, in www.foia.cia.gov.

¹²⁶ Mrs. Meir feared that the Americans were supporting Arab proposals to make Israeli troops withdraw unilaterally under the pretext of returning to October 22 lines. See A. EBAN, *An Autobiography*, New York, Random House, 1977, p. 538.

¹²⁷ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, November 2, 1973, 10:00 p.m.-00:45 a.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Sn 70-73, Pol Isr-Us, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

¹²⁸ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, November 3, 1973, 10:45 p.m.-1:10 a.m., in Nara, Rg 59, Records of Henry Kissinger, 1973-1977, Box 3, Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only.

¹²⁹ Though the Soviet leadership had provided supplies and supported the Arab diplomatic posture, the Politburo had no intention to give assistance for the Arab goal of recovery of territories occupied in 1967. See J.D. GLASSMAN, *Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and War in the Middle East*, Baltimore-London, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975, p. 173.

orate a common strategy with Washington. Having realised this, the Secretary tried to shift attention towards a broader understanding on the disengagement of armies along the Suez Canal. Sadat accepted the proposal as a whole, thus setting the foundation of his friendship with Kissinger and of the future American Middle East policy¹³⁰. Last but not least, the Government of Egypt agreed in principle to resume official diplomatic relations with the United States¹³¹. The agreement was accepted by the Government of Israel as well, and the stabilization of the cease-fire and the relaxation of military tensions were considered as a first step towards negotiations for a true peace between Israel and the neighbouring countries¹³².

CONCLUSIONS

When Kissinger emerged from the meeting with Sadat, he had achieved what the United States had never possessed before: an Arab policy, according to which Washington took a commitment in favour of the Arabs, as long as they understood that the Americans would not abandon Israel. The Us had strategic interests in the area, such as the Soviet Union. Despite *détente*, despite the fact that the Americans were not going to become the guardians of the Middle East, and although no one wished a crisis escalating to the extent of affecting Us-Soviet relations, this did not mean that Washington could leave the area at stake to the mercy of another superpower. As regarded Israel, the Atlantic power had a special relation with the Jewish State and a commitment to protect its security, but this did not prevent the White House from pursuing a friendship with the Egyptians, too¹³³. In fact, the war had put an end to the state of no peace, no war, and this had been a major goal for Egypt¹³⁴. Sadat had practically carried out a reversal of

¹³⁰ See SHEEHAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 48-50.

¹³¹ See *Memorandum for the President from Brent Scowcroft: Meeting with Sadat*, November 7, 1973, in Nara, Npmp, Nsf, Middle East 1969-1974, Country File Arab Republic of Egypt, Vol. X, Nov 1973-Dec 31, 1973, Box 639, Folder 1, Secret/Exclusively Eyes Only.

¹³² See *Statement to the Knesset by Prime Minister Golda Meir*, 13 November 1973, in Ifr, Vols. 1-2, 1947-1974, in www.mfa.gov.il.

¹³³ See SHEEHAN, *Op. cit.*, pp. 51-53.

¹³⁴ Sadat had realised that oil was a major economic tool to fuel Us interests in the aftermath of the war. See M.L. McDERMOTT, A.W. WALLACE, *Anwar Sadat and the 1973 Yom Kippur War Force: Sadat's Ultimate Instrument of Statecraft*, Washington, National Defense University, National War College, 2000, p. 11.

policy, rejecting the pan-Arab objective to deny the Jewish State the right to exist. Thus, instead of relying on the Soviet Union, or on Arab radical regimes, the Egyptian President was betting on the United States¹³⁵. On the other hand, the Israelis had realised that peace was the best way to guarantee security¹³⁶. After all, the Americans were not against Arab aspirations, but against their being achieved with Soviet pressure¹³⁷.

To conclude with the words of Simcha Dinitz, the basic outcome of the war was a radical change of attitude by all the parties involved. Egypt's ability to overcome the trauma of 1967 changed not only the image of the North African country, but also its foreign policy. On one hand, they had cancelled their sense of humiliation, but on the other hand they had also shown that the territories lost in 1967 could not be regained by the force of war. Israel reached the same conclusion, for the conflict managed to wake it up from the feeling of invincibility. The war made the Government of Israel realise that among the components of security, peace was equally important. But there was another element the military confrontation had created: a tremendous shift in Us diplomacy. The United States took an active diplomatic role, at last. During the Yom Kippur War, the State Department set a strategy for post-war negotiations as soon as the conflict started. Israel was not supposed to be defeated because this was against Us national interests, while the Arabs were not to be humiliated. This balance was necessary to turn enemies into parties of true peace negotiations. But the milestone of the whole question was the Us goal to minimize Soviet influence in the Middle East. The airlift for Israel, for example, was also a way to win Arab confidence in American diplomacy rather than in Soviet military power. Kissinger wanted to preserve *détente*, but at the same time limit Soviet influence. Just as he wanted to support Israel without humiliating Egypt, he wanted to protect *détente* without allowing the Ussr to spread its influence any longer. Therefore, the United States had drawn a successful Middle East diplomacy which had never existed before. From then

¹³⁵ See HANHIMÄKI, *Op. cit.*, pp. 319-320.

¹³⁶ See BG H.S. ABOUSEADA, *The Crossing of the Suez Canal, October 6, 1973 (The Ramadan War)*, Us Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, 2000, p. 15.

¹³⁷ See *Memorandum of Conversation*, November 12, 1973, 5:40-8:25 p.m., Top Secret/Sensitive/Exclusively Eyes Only, in W. BURR (ed.), *The Kissinger Transcripts: The Top-Secret Talks with Beijing & Moscow*, New York, The New Press, 1999, pp. 179-200.

onwards, Sadat abandoned the Soviet path, while from an Israeli point of view Washington had been turned from an ally into an arbitrator. Now Israel was no longer single child, but had become part of a set of interests including Egypt and to some extent even Syria¹³⁸.

The Us was the only actor in close contact with all parties, the only power able to produce progress, and the only one each was coming to in order to achieve something. Instead, nobody pursued Russian involvement¹³⁹. As Kissinger had stated a few years earlier, Soviet arms had been useful to start a serious war against Israel, but only American diplomacy had had the power to give Egypt its territory back. The Yom Kippur War, therefore, was a real breakthrough assigning the United States the role of mediator in the main question of the Middle East and alienating the Soviet Union from a major Arab country.

¹³⁸ See L. CARL BROWN, "The Endgame – S. Dinitz's Intervention", in R.B. PARKER (ed.), *The October War*, Cit., pp. 244-249.

¹³⁹ See M.F. FERRARO, *Tough Going: Anglo-American Relations and the Yom Kippur War of 1973*, Lincoln, iUniverse, 2007, p. 119.