The Cold War in the Middle East

Regional conflict and the superpowers 1967–73

Edited by
Nigel J. Ashton

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The Cold War in the Middle East

This edited volume re-assesses the relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union and key regional players in waging and halting conflict in the Middle East between 1967 and 1973. These were pivotal years in the Arab–Israeli conflict, with the effects still very much in evidence today.

In addition to addressing established debates, the book opens up new areas of controversy, in particular concerning the inter-war years and the so-called 'War of Attrition', and underlines the risks both Moscow and Washington were prepared to run in supporting their regional clients. The engagement of Soviet forces in the air defence of Egypt heightened the danger of escalation and made this one of the hottest regional conflicts of the Cold War era. Against this Cold War backdrop, the motives of both Israel and the Arab states in waging full-scale and lower-intensity conflict are illuminated. The overall goal of this work is to re-assess the relationship between the Cold War and regional conflict in shaping the events of this pivotal period in the Middle East.

This book will be of much interest to students of Cold War Studies, Middle Eastern History, Strategic Studies and International History.

Nigel J. Ashton is Senior Lecturer in International History at LSE. He is the author of *Eisenhower, Macmillan and the Problem of Nasser: Anglo-American Relations and Arab Nationalism, 1955–59* (1996) and *Kennedy, Macmillan and the Cold War: The Irony of Interdependence* (2002).

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Preface

This volume is the happy outcome of a conference held at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, between 10 and 12 May 2006. It would not have been possible without the generous sponsorship of the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the United Kingdom, which gave three members of the International History Department at the London School of Economics and Political Science, led by Arne Westad, and including Piers Ludlow and myself, a five-year grant in 2001 to explore linkages between the Cold War and regional conflicts between 1965 and 1990. Part of my own contribution to this project was the idea for a conference looking at events in the Middle East between 1967 and 1973 of which this book is the result. The 1967 and 1973 wars frequently appear on the syllabi of broader international history courses surveying the Cold War era. But how far are scholars, or at least those responsible for university history syllabi, justified in seeing this period as the most noteworthy from the point of view of the Cold War in the Middle East? How far can the wars and crises which broke out during these years really be seen as being driven by the Cold War? To what extent did regional conflict interact with the global struggle between the superpowers and vice versa? This volume does not claim to offer a comprehensive survey of the possible linkages during this period. Nor can it cover all of the regional players and their roles in key events. What it does do is to offer a series of fresh insights, sometimes through advancing existing historiographical debates, and sometimes by sparking new ones, concerning the interaction between the Cold War and regional conflict in the Middle East. That it does so is a tribute to the efforts of all of the contributors, who proved not only to be a convivial, but also an intellectually vibrant group to host at Cumberland Lodge.

In addition to the contributors themselves, I am also very grateful to Arne Westad, Kirsten Schulze, Piers Ludlow and Alex Wieland, who all acted as chairs for the various panel discussions held at Cumberland Lodge. Svetozar Rajak, the Managing Director of the Cold War Studies Centre (CWSC) at the LSE, also deserves special mention. Without his tireless work and indefatigable organisational skills, this and many other

CWSC events would not have been possible. Thanks are also due to Robert Kelley of the CWSC, who provided excellent administrative support for the event. I would also like to thank Najib Ghadbian of the University of Arkansas, who was prevented by events beyond his control from offering his planned contribution on the Syrian role during this period at our conference. In terms of this published volume, Andrew Humphrys has also been a most efficient and helpful editor with whom to work at Routledge. I am also very grateful to Michael Cox and Arne Westad, the editors of the *Cold War History* series at Routledge, for agreeing to add this volume to their growing list of titles.

Despite the involvement and help of many others, overall responsibility for the shape of this final volume remains my own. I trust it will offer material of interest not only to existing specialists in the field, but also to students, not least my own, trying to better understand the relationship between the Cold War and regional conflict in the Middle East during this eventful period.

Nigel J. Ashton
December 2006

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1 Introduction

The Cold War in the Middle East, 1967–73

Nigel J. Ashton

The years between 1967 and 1973 can truly be termed the 'crisis years' of the Cold War era in the Middle East.[1] This is not to say that regional conflict was unique to this period. But the concentration of important events – from the outbreak of the June 1967 Arab–Israeli war, through the March 1969–August 1970 War of Attrition, the September 1970 crisis in Jordan and the October 1973 Arab–Israeli war – makes this period exceptional even in the contemporary history of the Middle East.[2] Not only that, but the events of 1967–73 have left a lasting mark on the subsequent history of the region. If the 1967 war changed the fundamentals of the Arab–Israeli conflict in terms of land and legitimacy, the War of Attrition and the October 1973 war confirmed that it could not be resolved by way of conventional interstate military struggle. Not only that, but the subsequent terms of the Palestinian national conflict were largely defined during this period. Although the 'Jordan is Palestine' slogan remained a favourite of certain Israeli politicians, such as Ariel Sharon, through the 1980s,[3] in reality the Hashemite regime's success in defeating the PLO challenge in Jordan during 1970 ruled out the possibility of any solution to the Palestinian national problem outside the boundaries of the post-1922 Palestine mandate.

If the label 'crisis years' is eminently applicable to this period, then, what of the claim that these events can be defined as being part of the 'Cold War era'. To contemporary protagonists, this claim would have been uncontroversial. The Cold War was the main defining feature of the international political landscape between at least 1948 and 1989. Key statesmen who shaped policy between 1967 and 1973 did so as though the Cold War, in one form or another, would be an enduring feature of international politics for the foreseeable future. For all his operational skill within this system, US National Security Adviser and later Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, like most of his contemporaries, gave little thought to the possibility that the end of the Cold War system itself might be in sight.[4] Since the end of the Cold War, though, scholars have increasingly questioned the nature and significance of its impact on the Middle East. This is no doubt in part for the simple reason that the end of

the Cold War did not witness the resolution of conflict in the region. For Fred Halliday, 'for all its participation in a global process, and the inflaming of inter-state conflict, the Cold War itself had a limited impact on the Middle East.'[5] Amplifying his thoughts in respect of the key developments in the period, Halliday contends that 'most of what occurred in the Middle East during this period could have taken place without the Cold War at all: the Arab–Israeli dispute, the rise of Arab nationalism, the emergence of the oil-producing states . . . – none of these was centrally reliant on the Cold War for its emergence and development.'[6] But, the post–Cold War historiographical current has not flowed only in one direction. On the contrary, for Fawaz Gerges, 'the intrusion of the Cold War into regional politics exacerbated regional conflicts and made their resolution more difficult. This intrusion had devastating repercussions for the security and stability of the whole area.'[7]

On the face of things, then, these two apparently contradictory positions might be taken as typical of a debate about system dominance in the form of the Cold War, versus sub-system dominance in terms of regional conflict in the Middle East during this period.[8] Or put another way, they might be seen as typifying the debate about whether global or local factors drove events. In fact, such a formulation oversimplifies the complex arguments advanced by both Halliday and Gerges. As Halliday himself puts it, we are not looking at a division in interpretations between 'facile globalization' on one hand and 'regional narcissism' on the other, since all commentators would now agree that there was an interaction between the global Cold War and regional conflict in the Middle East. But rather, what we have is a debate about the *nature* and *significance* of this interaction.

It is in these respects that the essays presented in this volume move the debate forward, by demonstrating empirically how this interaction worked, and how far it mattered, in shaping the most important events during this pivotal period. In order to situate the work of the contributors to this volume more clearly, it is necessary first of all to rehearse in broader terms the current state of historiographical debate over the Cold War and the Middle East between 1967 and 1973. Beginning with the June 1967 Arab–Israeli war, then, it would have to be remarked that in recent years this has proven to be a fertile area for fresh research.[9] A range of debates about the origins and impact of the war have arisen, only some of which can be rehearsed here. Briefly, though, the debate continues about the purpose and significance of Soviet actions in the run-up to, and during the course of, the war. At the forefront of this debate, occupying different positions, are some of the contributors to this volume. For Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, on one hand, Soviet strategy during this period was aggressive, expansionist and provocative. The Soviet Union not only wanted an Arab–Israeli war, it set out actively to provoke one. According to Ginor, the so-called 'false intelligence report',

about a supposed Israeli military build-up on the Syrian front, passed by the Soviets to the Egyptian leadership in May 1967, was part of a pattern of behaviour aimed at instigating an Egyptian mobilisation, and tempting Israel into a first strike against the Arab states.[10] Ginor finds further evidence to support this thesis both in Moscow's diplomatic preparations before the war broke out[11] and in its military movements and dispositions during the war itself.[12] The fact that the strategy failed, with the Israeli first strike resulting in a spectacular defeat for the Arab states, does not, for Ginor, invalidate the thesis. It merely shows that the Soviet Union miscalculated, overestimating the military capabilities of the Arab states and underestimating those of Israel.

Galia Golan, meanwhile, sees the Soviet approach in the run-up to the outbreak of the June war, and during the war itself, as being the result of a series of misjudgements, and of factional struggle within the Kremlin leadership. In passing the 'false intelligence report' on to the Egyptians, she argues, the Soviets were most likely to have been trying to bolster Egyptian support for the embattled Syrian regime. Thereafter, the Soviets overestimated the control that they and the Americans could exert over their respective regional client states. Crucially, the Kremlin 'failed to grasp the volatility of the Arab–Israeli conflict'.[13] Others who come down largely on the side of this thesis include Uri Bar-Noi, who cites a subsequent report 'On Soviet Policy Following the Israeli Aggression in the Middle East', written by General Secretary of the Soviet Communist party, Leonid Brezhnev, recently unearthed in Polish archives, which is highly critical of Arab actions, as evidence that Moscow had 'no intention of inciting an armed conflict in the Middle East'.[14] Meanwhile, Michael Oren, in the most detailed, recent, book-length study of the war, argues in effect that it was an accident, a war no one, including the Soviets, wanted, which came about as the result of a series of miscalculations. In terms of the 'false intelligence report', what mattered more in his view was the unexpected severity of the Egyptian reaction to the Soviet information, rather than the passing of the information itself. Oren's overall argument is reminiscent of David Lloyd George's description of the outbreak of the First World War, with the reluctant protagonists slithering over the brink into the boiling cauldron of war.[15] In the context of the theme of this volume, it should be quite clear why these various interpretations of the Soviet role in the outbreak of war matter. If one accepts Ginor's argument, then one of the two superpowers was principally responsible for the outbreak of war, making this a clear case of system dominance. If, by contrast, one accepts any of the other lines of argument outlined above, then one must look elsewhere for explanations of the outbreak of war.

Linked to the debate about the Soviet role is the question of the reaction of the United States to the crisis. This was given its clearest formulation by William Quandt, when he asked rhetorically what colour

was the light shown by the Johnson Administration to the Israeli government on the eve of war?[16] Quandt's answer was simple. The red light of May 1967 shaded over to yellow by early June, which for the Israelis, like most motorists, was tantamount to a green for go. Peter Hahn's essay in this volume takes the debate originally framed by Quandt a stage further. Hahn adds four caveats to Quandt's thesis. First, he produces archival evidence to show that Johnson remained concerned about the implications of any Israeli initiation of hostilities right up to the outbreak of war. Second, he argues that Johnson seems to have expected some sort of Israeli action to test Nasser's blockade of the Straits of Tiran, rather than the launching of full-scale war. Third, he points out that any encouragement to Israel would have run the unwelcome risk for the Johnson Administration of alienating the Soviet Union at a time when it was also trying to explore the possibilities for détente. Finally, Hahn argues that Israel would have launched a pre-emptive strike irrespective of the US position. Here, there is perhaps an unintended irony of Quandt's 'traffic light' metaphor when applied to the Middle East, a region where in general such road signals, whatever their colour, tend to be treated as indicative rather than binding.

It should be immediately apparent that the terms of this debate are also directly relevant to the question of system versus sub-system dominance. If Quandt is right, and the Johnson Administration signalled to Israel that it would acquiesce in a pre-emptive strike against Egypt, and if this signal played a part in Israeli decision-making, then we have another, albeit less clear-cut, case of superpower instigation of the conflict. If, on the other hand, we accept Hahn's four caveats to Quandt's thesis, then the US role in the outbreak of war is considerably reduced in significance.

In contrast to the drama of June 1967, until recently the inter-war years have tended to provoke rather less historiographical debate.[17] For two decades, until the appearance in 1992 of David Korn's important study *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967–1970*, the historiographical field was pretty much dominated by two books, Lawrence Whetten's *The Canal War: Four-Power Conflict in the Middle East* and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov's *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969–1970: A Case Study of Limited Local War*. Several of the essays in this volume illustrate how, through the use of new evidence and new approaches, the historiographical debate about this comparatively neglected period can be enriched. In her essay on Egyptian decision-making in the War of Attrition, Laura James shows how from the perspective of President Nasser, domestic, regional and international factors were bound up together. Through launching the War of Attrition, Nasser aimed to boost domestic morale, destabilise the region, drag in the superpowers and thereby convince Israel that the long-term cost of occupying the Sinai would be too high.

The most crucial juncture in the War of Attrition came during late 1969 and early 1970, when, in the wake of the destruction of Egypt's air defences, and a further round of devastating Israeli 'deep penetration' raids against Egyptian infrastructure, Nasser decided to call for direct Soviet military intervention through the provision of air defence units and pilots. The Soviets agreed to his request, though, as Galia Golan points out in her essay, they did so principally to defend their own global Cold War interests. Egyptian defeat coupled with the collapse of the Nasser regime, from the Soviet perspective, would not only have been a major blow to their prestige, it might also have risked the loss of their bases in Egypt which were an integral part of their overall Cold War strategy. These are issues which have also been considered elsewhere by Dima Adamsky.[18] In his essay in this volume, Adamsky analyses why both the Israeli and American intelligence services failed to anticipate this large-scale direct Soviet military intervention in the conflict. On one level, the answer to this question is straightforward: Such Soviet military intervention was unprecedented in the Middle East, so the intelligence services were being asked to predict a linear rather than cyclical development. But Adamsky shows how a conception of Soviet behaviour, formed before the 1967 war, and seemingly confirmed by Moscow's failure to intervene in that conflict, became entrenched through mutually reinforcing Israeli and American assessments.

In the context of the debate about the respective roles of the superpowers and the regional players, though, the War of Attrition is a very important case study. While it was clear to both the Americans and Israelis at the time that the Soviets had intervened directly in the conflict, with their own air defence units and pilots, the reasons for the deployment were hotly debated both then and subsequently. Had the Soviet deployment been sparked by the Israeli deep penetration raids at the beginning of January 1970, or was it longer in the making? In his study of the War of Attrition written in the late 1970s, lacking firm evidence about Soviet decision-making, Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov speculated that Moscow had taken a decision to intervene in principle well before the Israeli raids.[19] Adamsky shows that consideration of this move in fact dated back to 1968, and that a firm decision was taken in August 1969, on the basis of global Cold War considerations. But, not only were the origins of Soviet intervention global rather than regional, the intervention itself was decisive in saving Egypt from defeat by providing the means to challenge Israeli air supremacy. Both of these points deserve to be underlined. Alongside the stationing of Soviet advisers, and the supply of Soviet weapons which had provided Egypt with the wherewithal to launch the War of Attrition in the first place, it was the direct Soviet military intervention, code-named 'Operation Kavkaz', in 1969–70 which kept Egypt fighting. Thus, we can state unequivocally that the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition was a clear case of a Cold

War–sustained conflict. To be sure, the regional players had their own motives for fighting, but without the Cold War there would have been no protracted Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition. Egypt would have been simply unable to launch and sustain the struggle. In terms of the respective arguments of Halliday and Gerges framed here at the outset, therefore, this particular test case provides clear support for Gerges's position.

But, we can take this Cold War–led argument further in respect of the evidence presented in this volume about the inter-war years. In their essay, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez reconsider one of the commonplaces of the familiar narrative of the causes of the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War, the so-called 'expulsion of the Soviet advisers' in July 1972 by Nasser's successor as Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. As they show, Henry Kissinger took the lead in first fostering the myth that Sadat had expelled all of the Soviet advisers in July 1972. This expulsion was subsequently explained as having been part of Sadat's strategy to free his hand for a possible attack on Israel, and to open the way to subsequent diplomatic engagement with the United States. In this narrative, the Soviets were supposed to have exercised a cautious, restraining influence over Egyptian policy, dictated in part by their desire to further détente with the US, and in part by their concern to avoid any escalation of the regional conflict. Sadat could only gain full control of Egyptian strategy, and emerge from the domestic political shadow of Nasser, it was argued, if he rid himself of this Soviet constraint.

As Ginor and Remez point out, there are a number of contradictions inherent in this thesis, not the least of which is the fact that Sadat ended up adopting a war-fighting strategy which was strictly limited in its goals in any case. Perhaps even more puzzling than this though is the question of how the claim that all of the Soviet advisers left in July 1972 can be reconciled with the claim that they left Egypt once again in the days before the outbreak of the October 1973 War. This pre-war exodus is normally taken as one of the intelligence indications of the imminent outbreak of war which was picked up, but misinterpreted and dismissed, by both Israel and the United States. Ginor and Remez challenge both components of the concept of the 'expulsion of Soviet advisers'. They argue, first, that there was no 'expulsion' because the Soviet troops who were withdrawn from Egypt in 1972 left by mutual consent. Second, they assert that the term 'advisers' is a misnomer, since the personnel who were actually withdrawn in 1972 were mainly the Soviet combat forces who had been introduced in 1969–70. The bulk of the genuine 'advisers' embedded with Egyptian forces, by contrast, stayed on and helped prepare the Egyptian army for the cross-canal offensive.

The claim of 'mutual consent' to the withdrawal of Soviet forces is no doubt controversial, but the latter part of this argument concerning the nature of the forces which left is supported by other recent commentators. Dima Adamsky has also argued elsewhere that scholars have

mistakenly defined Sadat's July 1972 move as an 'expulsion of Soviet advisers' when in fact the advisers remained in Egypt. He too argues that the forces which left as a result of Sadat's decision were the combat units introduced as part of 'Operation Kavkaz' during the War of Attrition. The 10,000 Soviet troops involved in this operation were rotated twice in March 1971 and March 1972, meaning that a total of 30,000 troops participated overall. Those introduced in the third rotation in March 1972 left in July 1972.[20] Whether or not one accepts it in full, Ginor and Remez's argument is consistent in the context of their overall thesis that the Soviet Union played an activistic and belligerent role in the region throughout this period. *If* the 'expulsion' was in fact an agreed withdrawal, and *if* the bulk of the Soviet advisers remained, helping to train Egyptian forces ahead of the October 1973 War, then the Soviet Union could clearly be seen as much more complicit than hitherto thought in the outbreak of that conflict as well.

Analysis of the October 1973 war perhaps presents the leading edge of archival-based scholarship at present, with many new primary sources having been opened up to researchers during the course of the last two or three years. In particular, new US sources have allowed a fuller picture to emerge of the attempts of the Nixon Administration, especially Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, to manage the crisis.[21] In terms of the duration and outcome of the conflict, the role of the US airlift to Israel and the protracted US–Soviet negotiations at the United Nations over a possible ceasefire resolution are both issues which are relevant from the point of view of the theme of this volume. Did the actions of the superpowers serve both to prolong the conflict and to decide which side would emerge victorious? With regard to the duration of the conflict, although both the US and the USSR were anxious not to see their respective regional protégés defeated, it seems to have been principally assessments of developments on the battlefield framed by the protagonists themselves which decided how long the war lasted. So, during the first days of the struggle, both Egyptian President Sadat and Syrian President Asad were opposed to a ceasefire because their initial plan of attack seemed to be working. As the Israelis turned the tide on the Golan Front between 10 and 12 October, Asad's position shifted, although Sadat remained stubborn for longer on the possibility of any ceasefire without demonstrable gains for the Arab side. Thereafter, as the tide of battle turned on the Canal Front as well, it was the Israelis who became the more reluctant to accept a ceasefire until they had completely defeated the Egyptian and Syrian armies. Although the superpowers manoeuvred in the background, with the Soviets keen to reach agreement on a ceasefire from 10 October onwards, probably the superpowers' only diplomatic role in drawing out the conflict came towards its end, when US Secretary of State Kissinger indirectly signalled to the Israelis that he would turn a blind eye if they needed more

time to act on the implementation of the UN ceasefire Resolution 338.[22] One might equally well argue, though, that the Israeli government would in any case have taken action on 23–24 October against the Egyptian Third Army, with or without Kissinger's apparent encouragement. Thereafter, it can be argued that pressure exerted by Kissinger on the Israelis through Ambassador Dinitz in Washington helped to bring about the final cessation of the Israeli assault on the Egyptian Third Army, although Israeli Prime Minister Meir pointedly refused to respond directly to Kissinger's warnings.[23]

In terms of determining who would emerge victorious in the October War, the question of arms supplies by both superpowers to the combatants, and, in particular, the question of the significance of the American airlift to Israel, may be considered. In the face of warnings that the Israelis were running low on ammunition on 12 and 13 October, President Nixon authorised a major military airlift on 13 October. When asked whether the Israelis were telling the truth about the shortage of ammunition, though, Kissinger apparently commented 'how the hell would I know'.[24] While it is as just difficult for a diplomatic historian to judge questions of military logistics as it was for a diplomat like Kissinger, it does seem highly likely that the Israelis would have won the war in any case. They had effectively prevailed on the Golan Front before the airlift got underway. Avi Kober concludes that the US resupply operation had almost no tangible impact on the Israeli war effort, noting, for instance, that the aircraft delivered flew fewer than 300 sorties before the ceasefire – a tiny fraction of the total number of sorties flown during the war. The shipments did have a significant psychological impact, though, allowing Israeli forces to press their attacks without fear of running out of equipment and ammunition.[25]

If the new archival sources available to judge US actions during the war are plentiful, the same cannot be said on the Soviet side. Victor Israelyan's memoir provides a useful account of the high-level decision-making process in Moscow written by an insider.[26] But so far we have little further by way of high-level documentation to allow us to assess the Soviet role in influencing the actions of the Arab states. Kober notes that in terms of the narrower question of the role of arms resupply, the Soviet effort was double the size of the comparable American shipments to Israel. Unlike the US deliveries, though, the Soviet weapons did reach the battlefield during the war, and allowed the Egyptians and Syrians to maintain reasonable force ratios despite the Israeli successes.[27] The implication of his argument is that the Soviet resupply effort prevented a complete collapse, on the Syrian Front in particular. To this extent, they made some contribution to the prolongation of the war, although not to its eventual outcome.

In terms of the regional participants themselves, meanwhile, archival sources which might help us judge the basis for decision-making in the

Arab states remain lacking, which presents a significant analytical problem in view of the role of Egypt and Syria in launching the war.[28] There are also gaps in our knowledge about the Israeli response to the crisis, with the Israeli Defence Forces' secret history of the conflict likely to remain classified for some time to come.[29] The causes of the Israeli failure to anticipate the war, by contrast, have been documented in some detail in a number of recent scholarly accounts, of which Uri Bar Joseph's *The Watchman Fell Asleep* is probably the most noteworthy.[30]

If, as outlined in the preceding historiographical discussion, some of the contributions to this collection provide evidence which might serve to tilt the balance of causation of key events in this period in the direction of global, or Cold War factors, this is not true of all of the contributions offered here. For Spencer Mawby, the key factor in explaining the contemporary collapse of British rule in South Arabia was regional, in the form of the spread of Arab nationalism. This, far more than international factors in the shape of the Cold War, fed opposition to the British. The rise of Arab nationalism, it will be recollected, was one of the regional factors which Halliday also argued was not centrally reliant on the Cold War for its development. Ironically, though, in the longer run, the British were to hand over power in South Arabia to a successor regime in the shape of the National Liberation Front, which subsequently developed the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen into the only true example of a Marxist–Leninist Soviet satellite state in the region.

In the case of Jordan as well, although the Cold War always loomed large in King Hussein's own calculation of the balance of regional forces, my own contribution to this volume questions the interpretation of the September 1970 crisis as principally Cold War–driven. Indeed, even Henry Kissinger, whose memoirs did much to establish the clash between the Hashemite regime on one side and the PLO, backed by Syrian forces, on the other as a Cold War crisis, now argues that Moscow 'tolerated, but did not sponsor' the Syrian invasion of Jordan in support of the Palestinian guerrillas in September 1970.[31] Contrary to the notion that Hussein acted as some sort of puppet or client of the United States throughout these years, in the 1967 war he joined the camp of the confrontation states. His relations with the United States during this period, I argue, were complex and ambivalent and cannot simply be caricatured of those of patron and client.

Indeed, as Salim Yaqub shows in his essay, the epithets 'complex' and 'ambivalent' could equally well be applied to the conduct of US policy in the region during the Nixon Administration. The contradictions in the Administration's approach towards the Arab–Israeli conflict were not only apparent from the outside but were real on the inside of the Administration, with National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger working to undermine the approach of Secretary of State William Rogers, with

the implicit approval of President Nixon himself. Competition between the offices of National Security Adviser and Secretary of State was hardly unique to this period, but Nixon evidently saw the establishment of rival policies and rival poles of attraction within his Administration as a good way to reconcile the irreconcilable. In other words, the Administration could appear at one and the same time to be pursuing an Arab–Israeli peace settlement, which would involve pressing Israel for significant territorial concessions, at the same time as it defended Israeli interests in order to placate the domestic pro-Israel lobby. Perhaps, this Janus-faced approach was the most effective way to handle the competing pressures on the Administration, but it certainly produced some strange contradictions, with Kissinger, on behalf of the President, indirectly asking Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to attack Secretary of State Rogers's Middle East peace plan during a visit to the United States. Lurking behind these political manoeuvres, though, one has the sense that Nixon himself had a fairly astute grasp of the complexities of the Arab–Israeli conflict, and the precarious nature of the post-1967 status quo. Certainly it was he, rather than Kissinger, who showed the greater prescience in warning of the likelihood of renewed conflict in 1973, although by this stage the domestic political imbroglio of Watergate meant that his attention to the problem was transient. If there is any case for the Nixon Administration to answer in terms of responsibility for the outbreak of war in October 1973, it lies in its failure to press the diplomatic process forward between 1971 and 1973. However, the causal link here is weaker than in 1967, relying on an argument about hypothetical diplomatic moves, rather than the change in signal regarding the desirability of an Israeli pre-emptive strike, as claimed by Quandt at the beginning of June 1967.

Whether or not the outbreak of war in October 1973 could have been avoided through a different approach on the part of the Israeli government is the theme of Zaki Shalom's contribution to this volume. In essence, he too concludes that the conflict was in fact irreconcilable during this period, even though there was considerable contemporary and subsequent debate in Israel about the right posture to adopt in dealing with the Arab states. In terms of the role of the superpowers, Shalom contends that Israel felt betrayed by the lukewarm support offered by the Johnson Administration during the crisis of May–June 1967, and drew the conclusion that it could not rely on outside powers to protect its vital national interests. Israeli policy thus emerges from this analysis as being driven first and foremost by regional factors in the form of assessments of the intentions of the Arab states.

If these are some of the main insights offered in this volume into the interaction between the Cold War and regional conflict in the context of the existing historiography, it also seems appropriate to consider at this stage the kinds of sources on which these contributions are based.

In dealing with the role of the Western powers in the region, the bulk of the relevant records are now open. One blind spot, though, remains the role of the Western intelligence services. For instance, King Hussein of Jordan's main American confidante during this period was the CIA Station Chief Jack O'Connell, who held his post between 1963 and 1971. However, none of O'Connell's reports of his many conversations with the King are open to researchers, although one may surmise that many of the meetings reported in the regular State Department diplomatic traffic between an 'embassy officer' and King Hussein in fact involved O'Connell. Similarly, O'Connell's British counterpart, Bill Speirs, who was the MI6 man in Amman during the 1970 crisis, was evidently close to the King, close enough to act as the intermediary in establishing a secure scrambler phone link between the King and the Israeli leadership in advance of the crisis. The only indications one can find of Speirs's role in British archives, though, take the form of indirect references in Foreign Office files.[32] We have no access to operational intelligence material from this period.

Despite this limitation, the available archival sources appear to present a fairly full picture of the Anglo-American role in the region. The picture as regards the Soviet role, by contrast, is much less complete. The respective contributions of Galia Golan, Dima Adamsky, and Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez to this volume do show that the evidence we now have available about Soviet policy in the region is considerably fuller than we had during the Cold War itself. In particular, there has been a flood of memoir material and oral history from those involved in the Soviet military deployment to Egypt. As regards decision-making in the Kremlin, though, the sources are patchy.[33] On the October 1973 war, Victor Israelyan's memoir provides an important, detailed account from an official who was close to the centre of decision-making during the crisis.[34] However, his account has in effect to be taken on trust since there are no significant archival sources to which it can be cross-referenced. Similarly, the fact that the Brezhnev report 'On Soviet Policy Following the Israeli Aggression in the Middle East' has to be cited from Polish archives is indicative of the fact that there has been no general opening of such sources in Moscow. To be sure, the access now available to the archives of former Eastern Bloc countries provides one useful way to work around this problem, but the picture as regards access to archival sources for high-level Soviet decision-making still reminds one of a bagel. We have a ring of sources round the outside, but still something of a hole in the middle.

In respect of decision-making in the Arab states the picture is even more difficult, and we have to be grateful for any archival crumbs that come our way. Still, Laura James's chapter in this volume shows how much can be achieved by cross-referencing oral history accounts, memoirs and public sources from the Arab states with Western archival

sources. In terms of judging between the various claims made by Nasser's former confidantes about his intentions in waging the War of Attrition, and his likely future plans had he lived on, though, reliable, high-level, contemporary documentary sources would also be very valuable. Whether such sources exist and whether they are likely to be opened up for research in future in any Arab state, not just Egypt, remain open questions at the time of writing, though.

In Israel, by contrast, some archival sources are accessible.[35] The Israeli State Archives have modelled their approach to document release on that adopted in the United States and Britain, although perhaps with a slightly greater degree of reserve as regards issues viewed as sensitive from the point of view of national security. Beyond the Israeli State Archives, other key collections include the papers of David Ben Gurion held at Sde Boker and the Central Zionist Archives, which hold some personal manuscript collections. Israel also publishes a series of *Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel*, which is accompanied by condensed companion volumes in English. As in Britain and the United States, the publication of these volumes runs some way behind the opening of the archives themselves. Access is also available to the Israeli Defence Forces and Security Forces archive.[36] Some of the contributors to this volume have made use of these collections, particularly the papers held in the Israeli State Archives, where new openings have recently reached the period surveyed here.

Perhaps it is in the prospect of the opening of further former Soviet, and possibly Arab, archival sources, then, that the greatest hope for the future enhancement of our understanding of this pivotal period in the contemporary history of the Middle East lies. Whatever may emerge from such sources should they become available, though, it should also be clear from the contributions to this volume that the interaction between the Cold War and regional conflict in the Middle East between 1967 and 1973 was significant and demonstrable, even if in some cases, such as that of the 1970 Jordanian crisis, it has been overstated. From the perspective of the regional players, consideration of the likely response of the superpowers was always an integral part of their calculations. Similarly, from the perspective of Washington and Moscow, although broader international considerations, in particular the development of détente, often took the lead, the crises thrown up by the conflict in the Middle East during this period meant that the region demanded frequent, if episodic, attention. The Cold War in the Middle East thus cannot be treated, in the words of Shakespeare's Prospero, like an 'insubstantial pageant faded', leaving 'not a rack behind'. On the contrary, the chapters which follow show that the global and regional conflicts interacted in complex and often unpredictable ways between 1967 and 1973.

Notes

1 Michael Beschloss (*Kennedy v. Khrushchev: The Crisis Years, 1960–63*, New York: Faber & Faber, 1991) applied the phrase 'crisis years' of the Cold War to 1960–63, but in a specifically Middle Eastern context, it seems more applicable to 1967–73.
2 William B. Quandt titled his original, seminal work on this period *Decade of Decisions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), although he extended the period forward to 1976 to cover both the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war and the Arab–Israeli disengagement agreements.
3 A. Garfinkle, *Israel and Jordan in the Shadow of War*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1992, pp. 102–3; A. Bligh, *The Political Legacy of King Hussein*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002, pp. 162–63.
4 J. Hanhimaki, ' "Dr Kissinger" or "Mr Henry"? Kissingerology, Thirty Years and Counting', *Diplomatic History*, 27/5, 2003, 663–64. See also Hanhimaki's *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.
5 F. Halliday, 'The Middle East and the Great Powers', in A. Shlaim and Y. Sayigh (eds), *The Cold War and the Middle East*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p. 16.
6 Ibid., p. 26.
7 F. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955–1967*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1994, p. 246.
8 For discussion of this analytical framework see Gerges, *The Superpowers*, pp. 4–15; A. Shlaim, 'Conclusion', in Shlaim and Sayigh, Op. cit., pp. 279–80.
9 Recent literature addressing the 1967 war includes J. Bowen, *Six Days: How the 1967 War Shaped the Middle East*, New York: Thomas Dunne, 2005; F. Brenchley, *Britain, The Six Day War and its Aftermath*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2005; M. Gat, *Britain and the Conflict in the Middle East, 1964–7: The Coming of the Six Day War*, Westport: Praeger, 2003; P. L. Hahn, 'An Ominous Moment: Lyndon Johnson and the Six Day War', in ed. M. Lerner, *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005; L. James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006; D. Little, 'Choosing Sides: Lyndon Johnson and the Middle East', in ed. R. A. Divine, *The Johnson Years*, Vol. 3: *LBJ at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994; Y. Meital, 'The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War', *Middle East Journal*, 54/1, 2000; M. B. Oren, 'The Revelations of 1967: New Research on the Six Day War and its Lessons for the Contemporary Middle East', *Israel Studies*, 10/2, 2005; M. B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; R. B. Parker, *The Six Day War: A Retrospective*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996.
10 I. Ginor, 'The Cold War's Longest Cover Up: How and Why the USSR Instigated the 1967 War', *MERIA*, 7/3, 2003. For an overview of the various theories about the 'Soviet warning', see R. B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 3–20.
11 I. Ginor and G. Remez, 'Un-Finnished Business: Archival Evidence Exposes the Diplomatic Aspect of the USSR's Pre-planning for the Six Day War', *Cold War History*, 6/3, 2006, 377–95.
12 I. Ginor, 'The Russians Were Coming: The Soviet Military Threat in the 1967 Six Day War', *MERIA*, 4/4, 2000. See also A. Kober, 'Great Power Involvement and Israeli Battlefield Success in the Arab–Israeli Wars, 1948–1982', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8/1, 2006, 28–32.

13 G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six Day War', *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8/1, 2006, 15.
14 Bar Noi's commentary is accessible in Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) e-dossier No.8, which also offers a link to the Brezhnev document: (accessed 8 December 2006) http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.publications&doc_id=35467&group_id=13349.
15 Oren, Op. cit., pp. 54–55.
16 W. B. Quandt, 'Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was The Light?' *Middle East Journal*, 46/2, 1992, 198–228; see also his *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict since 1967*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993, pp. 25–48.
17 Recent literature on the inter-war years also includes D. Adamsky and U. Bar-Joseph, 'The Russians are not coming: Israel's Intelligence Failure and Soviet Military Intervention in the "War of Attrition"', *Intelligence and National Security*, 21/1, 2006; I. Ginor: '"Under the Yellow Arab Helmet Gleamed Blue Russian Eyes": Operation *Kavkaz* and the War of Attrition,' *Cold War History*, 3/1, 2002; K. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab–Israeli Peace*, New York: Routledge, 1999, pp. 54–73.
18 D. Adamsky, 'Zero Hour for Bears: Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition, 1969–70', *Cold War History*, 6/1, 2006, 113–36.
19 Bar-Siman-Tov, *War of Attrition*, p. 145.
20 Adamsky, 'Zero Hour', 129.
21 See especially W. Burr (ed.), *The October War and US Policy*, The National Security Archive, http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/index.htm. Recent literature on the 1973 war also includes U. Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise Of Yom Kippur And Its Sources*, New York: State University of New York Press, 2005; W. J. Boyne, *The Two O'Clock War: The Yom Kippur Conflict and the Airlift that Saved Israel*, New York: Thomas Dunne, 2002; H. Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003; P. R. Kumarasawmy (ed.), *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War*, London: Frank Cass, 2000; R. B. Parker, *The October War: A Retrospective*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001; A. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*, New York: Schocken Books, 2004; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, pp. 74–96.
22 See Burr, *October War*, documents 51 and 54.
23 Ibid., documents 83 and 85.
24 Ibid., document 27.
25 Kober, 'Great Power Involvement', 45–46.
26 V. Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. For the Soviet role in October 1973, see also Kober, 'Great Power Involvement', 33–35.
27 Ibid., p. 33.
28 Contemporary and memoir accounts which offer some insights into Arab decision-making include A. Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, New York: Harper & Row, 1977; M. A. G. Gamasy, *The October War*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993; M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, London: Collins, 1975.
29 See Burr, *October War*, n. 2.
30 In addition to Bar Joseph's work, see also E. Kahana, 'Early Warning versus Concept: The Case of the Yom Kippur War 1973', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17/2, 2002.

31 For Kissinger's original interpretation of the Jordanian crisis as part of a Cold War 'autumn of crises' see *The White House Years*, New York: Little Brown, 1979, pp. 594–631. Kissinger offered the new formulation in an interview which he kindly granted me in New York, on 2 June 2003.

32 Author's interview with Zeid Rifai, Amman, 5 June 2002. Interestingly, in view of his role in establishing a direct communication link between the King and the Israeli government, the British Diplomatic Service List shows 'William James McLaren Speirs' (born 22 November 1924) as having served as First Secretary at the British Embassy in Tel Aviv between June 1970 and July 1972. There is no mention of a posting to Amman itself. His presence in Amman during the September 1970 crisis is confirmed circumstantially by a letter in British Foreign Office files from the producer of the BBC 'Panorama' programme thanking him for his help in setting up a television interview with King Hussein (FCO to Amman, telegram no.418, 28 September 1970, TNA FCO17/1084).

33 See James Hershberg's useful discussion of the state of play regarding Soviet bloc sources in CWIHP e-bulletin no.13: *The Soviet Bloc and the Aftermath of the June 1967 War: Selected Documents from Polish and Romanian Archives* (accessed 13 December 2006) http://wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=1409&fuseaction=topics.publications&doc_id=101696&group_id=13349

34 Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin*.

35 For further discussion of Israeli sources, see P. L. Hahn, 'The View From Jerusalem: Revelations about U.S. Diplomacy from the Archives of Israel', *Diplomatic History*, 22/4, 1998, 509–31, especially fn. 2, 510.

36 For more information in English about access to this archive, see http://www.archivesmadeeasy.org/ame_israel.htm (accessed 13 December 2006).

2 The Cold War and the Six Day War

US policy towards the Arab–Israeli crisis of June 1967

Peter L. Hahn

The Israeli pre-emptive strike on Egypt at the start of the Six Day War had a dramatic impact on US relations with the Arab world. His army reeling towards a massive defeat, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser openly charged that US carrier-based aircraft participated in the initial Israeli aerial attacks that gained command of the skies and thereby essentially won the war at its outset. In reaction, several Arab governments severed diplomatic relations with Washington, mobs demonstrated against the United States in the streets of Cairo, Amman, and other Arab cities, and some Arab powers threatened to punish the United States by curtailing oil exports. US officials firmly denied the Egyptian allegations as 'absolutely false', but to no avail. Thus the Lyndon B. Johnson administration turned to the Soviet Union for help. After the Pentagon briefed Johnson that Soviet ships could confirm that US Navy carriers had remained out of action some 200 miles from the battlefield, Johnson asked Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin to quell the Arab protests. 'Since you know where our carriers are,' he wrote, 'I hope you can put Cairo right on this matter and help us eliminate this kind of needless inflammation.'[1]

There is irony in this request by Johnson for Soviet help in managing a problem in the Arab world, given that Johnson had consistently striven to deny the Soviets an effective political position in the Middle East. Since 1963, Johnson had underscored the importance of practising anti-Soviet containment in the Middle East and elsewhere. His advisers cautioned that the Soviet Union sought to gain influence in the Middle East by supporting revolutionary, anti-Western regimes and political movements. In view of the region's oil resources, military facilities, lines of communication, and human resources, US officials resolved to stop such Soviet expansionism.[2]

Anti-Soviet containment formed the foundation of two specific American approaches to the Middle East in the early Johnson years. First, US officials sought political stability in the Middle East – which they defined as a region marked by internal peace, external security against Soviet invasion or political penetration, political regimes resistant to revolutionary

change, economic prosperity based on capitalism, and Western access to the natural resources of the region (especially its oil). Hence, US officials sought to bolster friendly governments (like those in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel) against internal and external threats, to contain defiant regimes (like Egypt and Syria), and to mitigate tensions that might inflame the region.[3]

Second, US officials aimed to maintain a delicate balance between antagonistic factions in the region. Despite the deep animosity between Israel and its Arab neighbours, US officials sought to remain on friendly terms with both camps. The Johnson administration initially denied Israeli requests for arms supply on the reasoning that it would trigger Soviet arms supply to Arab states and, when necessity seemed to dictate arming Israel, it also armed Jordan to create the appearance of balance. The Johnson administration also sought to negotiate a resolution of an Egyptian–Saudi clash in Yemen. 'Carrying water on both shoulders sometimes seems immoral and is always difficult,' Saunders explained, in reference to the US practice of maintaining friendly relations with all powers. But the only alternative was 'being driven to choose half our interests, sacrifice half and let the USSR pick up our losses.'[4]

Through early 1967, Johnson's containment policy faced mounting challenges. Soviet officials made political overtures to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq, all of which powers remained cold to the United States and indirectly threatened the integrity of Saudi Arabia and Jordan. In the eyes of US officials, Soviet machinations triggered a resurgence of Arab–Israeli conflict, including a series of incidents in late 1966 and early 1967 in which infiltrators into Israel committed deadly acts of violence and Israel responded with forceful reprisals. Israeli fighters engaged and downed Syrian jets on 7 April, and in May a wave of violence in northern Israel prompted an Israeli threat to occupy Damascus and change the Syrian government. Amidst reports that Israeli soldiers had mobilized for such an attack, Egypt and Syria consulted under their mutual defence pact. Suspecting that the Soviets had stirred up the trouble, the Johnson administration counselled caution on all parties.[5]

Contrary to US hopes, the border tension escalated into a crisis on 16 May. Chafed by criticism that he failed to adequately defend Syria against Israeli belligerence, Nasser expelled the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), which had patrolled the Sinai since 1957. Egyptian forces occupied the evacuated UN observation posts on Israel's border and at Sharm al-Sheikh and advanced 600 tanks and three infantry divisions into the Sinai. When Israel prepared to launch a pre-emptive strike against this provocation, US officials urged caution on all powers to the dispute. Johnson asked Israel, Syria, and Egypt to cooperate with UN Secretary General U Thant, who visited Cairo in search of a peaceful resolution to the crisis. The president also advised Syria to curtail infiltration of terrorists to Israel, Egypt to readmit UN soldiers to the

Sinai, and Israel to refrain from a pre-emptive attack. Johnson backpedalled from various US commitments to Israeli security and wrote to Eshkol 'to emphasize in the strongest terms the need to avoid any action on your side which would add further to the violence and tension in your area.'[6]

US officials also faced uncertainty with regard to their expectations of Soviet behaviour during the Middle East crisis. On the one hand, there were reasons for confidence that the Soviet Union would not exert strong influence in the showdown. Soon after Nasser expelled UN forces from the Sinai, Secretary of State Dean Rusk directed State Department officials in Washington, New York, and Moscow to urge the Soviets to restrain their Arab friends. He was relieved when Nikolai Fedorenko, the Soviet representative at the United Nations, told Ambassador Arthur J. Goldberg that the Soviets had not provoked the crisis and that they wanted 'no trouble.' Moreover, State Department intelligence officers considered but rejected the thesis that the Soviets would encourage a Middle East war as means of hampering US operations in Vietnam, on the rationale that such a war might escalate out of control and would likely lead to an embarrassing defeat of Moscow's Arab client states.[7]

On the other hand, US officials found reason to worry about Soviet diplomacy in the Arab world. Despite Fedorenko's assurance, Goldberg noted that the Soviets also started rumours among Arab powers that the United States encouraged Israeli truculence and that the Soviet Union approved the withdrawal of UNEF. Officials in the State Department cautioned that the Soviets would offer little support of Western diplomacy to keep the peace because such support would alienate Arab leaders. The great unknown factor was what the Soviets were saying to their clients in private; as special assistant Walt W. Rostow advised Johnson, 'If private counsel from Moscow remains moderate, there is scope for diplomacy here.'[8]

The Middle East crisis deepened on 22 May when Nasser declared that Egypt would blockade the Straits of Tiran, stop and search ships, and seize strategic cargoes destined for Israel. Charging that such a blockade would imperil their military security and economic vitality, Israeli leaders threatened to fight to reopen the waterway. Other Arab leaders, including moderates such as King Hussein of Jordan, warned that if the United States backed such action by Israel then they would have to repudiate the United States in order to survive the public backlash. The CIA saw in Nasser's blockade a multi-part gamble that the Soviets would back him, that the United States would refrain from intervention, that his army could defend itself in the Sinai, and that Israel would accept a UN-negotiated settlement rather than pre-empt.[9]

US officials also carefully evaluated the Soviet role in the mounting crisis and concluded that Moscow was making a gamble similar to

Cairo's. On the one hand, they reasoned that the Soviets did not desire a Middle East war because their Arab proxies would be mauled by Israel, to the detriment of Soviet prestige. Rusk and Rostow assured Johnson on 23 May that 'the Soviets probably do not want a blow-up in the Middle East', and the next day State Department officials disputed the president's suggestion that the Soviets might have provoked the crisis to distract the United States from Vietnam.[10]

On the other hand, US leaders suspected that Moscow had instigated the crisis by encouraging Syrian truculence against Israel in the spring and by quietly approving Nasser's expulsion of UNEF from the Sinai. Although he doubted that the Soviets had foreknowledge that Nasser would close the straits, Ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn E. Thompson, Jr, judged that the Soviets were 'not averse' to Egypt's 'stirring up this affair'. The CIA estimated that the Soviets hoped both 'to avoid military involvement and to give the US a black eye among the Arabs by identifying it with Israel.'[11]

As tensions mounted, US officials took five steps to head off war. First, Johnson promptly and publicly declared the Egyptian blockade 'illegal' and 'potentially disastrous to the cause of peace' and urged its reversal. Rostow told Egyptian Ambassador Mustapha Kamel that under international law Israel had the right to send ships through the straits, that Egypt's closure constituted aggression, and that Nasser's action might cause 'grave consequences'. Within days, Johnson sent former Secretary of the Treasury Robert Anderson to appeal to Nasser in person to resolve the crisis by lifting the blockade, but Nasser refused to desist.[12]

Second, US officials encouraged Egypt and Israel to cooperate with UN diplomacy to end the crisis. 'I want to play every card in the UN', Johnson told the National Security Council (NSC) on 24 May. US officials encouraged U Thant to visit Cairo, where he secured a pledge from Nasser not to attack Israel, and they endorsed U Thant's special appeal, issued from New York on 27 May, for all powers to show restraint. Eban told Rusk, however, that Israeli officials 'have absolutely no faith in the possibility of anything useful coming out of the UN'. On 2 June, Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman advised that the 'farce in the United Nations be ended'.[13]

Third, US officials tried to restrain Israel from launching a military attack designed to reopen the Straits of Tiran. Johnson and his advisers realized that such a feat would require them to perform a delicate balancing act. If, at one extreme, they offered Israel no support, or if, at the other extreme, they firmly endorsed Israel's position on the straits, then they might trigger the same outcome, namely, Israeli military action against Egypt. Such action would place the United States in a difficult situation, given that domestic political support of Israel would make it hard to fulfil US pledges to counter intra-regional aggression. Yet not stopping Israeli action, as Ambassador to Cairo Richard Nolte warned,

would incur 'heavy cost to us in terms of political, economic, and other relationships in [the] Arab world'. US officials resolved to head off Israeli pre-emption both by warning firmly against the use of force and by offering alternative means to guarantee freedom of the seas.[14]

US officials tried to implement this delicate policy in meetings with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, who visited Washington on 25–26 May. 'We put the case against pre-emptive strikes to Eban very hard', Rusk wrote to Johnson after meeting the foreign minister, 'both from the military and the political points of view . . . Preemptive action by Israel would cause extreme difficulty for the United States.' Johnson assured Eban on 26 May that 'we will pursue vigorously any and all possible measures to keep the Strait open.' The record of conversation reveals, however, that 'with emphasis and solemnity, the President repeated twice, Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone.' Johnson also refused to reissue a security guarantee on the grounds that he lacked congressional support and constitutional authority, without which a pledge 'wouldn't be worth ten cents and Israel could get no help from the United States.' Johnson also wrote to Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol that 'it is essential that Israel not take any pre-emptive military action and thereby make itself responsible for the initiation of hostilities.' On 30 May, Eshkol indicated that he would comply for 'a further limited period'.[15]

Fourth, US officials decided to contest Nasser's blockade of the Straits by organizing concerted action by Western maritime powers to break it. According to a plan conceived in the State and Defense Departments, naval forces of various Western powers would assume positions in the Red Sea and pledge to protect merchant ships that plied the straits bound for Israel. Other Western naval vessels would concentrate in the eastern Mediterranean to deter Nasser from resisting the operation in the straits and to provide reinforcement if shooting erupted. 'I want to see [British Prime Minister Harold] Wilson and [French President Charles] De Gaulle out there with their ships all lined up, too,' Johnson told the NSC on 24 May. After discussing this plan with several allied powers, US diplomats estimated that they would need three weeks to prepare an international agreement and put the plan in motion.[16]

Fifth, US officials appealed to Moscow to collar its Arab protégés. Within hours of Nasser's closure of the straits, Rusk ordered Thompson to ask Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko to make good on his pledges to restrain Egypt. Rostow encouraged Johnson to believe that if he could formulate a plan to resolve the straits issue, Moscow could be persuaded to pressure Cairo to accept it. Citing recent Syrian provocations against Israel, Johnson wrote to Kosygin on 22 May that it was 'time for each of us to use our influence to the full in the cause of moderation.' Kosygin replied on 27 May that he favoured restraint but that Israel, with American complicity, might aggravate tension into war.[17]

The US effort to head off war by appealing to Egypt to reverse course, endorsing UN diplomacy, restraining Israel, organizing the maritime operation, and seeking Soviet cooperation immediately encountered a series of problems. For starters, Israeli insecurity mounted quickly. Israeli intelligence predicted a sharp rise in infiltration raids under Egyptian protection and reported that Egyptian units in the Sinai were armed with chemical weapons. The Israeli people panicked over rumours that their country might be annihilated. 'A surprise aerial attack on Israel could be expected at any moment . . . ', IDF officials told US Ambassador Walworth Barbour on 27 May, 'knocking out their [Israeli] airfields and rendering a response ineffective.' In this context, the historian Avi Shlaim notes, Eshkol's decision to wait for Western diplomacy to reopen the straits nearly provoked 'an open rebellion' among military officers who favoured immediate pre-emption. Such concerns rose after King Hussein flew to Cairo to sign a mutual defence treaty with Egypt on 30 May. In the absence of an ironclad US security guarantee or promise to break the Gulf of Aqaba blockade, Eshkol wrote to Johnson, additional US appeals for restraint 'will lack any moral or logical basis.'[18]

Equally important, administration officials realized that the task of organizing the maritime operation faced severe obstacles at home and among allied powers. Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara agreed that Johnson must secure congressional approval before placing troops in harm's way in the Middle East, but, because 'the problem of "Tonkin Gulfitis" remains serious', they advised the president to delay asking for such approval until the UN exhaustively discussed the issue. Moreover, State Department negotiations with other maritime states on the logistics of implementing the Red Sea operation hit several bottlenecks. By 4 June, only seven states of fourteen approached pledged to adhere to the plan.[19]

Finally, US officials became painfully aware that the maritime plan faced political, economic, and military problems. Ambassador to Cairo Richard H. Nolte predicted with certainty that Egypt would resist blockade runners with 'solid support [of] Soviet bloc and entire Afr[o]-Asian world as well as all Arabs . . . unless faced by overwhelming military force.' Retired Ambassador Charles W. Yost, dispatched to Cairo to consult contacts in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, advised that the maritime operation would not reopen the straits unless the United States assembled a 'military force which would be out of proportion to real US interests at stake and would have most damaging repercussions on [the] US position throughout Arab world.' Tough words or financial sanctions designed to force Egyptian capitulation 'will have precisely [the] contrary effect' of feeding Arab unity and provoking anti-US demonstrations.[20]

The maritime operation also faced economic problems. Western powers had few financial levers to use against Arab states, a task force of officials from the State and Defense Departments, White House staff, and CIA warned, but the Arab states 'together would have powerful economic weapons to use against the Atlantic allies.' If fighting erupted between the United States and Egypt, the task force concluded, the 'oil-producing nations would take some action against the United States, ranging from scattered sabotage to sequestration of oil holdings and selective prohibition of exports.' If those states seized Western oil firms, the United States would lose $1 billion per year in foreign trade and billions of dollars in capital investments, Britain would lose $1 billion, and international markets would be devastated. If they embargoed oil supplies to Europe or aviation fuels destined for the war in Vietnam, the United States would need to draw from its own reserves and impose rationing at home.[21]

The Pentagon also identified military reasons not to challenge Nasser's blockade. Although the Sixth Fleet projected a powerful presence in the Mediterranean, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) General Earle G. Wheeler told the NSC on 24 May, available land forces included only 1,400 marines stationed in Naples, a three-day sail from the likely zone of operations. US anti-submarine warfare units in the Mediterranean, which would be needed against Egyptian submarines in the Red Sea, were unable to transit the Suez Canal, and the nearest alternative unit was based in Singapore, two weeks travel time. Wheeler also anticipated that Turkey, Libya, and Spain might refuse to permit US forces to use bases in their countries to support operations against Egypt. On 2 June, the JCS estimated that the Navy needed 31 days to reposition ships from its Atlantic fleet to the Red Sea, and considered such a move 'operationally unsound' because it would divide the Atlantic fleet, confine the task force to a small operating area, depend on an extended line of communication, and force a 'reduction/ degradation in other US commitments'. Forces currently east of Suez could try to break the Egyptian blockade immediately, but 'the capability of these forces to prevail, if attacked by major UAR forces, is doubtful.' In addition, military action would not guarantee a free and open waterway.[22]

By early June, US officials realized that they were boxed in by an impossible situation. Johnson and his top advisers remained convinced that Israel would escalate to war, unless Egypt rescinded its blockade of the Straits of Tiran. Yet State Department officials warned that the maritime plan to reopen the straits appeared to Arab leaders as a US capitulation to Israel, forced the pro-Western Arab states to endorse Nasser's position, eroded US influence in the Arab world, and opened the door to Soviet influence. Ambassador to Syria Hugh H. Smythe considered the maritime plan 'foredoomed' because it would lead quickly to US–British military conflict with Egypt. He and other envoys

to Arab states urged a 'hands off' policy. If the United States endorsed Israel's position in the conflict and then either Israel or the Western powers used force against Egypt, Ambassador to Jordan Findley Burns, Jr, added, 'this will wreck every interest we have in North Africa and the Middle East and destroy our influence with the Arabs for years to come.' Defense Department and CIA analysts warned that sending an unescorted tanker through the straits, let alone one escorted by the US Navy, would trigger massive anti-US propaganda by Egypt. 'Nasser could severely damage the United States and West Europe, politically and economically', Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Townsend Hoopes noted, 'without firing a shot'.[23]

In such a situation, US officials naturally considered the advantages of simply allowing Israel to escalate to hostilities. In contrast to the tactical difficulties of US military operations in the Gulf of Aqaba, General Wheeler reported to the NSC as early as 24 May, 'the Israelis can hold their own' in a war against the Arab states. Saunders suggested that if the United States had allowed Israel to pre-empt on 21 May then a better outcome might have resulted, namely, the defeat of Nasser without US involvement. 'We ought to consider admitting that we have failed', he suggested, 'and allow fighting to ensue.' State Department officials considered the 1 June appointment of Moshe Dayan, who had commanded Israeli forces during the invasion of Egypt in 1956, to the position of Minister of Defence to be a sign that action would follow. In reference to Dayan and other Israeli hawks, Rostow told Johnson that 'these boys are going to be hard to hold a week from now.'[24]

Some scholars assert that in late May and early June Johnson deliberately signalled to Israel that he would not object if it initiated military action against Egypt. William B. Quandt, for instance, argues that despite Johnson's official protestations against war, the president subtly conveyed to Eshkol, after 26 May, that he would not object if Israel pre-empted. In Quandt's view, Johnson abandoned his 'red light' position of categorical opposition to Israeli action for a 'yellow light' position of not opposing, while not specifically endorsing, an Israeli attack. 'As for most motorists', Quandt concludes, to the Israelis 'the yellow light was tantamount to a green one.' Avi Shlaim observes that when Mossad Director Meir Amit asked in early June how the United States would react to Israeli pre-emption, Secretary of Defense McNamara 'gave Israel a green light to take military action against Egypt.'[25]

As persuasive a case as Quandt and Shlaim make, four caveats limit the 'yellow light' and 'green light' theses. First, archival evidence demonstrates that Johnson remained skittish about Israeli pre-emption long after he might have flashed a yellow or green light to Eshkol. On 3 June, for instance, Johnson notified Eshkol of his diplomatic efforts to reopen the straits, confirmed his commitment to the survival of Israel and the territorial integrity of all Middle East states, and urged Eshkol to

refrain from aggression. Rusk urged US envoys in the Middle East to seek urgently some means to avert war. Even if Israel seemed determined to fight, he observed, 'we cannot throw up our hands and say... let them fight while we try to remain neutral.' 'We are sorry this [war] has taken place...', Johnson told the NSC on 7 June, two days after Israel initiated hostilities. 'By the time we get through with all the festering problems we are going to wish the war had not happened.' Johnson 'has never believed that this war was anything else than a mistake by the Israelis', Rostow recalled after the war. 'A brilliant quick victory he never regarded as an occasion for elation or satisfaction. He so told the Israeli representatives on a number of occasions.'[26]

Second, it seems plausible that Johnson expected Israel to initiate a test of Nasser's blockade of the Straits of Tiran on or after 11 June rather than launch a full-scale attack on Egyptian forces in the Sinai. NSC officials apparently anticipated that Israel would send a ship into the straits on 11 June, and respond forcefully if Egypt stopped it. Thus they resolved to seek a compromise solution to the standoff, by polishing the maritime plan or getting Nasser to rescind the blockade before that deadline. Apparently to deter Nasser from enforcing his blockade militarily, State Department officials sent two messages to Nasser on 3 June reaffirming US opposition to intra-regional aggression. 'The United States strongly opposes aggression by anyone in the area, in any form', Assistant Secretary of State Lucius Battle assured Nasser. 'Our future actions in the area will be firmly based on this policy which has benefited Egypt in the past.' It seems doubtful that the State Department would have issued such assurances had it known that Israel would invade the Sinai on 5 June.[27]

Third, the flashing of a green or yellow light to Israel would have run counter to the essence of US communications with the Soviet Union. On 22 May, as noted above, Johnson first encouraged Kosygin to restrain Arab states from provocation. After Kosygin replied by asking for similar US pressure on Israel, Rusk sent word to Gromyko on 28 May citing Eshkol's recent statement that Israel would seek a peaceful settlement as evidence of US goodwill and effectiveness. To unleash Israel in such a context ran the risk of deeply alienating Soviet leaders at a time when US officials were making a good faith effort to secure Soviet cooperation in stabilizing the Middle East.[28]

Fourth, the legacy of US–Israeli security relations and the evidence of US–Israeli differences of judgement during the crisis of 1967 suggest that Israel would have launched a pre-emptive strike against Egypt regardless of the US position. Israeli leaders were convinced by 5 June that Egyptian forces in the Sinai posed a dire threat to their national survival. It is reasonable to assume that they were prepared to address this threat by means of their own choosing regardless of the opinion of the United States, which was preoccupied in Vietnam and which

occasionally pursued security objectives that clashed with Israel's. In several previous situations, most notably the Suez-Sinai War of 1956–57, Israeli leaders took action to defend their national interests in defiance of US advice. 'You should not assume that the United States can order Israel not to fight for what it considers to be its most vital interests', Rusk cabled US ambassadors on 3 June, '. . . The "holy war" psychology of the Arab world is matched by an apocalyptic psychology within Israel. Israel may make a decision that it must resort to force to protect its vital interests.'[29]

The Israeli attack on Egypt on 5 June quickly escalated into a major war of territorial conquest. Eshkol justified the initial move as a defence against Nasser's 'extraordinary catalogue of aggression'. Rather than depend on the United Nations, he argued, Israel would 'rely on the courage and determination of our soldiers and citizens'. On the battlefields, Israeli forces demolished the Egyptian air force and rapidly occupied the Sinai. When Jordan and Syria entered the fray on Egypt's side, Israel delivered similar blows to their forces and occupied the West Bank and the Golan Heights. By the time the final ceasefire took effect on 10 June, Israel had soundly defeated three enemies and occupied enormous portions of their territory.[30]

US–Arab relations declined because of the war. Within hours of the outbreak of fighting, Rostow declared to Arab chiefs of mission in Washington that Johnson had tried to prevent hostilities and sought to restore peace. As their military fortunes collapsed, however, various Arab leaders charged that US warplanes actually participated in the Israeli aerial attacks against them. US officials rejected these charges as specious, and privately attributed them to scapegoating by leaders anxious to fortify their political reputations in the face of embarrassing military setbacks. In any case, anti-US passions soared among the peoples of Arab countries, mobs threatened the safety of US nationals, and Arab governments severed diplomatic relations with the United States.[31]

US–Israeli relations also suffered setbacks during the Six Day War. On 8 June, Israeli warplanes attacked the *Liberty*, a US Navy intelligence-gathering ship sailing 25 miles off the coast of Egypt, killing 34 US sailors. Israel later explained the incident as a result of errors in reconnaissance and communications and apologized for it, and Johnson accepted the apology and refrained from publicly investigating the episode.[32] Yet the attack angered many US officials. Rusk reported to Eban 'very strong feeling' in Congress over the matter. 'There is no excuse for repeated attacks on a plainly marked U.S. naval vessel', an NSC official wrote. Israeli apologies 'do not change the fact that this most unfortunate attack occurred.'[33]

Ironically, the *Liberty* incident provided an oasis of US–Soviet cooperation during the Middle East conflict. When Johnson scrambled US naval aircraft to assist the badly damaged ship, he used the hotline to

alert Kosygin of the airplanes' mission, to stress that they had no hostile purpose, and to ask Kosygin to relay such messages to Egypt. Kosygin promptly replied that he had passed the message to Cairo. Relieved, Rostow told Johnson that this 'was one reason the link was created: to avoid misinterpretation of military moves and incidents during an intense crisis.'[34]

As the Six Day War unfolded, the United States adopted a multi-track policy designed to end the fighting, contain the Soviets, and secure a stable future. First, US officials sought to end the hostilities as quickly as possible. They pushed a simple ceasefire resolution through the UN Security Council on 6 June, resisting a Soviet amendment ordering Israel to evacuate the territory it occupied, until the Soviets relented in the light of Israel's mounting battlefield gains. US officials pressed Israel to accept ceasefires with Jordan on 7 June and with Egypt on 8 June, after the Israeli military had occupied the West Bank and Gaza and the Sinai, respectively. An Israeli–Syrian ceasefire was agreed to on 9 June but did not take effect until the next day, as each side accused the other of continuing military operations in violation of the accord. US officials put strong pressure on Israel to curtail its military manoeuvres.[35]

The Johnson administration also worked assiduously to prevent Soviet political or military involvement that would seriously imperil Western interests in the Middle East and perhaps lead to a global conflict. Rusk had predicted fearfully on 2 June that if Israel launched an attack and gained the upper hand then the Soviets would do 'something' to assist the Arab states. As Israel secured its battlefield victories, by contrast, CIA officers concluded that the Soviets wished 'to avoid direct involvement in the war and to escape the risk of a direct confrontation with the U.S.' In a series of hotline messages, Johnson appealed to Kosygin to repudiate Arab charges of US military involvement in Israel's attack and to collaborate to achieve UN ceasefire resolutions. Kosygin indicated that he supported UN diplomacy to end the fighting in principle although he and Johnson quibbled on the specific terms of a UN resolution.[36]

US–Soviet tensions peaked on 9–10 June, as Israeli and Arab adversaries manoeuvred to secure optimal territorial positions in the approach of the impending ceasefire. Because Israel continued to fight, Kosygin warned Johnson, 'a very crucial moment has now arrived which forces us, if military actions are not stopped in the next few hours, to adopt an independent action' that might lead to a US–Soviet clash. Kosygin severed relations with Israel and indicated that he would warn that state to desist, threatening that if it refused then 'necessary actions will be taken, including military'. To ease the tensions, the State Department cited Soviet 'saber rattling' in urgent messages pressing Israel immediately to honour the ceasefire terms. Johnson also ordered the Sixth Fleet to move from a holding pattern towards the battle zone

of the eastern Mediterranean, cognizant that Soviet submarines would detect this manoeuvre.[37]

To Johnson's relief, the US–Soviet tension dissipated quickly. Initially, Johnson, McNamara, Rostow, and Director of Central Intelligence Richard M. Helms huddled in the White House sombrely contemplating the Soviet threats and monitoring military manoeuvres in the region. Helms recorded that the atmosphere of the meeting 'was in the lowest voices he had ever heard in a meeting of that kind. The atmosphere was tense.' A round of hotline exchanges with Kosygin about the activation of the ceasefire, punctuated by conflicting reports about which forces were still fighting along the Syrian–Israeli frontier, added to the tension. Yet the sense of crisis passed quickly as US monitors confirmed that the guns fell silent and the ceasefire held.[38]

Third, the United States sought to accomplish a permanent peace settlement between Israel and the Arab states. Initially, NSC and State Department experts aimed for a settlement that would reopen the Tiran straits, redeploy UN soldiers on both sides of the Egypt–Israel border, end the arms race in the Middle East, settle the refugee crisis, and promote economic development of the entire region. They intended for the United States, acting impartially to all parties to the dispute, to press Israel to relinquish the territorial gains it made during the fighting. Zbigniew Brzezinski of the State Department's Policy Planning Council and Special Assistant McGeorge Bundy urged Johnson to move quickly on such peacemaking, before the Soviet Union drove a wedge between the West and the Arab states by proposing a pro-Arab peace plan.[39]

These US aspirations soon encountered two major obstacles. First, it became clear that Israel would not make the concessions envisioned by US officials. Flushed with victory, Israeli leaders gradually resolved to use the occupied territories to secure their own terms in any peace settlement. To dislodge Israel from the occupied territories against its will, special counsel Harry McPherson advised Johnson after touring Israel, would require actual US military force, not merely a threat of economic sanctions such as President Dwight D. Eisenhower had issued in 1957. And political factors within the United States clearly militated against pressuring Israel to concede against its will.[40]

Second, Soviet policy made it difficult for the United States to affirm an impartial stance. The CIA anticipated on 9 June that the Soviet Union would aim 'to pick up as many pieces in the Middle East as it can.' It would aim to preserve its relationship with Cairo, to rearm Arab states as quickly as possible, and to criticize Israel and its relationship with the United States in order to curry Arab favour. The Soviet cooperation in securing the ceasefire, the CIA noted, marked merely an immediate practical goal, not a new era of cooperation.[41]

Indeed, within days of the ceasefire, US and Soviet officials disagreed on the principle of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories.

Kosygin alerted Johnson that 'it will be necessary to proceed to the next step of evacuating the territory occupied by Israel and the return of troops behind the armistice line.' On 16 June, when Soviet Ambassador to Washington Anatoliy F. Dobrynin asked why the United States did not force Israel to withdraw to the 1949 armistice lines, Rusk replied that the Arab states must recognize the existence of Israel before the United States would endorse their territorial claims.[42]

With US officials disinclined to pressure Israel, and with the Soviet Union inclined to promote the Arab cause, peacemaking diplomacy achieved little. On 19 June, Johnson announced a plan for settlement including mutual recognition, arms limitations, resolution of the Palestinian refugee crisis, freedom of transit, and independence of all area states. The UN General Assembly, however, considered but failed to vote on a draft resolution acknowledging these principles, ultimately referring the issue to the Security Council. During the deliberations, US and Soviet officials reached a deadlock. Dobrynin proposed to Rusk a deal in which Israel would agree to withdraw in response to Arab pledges against using force to settle disputes. But Rusk insisted that Israel could not be expected to withdraw unless the Arab states first agreed to a permanent peace with Israel. The CIA noted that because the Soviet Union and the Arab states 'need each other . . . the Soviets in the main will have to go along with Arab policies.'[43]

The US–Soviet deadlock at the United Nations was reflected in the Johnson–Kosygin summit meeting at Glassboro, New Jersey, in late June. The two leaders agreed in principle that they favoured an Arab–Israeli settlement, but they disagreed deeply on the specifics of such a deal. Kosygin insisted that Israel withdraw unconditionally from the occupied territories before the Arabs made concessions, a position that Johnson rejected on the rationale that Israel could not be expected to withdraw if a state of war persisted. When Rusk recommended that the two great powers affirm a series of joint statements affirming Arab–Israeli peace, Israel's right to exist, the interests of Palestinian refugees, and arms limitations, Gromyko replied that Rusk 'avoided the main question, namely withdrawal of Israeli troops and liberation of occupied Arab territories . . . It hadn't been arms but Israeli policy that had started the war.'[44]

The US–Soviet deadlock persisted even as the Security Council deliberated the terms of peace. US and Soviet officials agreed on a fundamental land-for-peace formula in which Israel would exchange recently occupied territories for Arab recognition and acceptance. Soviet officials tried to secure the principle of complete Israeli withdrawal, however, insisting that the Security Council resolve that Israel must abandon 'the territories' occupied in 1967. But US officials backed a British-drafted resolution that called on Israel to withdraw from 'territories,' giving Israel a basis for retaining some of the land it had recently occupied. In

doing so, US officials moved away from an earlier position of insisting on Israeli withdrawal to the borders defined by the armistice agreements in 1949, a shift that drew Soviet protests. Yet Johnson held firm, and Resolution 242, which the Security Council passed in late November 1967, contained the ambiguous wording favoured by Israel.[45]

By the time Resolution 242 passed, low-intensity warfare had erupted along the Israeli–Egyptian border. Violent incidents between the military forces of the two powers occurred in September–October 1967 and escalated into the War of Attrition by mid-1968. Embittered by their massive military defeats and territorial losses in 1967, Arab states became increasingly dependent on the Soviet Union for military and political backing as they waged limited war against Israel. Because of the perception that such Arab aggression enjoyed Soviet backing, the United States bolstered Israel. Despite his best efforts, Johnson proved unable to avoid the emergence of a close parallel between the Arab–Israeli conflict and the US–Soviet Cold War.[46]

The Six Day War dramatically altered the foundations of US diplomacy in the Middle East. From 1963 to 1967, President Johnson had proved able to maintain a policy of containment, stability, and even-handedness in the Middle East and to avert an escalation in the Arab–Israeli conflict. Maintaining amicable relations with Israel and various Arab states seemed to protect US vital interests in the region. In 1967, however, this policy collapsed under the strain of an Egyptian–Israeli crisis. Johnson administration officials tried to defuse the crisis by persuading Egypt to reverse its provocative actions, restraining Israel from pre-empting against Egypt, promoting UN peacekeeping diplomacy, and promoting a multilateral operation to reopen the Straits of Tiran. Such US diplomacy failed, however, to avert the outbreak of full-scale warfare on 5 June 1967.

The escalation of the crisis to war revealed the limitations of US diplomacy in the Middle East. The Johnson administration found it impossible to achieve a UN settlement of the Israeli–Egyptian standoff, to implement an initiative among maritime powers to lift the Aqaba blockade, to convince Nasser to relent from an act of brinkmanship, or to restrain Israel from provoking general hostilities. That the United States sought Soviet assistance in restraining Arab states from provocative behaviour revealed the incapacity of US officials to secure their goals unilaterally and an unusual willingness to welcome Soviet influence in the Middle East.

The Six Day War and its aftermath also pointed to the weaknesses in US policy. Johnson and his advisers were able to end the fighting by negotiating a series of ceasefire accords by 10 June, but only after passions had been inflamed and territorial boundaries had been substantially redrawn. They were able to deter Soviet intervention in the war, but only after Kosygin threatened to use force against Israel. The

administration also proved unable to achieve a permanent peace accord in the aftermath of the war. Israel displayed sufficient military power and political confidence to resist US pressures, modest though they were, to make concessions needed for settlement, while the Arab states remained sufficiently bitter to reject US calls for compromise. In the Suez-Sinai War of 1956–57, US officials had proved adept at terminating the hostilities and forcing the attacking powers to relinquish their gains. In 1967, by contrast, the United States retained no such power.

In addition to revealing US weaknesses, the Six Day War also strained US–Soviet relations. While it remains unclear whether Soviet leaders deliberately provoked the 1967 war, it appears that they showed little enthusiasm for Western efforts to avert the hostilities. To a degree, US and Soviet leaders collaborated to achieve the ceasefires during the Six Day War, and the hotline exchange during the *Liberty* episode provided evidence of crisis containment. US–Soviet tensions peaked, however, when the Soviets threatened to intervene against Israel and Johnson ordered the US Navy to sail towards the battle zone. The two superpowers also failed to agree on the optimal terms for a permanent peace after the Six Day War.

In the aftermath of the Six Day War, the East–West fissures of the Cold War became superimposed on the Arab–Israeli conflict. Despite quarrels with Israel's pre-emption, attack on the *Liberty*, and uncompromising post-war position on peacemaking, the United States essentially endorsed the Israeli insistence on retaining territory until the Arab states agreed to make peace and extend diplomatic recognition. By contrast, US relations with Arab states became badly strained. Prior to 1967, US diplomats aimed to preserve friendly ties with the conservative regimes in Jordan and Saudi Arabia and tried to repair strained relations with the more radical governments in Egypt and Syria. By defending Israeli transit rights during the crisis of 1967, however, US officials earned the wrath of Arab peoples and leaders who experienced the humiliating military defeats of June. And by refraining from forcing Israel to withdraw from the territory it occupied in June 1967, the United States exacerbated the problem. During the War of Attrition, Soviet arms supply to Egypt and Syria and US supply to Israel indicated an intersection of the Cold War and the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Lyndon Johnson became aware of the outbreak of the Six Day War at 4:35 am on 5 June 1967, when National Security Adviser Walt W. Rostow awakened him with the news. At 8:00 am, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara reported that Kosygin had activated the hotline to discuss the situation. Johnson recalled in his memoirs that this news deeply disturbed him because he had worked hard to avert such hostilities, which seemed 'potentially far more dangerous than the war in Southeast Asia.' McNamara's words that 'the hot-line is up,' Johnson recalled, 'were ominous.'[47] Given the way the Six Day War revealed the

limitations of US power, provoked US–Soviet tension, drove the Arab states into Moscow's camp, and set the stage for enduring conflict in the region, it is not surprising that Johnson awoke to the news of the war with such a sense of foreboding.

Notes

1 Rusk to Goldberg, 6 June 1967, Johnson to Kosygin, 6 June 1967, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 321, 325–26 (hereafter *FRUS*).
2 Saunders to Rostow, 24 June 1966, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XXI, pp. 29–31.
3 State Department paper, 8 February 1967, ibid., pp. 39–41. See also Rusk to Johnson, 16 January 1964, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XVIII, pp. 17–23.
4 Saunders to Rostow, 24 June 1966, ibid., pp. 29–31. See also D. Little, 'Choosing Sides: Lyndon Johnson and the Middle East', in ed. R. A. Divine, *The Johnson Years*, Vol. 3: *LBJ at Home and Abroad*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994, pp. 150–97; P. L. Hahn, 'An Ominous Moment: Lyndon Johnson and the Six Day War', in ed. M. Lerner, *Looking Back at LBJ: White House Politics in a New Light*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005, pp. 78–82.
5 Saunders to Rostow, 16 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XXI, pp. 41–48; NSC, *History of Middle East Crisis*, Vol. 9, appendix P, box 20, National Security File, Lyndon B. Johnson Library, pp. 1, 5–13 (hereafter *NSCH* with page numbers) (hereafter 'LBJL').
6 Johnson to Eshkol, 17 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, box 17, LBJL. See also Rostow to Johnson, 19 May 1967, Country File: Israel, box 144, NSF, LBJL; Smythe to Rusk, 20 May 1967, Rusk to Nolte, 22 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 13, box 22, LBJL; Johnson to Nasser, 22 May 1967, NSF, CO, box 144, LBJL; circular telegram by Rusk, 18 May 1967, Johnson to Eshkol, 21 May 1967, ibid.
7 Popper to Rusk, 19 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 28–29. See also circular telegram by State Department, 15 May 1967, ibid., pp. 3–4; Rusk to Embassy in Moscow, 18 May 1967, Denney to Rusk, 19 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 13, box 22, LBJL.
8 Rostow to Johnson, 24 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, p. 84. See also Goldberg to Rusk, 20 May 1967, ibid., pp. 36–39; Hughes to Rusk, 23 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 6, box 19, LBJL.
9 Barbour to Rusk, 21 May 1967, quoted in *NSCH*, 24; Nolte to Rusk, 23 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 13, box 22, LBJL; minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSF, NSC Meetings file, box 2, LBJL; Rostow to Johnson with attachment, 25 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 2, box 17, LBJL; CIA to White House Situation Room, 25 May 1967, CIA Records, On-line Retrieval Information System (ORIS).
10 Memorandum by Read, 23 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 79–80. See also memorandum for the record by Saunders, 24 May 1967, ibid., pp. 87–91.
11 Thompson to Rusk, 25 May 1967, ibid., pp. 98–9 Rostow to Johnson with attachment, 25 May 1967, ibid., pp. 98–99, 103–5. See also Davis to Rostow, 2 June 1967, ibid., pp. 258–59.
12 Johnson quoted in *NSCH*, p. 37; Rostow to Nolte, 22 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 13, box 22, LBJL. See also Rusk to Embassy at Cairo, 22 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, box 17, LBJL; Anderson to Johnson and Rusk, 2 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF.

13 Minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSC Meetings file, box 2, NSF, LBJL; Rusk to Johnson, 26 May 1967, Country File: Israel, box 142, NSF, LBJL; Rusk to Barbour, 3 June 1967, quoted in *NSCH*, p. 97. See also *NSCH*, pp. 60–61.
14 Nolte to Rusk, 26 May 1967, Office File of White House Aides: George Christian, box 4, LBJL. See also cable from Amman, 1 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL; circular cable by Rusk, 26 May 1967, *NSCH*, pp. 59–60; Rusk to Johnson, 26 May 1967, memorandum by Saunders, 27 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 2, box 17, LBJL.
15 Rusk to Johnson, 26 May 1967, Country File: Israel, box 142, NSF, LBJL; unsigned memorandum of conversation, 26 May 1967, Johnson to Eshkol, 27 May 1967, Eshkol to Johnson, 30 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, box 17, LBJL. See also memorandum for the record by Saunders, 19 May 1967, Rostow to Harman, 20 May 1967, Rostow to Johnson, 27 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, box 17, LBJL; minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSF, NSC Meetings file, box 2, LBJL; Rusk to Johnson, 26 May 1967, NSF, CO, box 142, LBJL.
16 Minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSC Meetings file, box 2, NSF, LBJL. See also *NSCH*, pp. 64–66; Eshkol to Johnson, 2 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, LBJL.
17 Johnson to Kosygin, 22 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, p. 68n. See also Rusk to Thompson, 23 May 1967, Kosygin to Johnson, 27 May 1967, Rostow to Johnson, 4 June 1967, ibid., pp. 65, 159–60, 272–77.
18 Barbour to Rusk, 27 May 1967, quoted in *NSCH*, 64; A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, New York: Norton, 2000, pp. 236–40 (quotation on p. 240); Eshkol to Johnson, 30 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 2, box 17, LBJL. See also circular cable by Rusk, 30 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 14, box 22, LBJL.
19 Rusk and McNamara to Johnson, 30 May 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL. See also *NSCH*, pp. 84–86, 93–96, 103–5.
20 Nolte to Rusk, 26 May 1967, Office File of White House Aides: George Christian, box 4, LBJL; Yost to Rusk, 2 June 1967, Country File: Egypt, box 107, NSF. See also Rusk to Nolte, 30 May 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 14, box 22, LBJL.
21 Battle to Control Group, 31 May 1967, quoted in *NSCH*, p. 76.
22 Wheeler to McNamara, 2 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL. See also minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSC Meetings file, box 2, NSF, LBJL.
23 Rostow to Johnson, 28 and 29 May 1967, Rusk and McNamara to Johnson, 30 May 1967, Hoopes to McNamara, 2 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL; Smythe to Rusk, 1 June 1967, Burns to Rusk, 2 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 14, box 22, LBJL.
24 Minutes of NSC meeting, 24 May 1967, NSF, NSC Meetings file, box 2, LBJL; Saunders to Rostow, 31 May 1967, LBJL; Rostow to Johnson, 2 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, LBJL. See also Rostow to Johnson with attachments, 1 June 1967, ibid.; Saunders to Rostow, 1 June 1967, NSF, NSC Meetings file, box 58, LBJL; situation report, 1 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 10, box 21, LBJL.
25 W. B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, Washington: Brookings, 1993, pp. 25–48 (quotation on p. 48); Shlaim, Op. cit., p. 241.
26 Circular cable from Rusk, 3 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL; memorandum for the record by Saunders, 7 January 1969 [7 June 1967], NSF, NSC Meetings file, box 2, LBJL; memorandum for the record by Saunders, 17 Nov. 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, box 18, LBJL. See also Johnson to

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27 Battle to Nolte, 3 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL. See also unsigned memorandum, 3 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18; circular cable from Rusk, 3 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL.

28 Rusk to Gromyko, 28 May 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 169–70.

29 Circular cable from Rusk, 3 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL.

30 Eshkol to Johnson, 5 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL. See also Davis to Rostow, 7 June 1967, ibid.; Rostow to Johnson, 7 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 4, box 18, LBJL; *NSCH*, pp. 106–23.

31 Circular cables from Rusk, 5, 7 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL; CIA situation reports, 6–10 June 1967, CIA Records, ORIS.

32 On the basis of the testimony of surviving crew members, writers such as James Ennes, Donald Neff, and Andrew Cockburn and Leslie Cockburn speculate that Israel attacked the ship to prevent the US from detecting Israeli mobilization against Syrian forces in the Golan Heights and reporting such intelligence to the regime in Damascus, while James Bamford suggests that Israel acted to prevent detection of its mass killings of Egyptian prisoners of war in nearby Sinai. On the other hand, scholars such as David Schoenbaum accept the Israelis' 'honest error' argument. J. M. Ennes, *Assault on the Liberty: The True Story of An Israeli Attack on an American Intelligence Ship*, New York: Random, 1979; D. Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: Six Days that Changed the Middle East*, New York: Linden, 1984, pp. 246–75; A. Cockburn and L. Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison*, New York: Harper Collins, 1991, pp. 152–53; J. Bamford, *Body of Secrets: Anatomy of the Ultra-Secret National Security Agency from the Cold War through the Dawn of a New Century*, New York: Doubleday, 2001, pp. 185–239; D. Schoenbaum, *The United States and the State of Israel*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 157–59.

33 Rusk to embassy Tel Aviv, 9 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 15, box 23, LBJL; unsigned memorandum, 9 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 4, box 18, NSF, LBJL. See also CIA situation report, 8 June 1967, CIA memorandum, 'The Attack on the Liberty', 13 June 1967, CIA Records, ORIS. During a conference on the 1967 war, held in 1992, former Israeli officials continued to argue that the attack was an honest mistake, while former US officials continued to reject that argument. See R. B. Parker, ed., *The Six-Day War: A Retrospective*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, especially the exchange between former US ambassador Talcott W. Seelye and former Israeli ambassador Ephraim Evron (pp. 266–70).

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35 Kosygin to Johnson, 5–6 June 1967, Johnson to Kosygin, 5–6 June 1967, ibid., pp. 300, 304, 323, 325–26; Rusk to Barbour, 6 June 1967, quoted in *NSCH*, p. 129; Nathaniel Davis to Rostow, 6 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL; Nolte to Rusk, 8–10 June 1967, NSF, Country File, box 107, LBJL.

36 Memorandum of conversation by Leddy, 2 June 1967, Smith to Helms, 9 June 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 237–44, 403–6; Johnson to Kosygin, 10 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 7, box 19, LBJL.

37 Kosygin to Johnson, 10 June 1967, ibid. See also memorandum of conversation by Gamon, 10 June 1967, Johnson to Kosygin, 10 June 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 417–18, 421.

38 Memorandum by Saunders, 22 October 1968, ibid., p. 410; Smith to Helms, 9 June 1967, ibid., pp. 403–6; unsigned memorandum of conversation, 14 June 1967, Diary Back-Up file, box 68, LBJL. See also Johnson to Kosygin, 10 June 1967, Kosygin to Johnson, 10 June 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 414–15.

39 Rostow to Johnson, 5 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, LBJL; Rostow to Embassy in London, 7 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 4, box 18, LBJL; Wriggins to Rostow, 8 June 1967, NSF, Country File, box 107, LBJL; State Department paper, 8 June 1967, paper by Brzezinski, 14 June 1967, NSF, *NSCH*, Vol. 7, box 19, LBJL; Bundy to Johnson, 9 June 1967, Diary Back-Up file, box 68, LBJL.

40 Levinson and Wattenberg to Johnson, 7 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 3, box 18, NSF, LBJL; Panzer to Johnson, 10 June 1967, WHCF, NS-D, box 193, LBJL; McPherson to Johnson, 11 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 4, box 18, NSF, LBJL; Smith to Johnson, 11 June 1967, Rusk to Embassy in Amman, 16 June 1967, Diary Back-Up file, boxes 68, 70, LBJL; Rostow to Johnson, 13 June 1967, *NSCH*, Vol. 5, box 18, NSF; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, pp. 126–27.

41 Smith to Helms, 9 June 1967, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 403–6.

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43 Memorandum by CIA, 13 July 1967, ibid., pp. 650–52. See also memorandum of conversation by Eugene Rostow, 20 June 1967, Goldberg to Rusk, 22 June 1967, Davis to Rostow, 29 June 1967, Goldberg to Rusk, 5 July 1967, memorandum of conversation by Kohler, 8 July 1967, Bundy to Johnson, 21 July 1967, ibid., pp. 522–24, 535–36, 586–87, 610–12, 620–23, 707–9.

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3 The politics of stalemate

The Nixon administration and the Arab–Israeli conflict, 1969–73

Salim Yaqub

Richard M. Nixon entered the White House in early 1969 amid speculation that he might follow an 'even-handed' policy on the Middle East, avoiding the markedly pro-Israel stance of his predecessor, Lyndon B. Johnson. Indeed, during Nixon's first year in office, his administration unveiled an ambitious plan for Middle East peace that infuriated the Israelis and provoked an extended crisis in US–Israeli relations. Starting in 1970, however, the Nixon administration de-emphasized its peace plan and adopted positions on the Arab–Israeli dispute that were more congenial to Israel. The following year the United States dramatically increased its military and economic assistance to Israel.[1]

This transformation in Nixon's policies is closely associated with the declining fortunes of Secretary of State William P. Rogers, who favoured an even-handed approach, and the rising star of National Security Adviser Henry A. Kissinger, who took a more pro-Israel position. Although Nixon had some sympathy for Rogers's perspective and initially assigned his secretary of state the leading role in Middle East policymaking, he was susceptible to Kissinger's argument that the Rogers approach was unworkable. But if Rogers's policy was unworkable it was largely because Nixon made it so. Recognizing the domestic political dangers of even-handedness, Nixon gave assurances to the Israelis that encouraged them to defy his own secretary of state, as the emerging documentary record increasingly shows. By late 1971, Rogers had little influence over US Middle East policy.

Still, Nixon recognized the dangers of allowing the Arab–Israeli impasse to continue indefinitely and, following his re-election in 1972, seemed determined to press Israel to adopt a more flexible stance in the dispute. For such pressure to succeed, however, the president needed maximum prestige, public support, and room for manoeuvre, all of which were in short supply once the Watergate scandal became a national obsession in the spring of 1973. The rapid erosion of Nixon's political authority, combined with the narrowness of his diplomatic vision, meant that a resumption of vigorous US diplomacy would have to await the aftermath of the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War.

I

The incoherence of Nixon's approach to the Arab–Israeli conflict had a good deal to do with the peculiar makeup of his foreign policy team. Determined to control foreign policy from the White House, the president charged Kissinger with keeping a tight leash on the policymaking bureaucracy and preventing it from pursuing independent initiatives. The practical effect of Kissinger's efforts was to diminish the authority of Rogers, especially on issues of crucial importance to Nixon, like the Vietnam War, China policy, and US–Soviet détente. To prevent the total usurpation of Rogers, Nixon left some policy areas in the domain of his secretary of state. 'But what Nixon gave with one hand', Kissinger writes in his memoirs, 'he tended to take away with the other. The areas he did not mind consigning [to Rogers] were those where success seemed elusive . . . or those where the risks of domestic reaction were high. The Middle East met both of Nixon's criteria. He calculated that almost any active policy would fail; in addition it would almost certainly incur the wrath of Israel's supporters. So he found it useful to get the White House as much out of the direct line of fire as possible.'[2] Apparently unaware of the cynical calculations that had placed Middle East policy under his authority, Rogers eagerly embraced the challenge of promoting a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Like many other State Department officials, Rogers assumed that the current Arab–Israeli impasse – especially Israel's occupation of Arab lands seized in the Arab–Israeli War of 1967 – was deeply damaging to US geopolitical interests. As long as that impasse continued, Rogers believed, Arab resentment against the United States would grow, facilitating the spread of Soviet influence and radical Arab nationalism in the Middle East. The best way to arrest the erosion in America's position was to promote a comprehensive settlement of the conflict, whereby the Arab states agreed to make peace with Israel in exchange for Israel's withdrawal from nearly all of the territory taken in 1967. 'The settlement we envisage', Rogers wrote Nixon in September 1969, 'must be based on a map not very different from the one that existed before the 1967 war.'[3]

At the start of Nixon's first term, Kissinger had no direct authority over Middle East policy, but he had strong views on the matter and frequently shared them with the president. Kissinger noted that two of the Arab states seeking to recover land from Israel, Egypt and Syria, had close ties to the Soviet Union. Helping either country regain territory would be tantamount to rewarding a Soviet client at the expense of Israel, America's ally. Such an outcome, Kissinger writes in his memoirs, would 'give the Soviets a dazzling opportunity to demonstrate their utility to their Arab friends.' Kissinger wanted to delay any settlement until after Arab countries had reduced their ties to the Soviet Union and reoriented themselves towards the United States. This would show 'that

in the Middle East friendship with the United States was the precondition to diplomatic progress.' Geopolitics aside, Kissinger doubted that the United States could actually induce Israel to withdraw from Arab territory on the scale envisioned by Rogers.[4]

Nixon had sympathy for both of these positions. On the one hand, he accepted Rogers's view that resentment over US support for Israel was radicalizing the Arab world and facilitating the spread of Soviet influence. On the other hand, he shared Kissinger's desire to confront the Soviet Union and prevent it from reaping the benefits of any Middle East settlement. 'In short', William B. Quandt writes, 'Nixon embodied in his own mind the two competing paradigms for how best to tackle the Arab–Israeli conflict. What came to be seen as a great battle between Kissinger and Rogers was also, apparently, an unresolved debate within Nixon's own mind.'[5]

Further complicating Nixon's outlook were domestic political considerations. Because of American Jews' historical attachment to the Democratic Party, Nixon could never hope to receive the support of most Jews. Indeed, Kissinger recalls, 'The President was convinced that most leaders of the Jewish community had opposed him throughout his political career' – an attitude Nixon reciprocated by making disparaging comments about Jews in private. At the same time, Nixon took pride in his ability to make Middle East policy entirely on the merits, without regard to domestic politics. Whenever he made a move that benefited Israel, he was quick to portray his action as solely motivated by the national interest and to point out how little he stood to gain by it politically. During the 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon delivered a prepared speech to a B'nai B'rith convention in which he promised to ensure that the military balance would 'be tipped in Israel's favor.' Prior to the event Nixon said to his speechwriter, 'You'll see, there won't be a single vote in this for me. They'll cheer and applaud, and then vote for the other guy, they always do. But we're right on the issue, and it wouldn't hurt to say so.' In a 1970 memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon remarked that Israeli leaders 'must recognize that our interests are basically pro-freedom and not just pro-Israel because of the Jewish vote. We are *for* Israel because Israel in our view is the only state in the Mideast which is *pro*-freedom and an effective opponent to Soviet expansion.'[6]

In denying any interest in the Jewish vote, Nixon was, of course, protesting too much. He cared deeply about what he saw as the ingratitude of American Jews and worked assiduously to reverse it. One way Nixon sought to do this was by demanding recognition from Jewish groups for every pro-Israel action he took. In September 1969, after sending the first instalment of fifty F-4 Phantom jets that the US government had agreed to sell to Israel, Nixon wrote a memorandum to Kissinger demanding an explanation for 'the absolute failure of the American Jewish community to express any appreciation by letter, calls

or otherwise' for the shipment.[7] More consequentially, Nixon sought to curry favour with American Jews by privately assuring them (along with the Israeli government) that Rogers did not have full presidential backing. While such assurances helped to reduce Jewish opposition to Nixon, they also hampered his administration's ability to promote a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

II

Shortly after taking office in early 1969, the Nixon administration began exploring prospects for an Arab–Israeli settlement through bilateral talks with the Soviet Union and four-power talks with the Soviet Union, Britain, and France. The administration also cooperated with the special United Nations mediator Gunnar Jarring, whose mission had been authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 242. The purpose of the bilateral and four-power talks was to find some common basis for settling the dispute that Jarring could then submit to Israel and the relevant Arab states.[8]

These exchanges took place against the backdrop of escalating violence along the Suez Canal. In early 1969 Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's president, authorized his military to launch a series of artillery and commando attacks against Israeli positions in the Sinai Peninsula that became known as the War of Attrition. Nasser's objective was to prevent the military status quo from solidifying and to force the international community to compel Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula and the other occupied Arab territories. Israel responded to the War of Attrition by staging commando raids and air attacks against Egyptian military bases and facilities on the west side of the canal.[9]

On 28 October 1969, the State Department presented the Soviets with its proposal for an Egyptian–Israeli settlement. In exchange for Israel's withdrawal from all of the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt was to make peace with Israel, allow Israeli vessels safe passage through the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, and agree to the demilitarization of portions of the Sinai. On 18 December, the State Department submitted a parallel proposal for a Jordanian–Israeli settlement, involving Israel's withdrawal from virtually all of the West Bank, a negotiated settlement of Jerusalem's status on the basis of shared Israeli and Jordanian administration of a unified city, and a resolution of the refugee issue on the basis of repatriation of some refuges and resettlement and compensation of the remainder. (Although the State Department did not rule out Syria's eventual inclusion in a settlement, it declined to issue a paper addressing Syrian claims because Damascus had rejected Resolution 242.) The above agreements were to be achieved through indirect negotiations among the parties that would, at a later date, give way to direct negotiations. All of these provisions, which Rogers publicly unveiled in a 9 December speech, became known collectively as the 'Rogers Plan'.[10]

Of the three Arab countries seeking to regain territory from Israel – Egypt, Jordan, and Syria – Egypt received the most attention from the United States. Syria, as noted, had rejected Resolution 242 and showed little interest in diplomacy. Jordan had a history of secret contacts with Israel, but it was too small, weak, and politically vulnerable to take the lead in any public peace efforts. Egypt, by contrast, was the most populous and influential Arab country, and its president remained an imposing symbol of Arab nationalism.[11] These facts, combined with the growing severity of the War of Attrition, caused US officials to view Egypt as the key to any Arab–Israeli settlement, a perception that lingered into the era of Anwar Sadat due to Sadat's own obvious interest in resolving the dispute. Accordingly, this essay will pay more attention to the role of Egypt than to that of any other Arab country or group.

Kissinger strongly opposed the Rogers Plan for the reasons mentioned above. The plan would allow Egypt, a client of the Soviet Union, to recover territory at the expense of Israel, an ally of the United States. He also doubted that the United States would be able to convince Israel to conduct a wholesale withdrawal from Arab land. Nixon, too, had serious reservations about the plan, but he thought there were advantages in allowing Rogers to present it. 'I knew that the Rogers Plan could never be implemented', he later acknowledged, 'but I believed that it was important to let the Arab world know that the United States did not automatically dismiss its case regarding the occupied territories or rule out a compromise of the conflicting claims. With the Rogers Plan on the record, I thought it would be easier for the Arab leaders to propose reopening relations with the United States without coming under attack from the hawks and pro-Soviet elements in their own countries.'[12]

While cunning in theory, Nixon's approach was unworkable in practice. It was unrealistic to suppose that the Rogers Plan could sit inertly 'on the record.' As long as Rogers believed he had presidential backing (and Nixon, who loathed personal confrontation, seems never to have suggested otherwise), the secretary could be expected to make vigorous efforts to bring his plan to fruition. Yet an untrammelled Rogers Plan spelled political danger for Nixon, as the Israeli government's bitter opposition to the scheme, a sentiment loudly echoed by Israel's American supporters, plainly demonstrated.[13] So Nixon, with Kissinger's eager assistance, resorted to covert means to subvert his administration's official Middle East policy.

The undermining of Rogers's efforts began in earnest in the fall of 1969. Kissinger writes in his memoirs that in late October, after authorizing the State Department to submit its proposal for an Egyptian–Israeli settlement to the Soviets, Nixon 'sought to hedge his bets by asking [Attorney General] John Mitchell and Leonard Garment – counselor to the President and adviser on Jewish affairs – to let Jewish community leaders know his doubts about State's diplomacy.' When the State

Department submitted its 18 December paper on Jordan, Kissinger continues, 'Nixon ordered that private assurances be given to [Israeli Prime Minister Golda] Meir via Len Garment that we would go no further and that we would not press our proposal.' American Jewish leaders received similar assurances from Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph Sisco, a frequent intermediary between the White House and the State Department who sometimes acted without Rogers's knowledge. In late December, Yitzhak Rabin, Israel's ambassador in Washington, privately warned Kissinger that if the State Department pursued the Rogers Plan, he would personally lead a public campaign in the United States against the initiative. According to Rabin's memoirs, Kissinger replied that Nixon 'has not spoken about the documents yet. He has given Rogers a free hand; but as long as he himself is not publicly committed, you have a chance of taking action. How you act is your affair. What you say to Rogers, or against him, is for you to decide. But I advise you.... Don't attack the president!' To Rogers, Kissinger said that Israeli criticism of the Rogers Plan would establish the initiative's credibility with the Arab states. '[I]n fact that's what we need. It wouldn't be authentic if the Israelis approved.'[14]

What Kissinger did not tell Rogers was the extent to which the White House itself was encouraging Jewish and Israeli attacks on the State Department. On 2 October Kissinger wrote to Nixon, 'As you requested, I told Len Garment to organize some Jewish Community protests against the State Department's attitude on the Middle East situation and Len promised to take prompt action.' Garment recalls that in January 1970, as Meir began a speaking tour of the United States, Kissinger told Garment, 'The president has a little errand for you.' Garment was to meet Meir at the airport and '[t]ell her wherever she goes, in all her speeches and press conferences, we want her to slam the hell out of Rogers and his plan.' A skeptical Garment called H. R. (Bob) Haldeman, the White House chief of staff, who confirmed that these were Nixon's instructions: 'That's affirmative. The president says go ahead.'[15]

On 22 December, the Israeli cabinet formally rejected the Rogers Plan, calling it 'an attempt to appease [Arab leaders] at the expense of Israel.' The next day the Soviet government, too, rejected the plan and informed Washington that Egypt had turned it down as well. The conventional wisdom among US officials was that 'the Soviets had let the United States down', as David Korn, a former State Department official, puts it. 'The Americans had been ready to take a position at odds with their client, Israel, but the Soviets had been unwilling to do the same with theirs, Egypt.'[16] What this assessment misses, of course, is the role of the Nixon White House in abetting Israel's own rejection of the American plan.

In January 1970, the War of Attrition sharply intensified, as the Israeli air force began conducting highly destructive 'deep penetration' bombing raids inside Egyptian territory, in an effort not just to force an end to the War of Attrition but also, apparently, to undermine the Nasser regime. Shocked by the severity of the raids, Nasser flew to Moscow and convinced the Soviet government to supply Egypt with new surface-to-air missiles, known as SAM-3s, capable of shooting down Israeli aircraft. Because the Egyptians were not yet trained in the use of the missiles, Soviet technicians operated the weapons. Initially deployed around Cairo and in the Nile Delta and Valley, the SAM-3s forced an end to Israel's deep penetration raids. In the late spring, Egypt began moving the missile sites closer to the Suez Canal, in an effort to extend the anti-aircraft shield to the east bank and thus permit an eventual Egyptian crossing of the canal. The Israelis ferociously attacked the sites but were unable to prevent the Egyptians from inching the missiles towards the canal.[17]

To offset the impact of the SAM-3s, the Israelis pressured the Nixon administration to sell them additional Phantom and Skyhawk aircraft, a demand supported by overwhelming majorities on Capitol Hill. Kissinger, too, favoured a substantial increase in military aid to Israel, on the grounds that the Soviet missile deployments in Egypt could not go unanswered. But State Department officials, noting that the SAM-3s had been deployed in response to Israel's deep penetration raids, argued that the best way to prevent further Soviet encroachment would be to urge restraint on Israel and limit its arsenal. Nixon, characteristically, was swayed by the arguments of both camps. In March, he permitted Rogers to announce that further deliveries of military aircraft to Israel would be held 'in abeyance' for the moment. Over the next several weeks, however, Nixon privately assured Rabin and Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban that Washington would quietly replenish Israeli aircraft lost in the War of Attrition.[18]

Indeed, even as he endorsed Rogers's efforts to encourage Israeli restraint, Nixon appeared to take visceral and vicarious pleasure in Israel's air attacks against Egypt. In his memoirs, Rabin describes a meeting with the president in March, shortly after the SAM-3s began appearing in Egypt. Nixon, with 'a strange glint in his eye', asked the ambassador, 'How do you feel about those missiles being manned by the Russians? Have you considered attacking them?' Meeting with Rabin and Eban in May, Nixon confessed, 'Every time I hear of you penetrating into their territory and hitting them hard, I get a feeling of satisfaction', though he also said that 'the military escalation can't be allowed to go on endlessly.' Steven Spiegel casts doubt on Rabin's characterization of Nixon's attitude, but similar statements by Nixon appear in the documentary record from this period. In June 1970, when internal unrest in Jordan caused US officials to worry about possible Syrian intervention

in that country (foreshadowing the crisis of September 1970), Haldeman wrote in his diary that Nixon asked Rogers over the phone, 'why doesn't Israel hit Syria[?]' A memorandum of a Kissinger phone conversation from that month records Nixon's comment that Israel 'ought to kick the Syrians – they are the most obnoxious.' Such remarks may not have reflected Nixon's considered judgement, but the ones Rabin heard reinforced the ambassador's impression that Washington favoured Israel's military operations against Egypt – an impression Rabin conveyed to his government.[19]

Whatever personal satisfaction Nixon may have derived from Israeli military action, in June he authorized Rogers to launch another, more modest initiative that became known as the second Rogers Plan. It called on Egypt and Israel to cease all military hostilities for three months' time and to 'refrain from changing the military status quo within zones extending 50 kilometers' on either side of the Suez Canal. The agreement also called for a resumption of Gunnar Jarring's mission, which had been suspended the previous year. The Israelis balked at the proposal. To gain their acceptance, Nixon sent a letter to Meir assuring Israel of continued arms deliveries and pledging that the United States 'will not press Israel to accept a solution to the [Palestinian] refugee problem that will alter fundamentally the Jewish character of the State of Israel.' The letter also pledged, 'no Israeli soldier should be withdrawn from the present lines until a binding contractual peace agreement satisfactory to you has been achieved.' On 31 July, Israel accepted the initiative, as Egypt had done a week earlier. The agreement went into effect at midnight on 7–8 August.[20]

The second Rogers Plan nearly collapsed at the outset as the Egyptians, exploiting a loophole in the hastily drafted agreement, rushed to install several additional missile sites on the west side of the canal. Subsequent Egyptian missile installations violated the actual letter of the agreement. The Israelis cried foul and suspended their participation in the Jarring talks, but the ceasefire itself held. Rogers, whose personal prestige was invested in the agreement, was slow to acknowledge the Egyptian violations, a fact that infuriated the Israelis and caused him to lose some credibility with Nixon. (US intelligence agencies suspected that Israel, too, was violating the ceasefire agreement by improving roads and fortifications on the east bank of the canal, but they were unable to document the violations fully because the Israeli government forbade American U-2 spy planes to fly over Israeli positions in the Sinai. Israeli defence minister Moshe Dayan even threatened to shoot down any U-2 plane that did so.)[21]

Rogers's stock suffered a further decline during the Jordan crisis of September 1970. A detailed chronology of the crisis is beyond the scope of this essay, so a bare summary will suffice. In early September, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a radical offshoot

of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), hijacked several passenger airplanes and forced three of them to land on a desert runway in Jordan, taking scores of passengers hostage. Seeing the hijacking as an intolerable challenge to his authority, King Hussein of Jordan dispatched his army to crush the PLO, which had established a state-within-a-state on the territory of his country. On 19 September, a column of Syrian tanks crossed into northern Jordan, apparently to assist the PLO. Kissinger, who managed the administration's response to the crisis, had little difficulty convincing Nixon that the Syrian incursion was a Soviet-sponsored test of American resolve, though other US officials questioned this conclusion.[22] Eager to shore up the pro-Western Hussein yet fearing the consequences of direct US military intervention, Nixon and Kissinger asked Israel if it would be prepared to intervene on Hussein's behalf should such an operation become necessary, and Israel said yes. In the end, Hussein succeeded in turning back the Syrian invasion and defeating the PLO without external assistance, but the crisis had far-reaching consequences. Not only did it appear to vindicate Kissinger's globalist perspective; it allowed the Israelis to score points with Nixon. Rogers's even-handedness and inclination to downplay the US–Soviet rivalry were correspondingly devalued.[23]

Some scholars have argued that the Jordan crisis convinced Nixon that Israel was a 'strategic asset' that could help the United States combat Soviet influence and radical nationalism in the Middle East.[24] This is a dubious claim. While the Israeli government and its American supporters eagerly promoted the 'strategic asset' thesis, there is little evidence that Nixon seriously expected to face subsequent crises in which the threat or reality of Israeli intervention in a neighbouring country would serve the strategic interests of the United States. Rather, the Jordan crisis, by recasting Middle Eastern conflicts as proxy struggles in the Cold War, enhanced Israel's symbolic status as a loyal ally whose sensitivities and concerns merited special deference, especially when they clashed with the claims of Moscow's regional clients. Similarly, by highlighting Soviet adventurism in the Middle East, the Jordan crisis lent credence to Kissinger's view that the United States should subordinate Arab–Israeli peacemaking to combating Soviet influence in the region. These changes in perception made it harder for the Nixon administration to resist Israeli requests for increased military aid or to press Israel to be more flexible in Arab–Israeli diplomacy.

III

On 28 September 1970, after brokering a ceasefire agreement in Cairo between King Hussein and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, Nasser died of a heart attack. Nasser's successor, Anwar Sadat, was widely seen (both at home and abroad) as a transitional president who would soon make way

for a more commanding figure. From the start, however, Sadat showed a willingness to act boldly on the diplomatic stage. In a 4 February 1971 speech, he offered to extend the Egyptian–Israeli ceasefire and reopen the Suez Canal, which had been closed since 1967, in exchange for Israel's partial withdrawal from the Sinai 'as the first stage of a timetable which will be prepared later to implement the other provisions of the Security Council Resolution [242].' Later that month, in response to a set of questions posed by Ambassador Jarring (who had resumed his mission in late 1970), Sadat indicated that Egypt would conclude a peace agreement with Israel if it fully withdrew from the Sinai and from the other Arab territories seized in 1967. It was the first time an Arab leader had publicly contemplated formal peace with Israel. Equally noteworthy was Sadat's willingness for Israel's withdrawal to be accomplished in stages, a departure from the standard Arab interpretation of Resolution 242. The Israeli government, responding to the same questions from Jarring, rejected Sadat's call for a predetermined outcome and said that peace would come only through direct negotiations 'without prior conditions.' But the Israelis also insisted that 'Israel will not withdraw to the pre-June 5, 1967, lines', which sounded for all the world like a prior condition. Unable to bridge the gap between the parties, Jarring abandoned his mission for good.[25]

Over the coming weeks, that gap became clearer as the Egyptian and Israeli governments spelled out their positions in greater detail. Egypt insisted that in exchange for the reopening of the Suez Canal, Egyptian forces must be permitted to cross the canal and reoccupy the Sinai Peninsula as far east as the Mitla and Giddi passes. Israel could temporarily remain in eastern Sinai, but it would have to vacate the whole peninsula within six months' time. These moves would be linked to an Israeli commitment to withdraw from all of the remaining occupied territories. For its part, Israel was willing to conclude a limited agreement involving an Israeli withdrawal to a line ten kilometres east of the canal, but the agreement could not be linked to a final settlement. And in the event of a final settlement, Israel must keep Sharm al-Shaykh and an access road to it, the Golan Heights, East Jerusalem, and substantial portions of the West Bank.[26]

The State Department was encouraged by Sadat's initiative and lobbied Nixon for an all-out American effort to press Israel to move further in Egypt's direction. Indeed, many US officials felt that the broader regional climate in early 1971 presented Washington with a once-in-a-generation opportunity to settle the Arab–Israeli conflict. As a State Department paper noted in early March,

> There are more indicators favorable to a solution today than at any time since the creation of the State of Israel. The UAR and Jordan have said explicitly they are ready to make a peace agreement with

> Israel. . . . Syria has more pragmatic leadership;[27] the fedayeen are in disarray; the Soviets, while not positively helpful, are at least not obstructive; and there is a peace psychology in the area deriving from a seven-month ceasefire. Also, there is general recognition in the area that . . . only the U.S. can bring about a peaceful settlement. This sets the stage for a total effort to be made promptly . . . which engages the resources of the U.S. and the President.

Harold Saunders, Kissinger's principal aide for Middle East policy, agreed that the Egyptians 'have made the commitment to peace that the Israelis have demanded as a prerequisite to further progress. . . . Having done this, they have clearly passed responsibility back to Israel.'[28]

In early March, the State Department presented Nixon with a detailed and ambitious strategy for taking advantage of Sadat's overtures. According to that strategy, Israel would be encouraged to reach a preliminary, or 'interim', agreement involving the reopening of the Suez Canal and an Israeli pullback in western Sinai, with the understanding that Washington would then pursue a comprehensive settlement along the lines of the Rogers Plan. In exchange for Israel's cooperation, the United States would pledge to sell Israel arms on a long-term basis, extend a stronger security guarantee to Israel, and provide major financial contributions for the resettlement of refugees and the conversion of the Israeli economy to a peacetime footing.[29]

Kissinger strongly opposed State's approach. Ever willing to view the Arab–Israeli conflict through the lens of the Cold War, he saw no point in pushing for Israeli withdrawals in the Sinai or elsewhere without first securing Soviet concessions in exchange. '[Anatoly] Dobrynin has been on his knees with me for things like this', Kissinger said to Bob Haldeman, referring to the Soviet ambassador in Washington. 'We might have gotten something from them and this way will get nothing.' Moreover, Kissinger realized that any attempt to move Israel back to the pre-June 1967 lines would cause a bitter and politically costly confrontation with the Jewish state. As he warned the president on 9 March, the State Department was proposing 'a major approach to the Israelis that they have almost no choice but to reject. . . . You will recall the violent Israeli reaction of January 1970 against the US positions of the previous October and December.'[30] Kissinger neglected to mention the part he and Nixon had played in generating that 'violent Israeli reaction' in the first place.

Nixon, however, was willing to give Rogers an opportunity to pursue a settlement. In a major address on foreign policy in late February, the president took the unusual steps of publicly associating himself with the Rogers Plan and endorsing State's position 'that any changes in [Israel's] prewar borders should be insubstantial.' In mid-April, he authorized Rogers to travel to the Middle East to explore the possibilities of an

interim Egyptian–Israeli agreement. 'This of course has Henry going right up the wall', Haldeman wrote in his diary.[31]

Still, Nixon was determined to avoid what he called 'a blow-up with Israel', and he offered assurances that sharply limited Rogers's discretion. Three days after publicly endorsing 'insubstantial' border changes, Nixon privately instructed Kissinger to 'go to the Israelis, let them know my position on the Golan Heights and assure them I will support them.' Kissinger, John Mitchell, and Leonard Garment quietly reminded Jewish leaders that US Middle East policy was not confined to State Department initiatives. In a 4 March press conference, Nixon promised that he would not 'impose a settlement in the Mideast' and would continue to supply Israel with arms. On 22 April, shortly before Rogers embarked on his Middle East trip, Nixon 'told the Secretary to make it clear to Mrs. Meir that we will continue to maintain the [military] balance' between Israel and the Arab states. Rogers promised that he would 'urge progress by Israel but in no way will he dictate anything to them.'[32]

These ground rules and assurances helped to guarantee that Rogers would get nowhere with the Israelis. Confident that Washington would neither insist on its own position nor cut off the arms flow, Israel had little incentive to soften its stance. Meeting in New York on 20 April with Yigal Allon, Israel's deputy prime minister, Rogers presented the State Department view that in light of the setbacks that radical Arab nationalists had recently suffered, Israel's position was far more secure than before. Indeed, the 'general climate and situation in [the] Arab world have never been better for peace.' Israel should seize the moment and 'minimize its claims to territory.' Allon agreed that Israel was in a stronger position but drew exactly the opposite conclusion. He said 'that if there were [a] new War of Attrition, it would be no worse than before: Israel is better off today. As for [the] Soviets, they cannot invade Israel and will not drop an atomic bomb. Israel had demonstrated in September 1970 that it is more an asset than a liability to [the] USG[overnment].' Washington, therefore, should support Israel's demands for substantial 'border changes.'[33]

Rogers was no more successful in convincing Meir, whom he met in Jerusalem during his trip to the Middle East in early May. In what Eban recalled as 'an unpromisingly sharp exchange', Rogers told Meir that Sadat's declared willingness to make peace with Israel had dramatically altered the situation. '[Y]ou must agree that it came as a surprise, certainly it came as a surprise to the United States.... You said it wouldn't happen. And we are in a position where he has done the very things that we thought he wouldn't do.' It was thus up to Israel to respond positively. Meir countered that Sadat's refusal to agree to an indefinite ceasefire gave Israel little incentive to withdraw from its current position along the canal: 'If shooting begins [again], this is the best line that Israel can

hope for.' Meir and her colleagues reiterated that any Israeli withdrawal in the Sinai must be limited to ten kilometres east of the Suez Canal, that such a withdrawal could not be linked to an overall peace settlement, and that in a final settlement Israel must acquire substantial territories across the board. Rogers had little leverage to induce greater flexibility.[34]

Rogers and the State Department were in a weak position to begin with, but they compounded their predicament with diplomatic blunders. While visiting Israel, Rogers found that Moshe Dayan, Israel's defence minister, had a more flexible stance than that of his colleagues. Dayan thought that Israel should permit Egyptian civilians and technicians (but not military forces) to cross to the east bank of the canal and that such a move could be followed by further discussions about Israeli withdrawal. Eager to break the stalemate, Rogers sent Joe Sisco to Cairo to convey Dayan's ideas to Sadat, who gained the impression that these were authoritative Israeli proposals. When it later emerged that Meir did not endorse them, Rogers and the State Department lost credibility with Sadat. In late May, Donald Bergus, the head of the US Interests Section in Cairo (in the absence of formal diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt), helped Egyptian officials compose a diplomatic note detailing Egypt's position on an interim agreement. When Bergus's role subsequently leaked to the press, the Israelis were outraged about what they saw as US–Egyptian collusion. The State Department disavowed Bergus's action, in turn angering the Egyptians.[35]

In mid-July Nixon authorized Sisco to return to Israel to see if its government was prepared to be more flexible. But the president, Quandt writes, 'pointedly refused . . . to promise that he would exert pressure on Israel if Sisco encountered difficulty. In brief, Sisco was on his own.' Not surprisingly, the Israelis showed no willingness to modify their stance. 'His trip produced so little', Kissinger recalls, 'that Sisco did not even bother to stop in Cairo on the way home.'[36]

As Rogers's mission collapsed, Sadat was beginning his slow-motion exodus from the Soviet camp. In May Sadat dismissed and arrested 'Ali Sabri, the pro-Soviet Secretary General of the Arab Socialist Union, charging that Sabri had been plotting a coup. Several of Sabri's alleged co-conspirators were jailed as well. Two months later, Sadat helped the Sudanese government put down an attempted communist coup by arranging for loyalist Sudanese troops to be flown to Khartoum from the Suez Canal zone. Although Kissinger had long believed that an Arab–Israeli settlement would not be possible '[u]ntil some Arab state showed a willingness to separate from the Soviets', these developments scarcely altered his aversion to vigorous diplomacy. To some extent, this stance can be attributed to the subsequent signing of an Egyptian–Soviet friendship treaty, which, while relatively innocuous in content, muddied the picture of Sadat's geopolitical intentions. Mostly, though, Kissinger

remained convinced that any attempt to alter Israel's position would spark a fierce confrontation with its government, an increasingly distasteful prospect as the 1972 presidential election approached.[37]

Nixon seemed to be reaching the same conclusion. By the late summer of 1971, Kissinger writes, 'Nixon did not believe he could risk recurrent crises in the Middle East in an election year. He therefore asked me to step in, if only to keep things quiet.' Kissinger complied by establishing a back-channel dialogue on the issue with the Soviet government, quite an irony considering Kissinger's long-standing opposition to Soviet involvement in Middle East diplomacy. Yet the purpose of the dialogue was not to achieve substantive progress but rather to draw the Soviets 'into protracted and inconclusive negotiations until either they or some Arab country changed their position' of demanding a full Israeli withdrawal from Arab land.[38] Given the unlikelihood of either occurrence, this was essentially a strategy of forestalling serious diplomacy until after Nixon had been safely re-elected.

In December 1971, Golda Meir visited Washington and secured two key pledges from the Nixon administration. First, in a departure from the previous practice of offering only short-term arms deals, the United States agreed to supply Israel with Phantom and Skyhawk aircraft over the next three years. Second, the United States assured the Israelis that they would no longer be bound to the Rogers Plan. At about this time, Quandt writes, '[t]he White House explicitly told the State Department not to consider any new initiatives until after the elections.' Quandt does not elaborate on this White House injunction, but in January 1972 Haldeman wrote in his diary that Nixon

> had a directive that Henry wanted sent to Rogers about the planes to Israel and the Israel-Egypt negotiations. P[resident] decided that I should handle the directive. . . . He wants Rogers to know that he expects him to play it politically, that we can't have the American Jews bitching about the plane deliveries. We can't push Israel too hard and have a confrontation, so he's to keep Sisco slowed down. . . . We must not let this issue hurt us politically.

Rogers and Sisco got the message. In a 2 February memorandum, Sisco gave the Israeli government an extraordinary assurance: 'The U.S. will not put forward to Egypt, nor will it support[,] any suggestions or proposals without making every effort to seek and to achieve full prior understanding with the Government of Israel.' That same day Rogers wrote Nixon that '[i]n this year of 1972' the State Department would 'avoid confrontations with the Israelis on various issues, and avoid putting forward American blueprints to resolve the problem.' Grateful for these gestures, the Israeli government all but endorsed Nixon for re-election.[39]

Kissinger was riding high. Not only had he wrested Middle East policy from Rogers; he was enjoying surprising success in his efforts to soften up the Soviets. During the US–Soviet summit meeting in Moscow in May 1972, Kissinger convinced Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to accept a joint communiqué on the Arab–Israeli dispute containing anaemic formulations that tended to favour the Israeli position. 'The principles were weaker than Resolution 242', Kissinger writes; 'they stated that border rectifications were possible (omitting the modifier 'minor', which had become sacramental in official documents); the formulations were ambiguous about the extent of intended Israeli withdrawals. I have never understood why Gromyko accepted them, unless it was exhaustion.' Sadat was shocked by the communiqué, which suggested that the Soviets were prepared to sacrifice Arab interests for the sake of détente.[40]

In July 1972, Sadat stunned the international community by expelling thousands of Soviet military personnel from Egypt. In part, he was attempting to register Egypt's displeasure with the US–Soviet communiqué and to shock the Soviets into providing Egypt with the arms it would need for a hostile crossing of the Suez Canal. In part, Sadat's move was directed at Kissinger, who had recently passed word via a Saudi official that Washington would not press Israel to make concessions as long as Soviet troops remained in Egypt. The Soviets, apparently chastened by the expulsion order, quickly agreed to provide Egypt many of the weapons systems they had previously withheld. Kissinger, by contrast, declined to exploit the opening Sadat had created. Certainly the timing of the move – just a month prior to the Republican National Convention – was a powerful argument for inaction. So, too, was Sadat's failure to seek an American *quid pro quo* prior to acting, an omission that reinforced Kissinger's view of Sadat as an inconsequential figure whose geopolitical manoeuvrings could be safely ignored.[41]

Around the same time he expelled the Soviets, Sadat informed Washington via intermediaries that he was interested in secret, high-level discussions with the US government. Kissinger indicated that he would be willing to meet secretly with Hafiz Ismail, Sadat's national security adviser. But Kissinger was in no hurry to set a date for the meeting. As he reminded Nixon in a confidential memorandum months later, 'We responded sympathetically [to Sadat's request for a secret dialogue] but did not go immediately into substantive exchanges. This was partly due to our election, partly because of the Vietnam negotiations, but also partly deliberate. We have seen so often that over-eagerness on our part only generates expectations and illusions that far outrun the substantive discussions.' Kissinger and Ismail would not meet until February 1973, by which time Sadat had already opted for war.[42]

IV

In November 1972, Nixon was overwhelmingly elected to a second presidential term. In the immediate aftermath of his re-election, most of the energy the president devoted to foreign affairs was focused on achieving a Vietnam settlement, which was finally concluded in January 1973. In early February, however, Nixon began expressing keen anxiety over the continuing Arab–Israeli impasse, which he blamed primarily on Israeli intransigence. No longer concerned about his own electoral prospects, he believed he was at last in a position to get tough with the Israelis. On 2 February at Camp David, Nixon discussed the issue with British Prime Minister Edward Heath. According to the British government's transcript of the conversation, Nixon remarked 'that every other year the United States Government were inhibited, by one or [an]other of their Elections, from taking any action in relation to the Middle East which would be unacceptable to Israeli opinion. 1973, however, was a year in which they were free from this particular inhibition.' The next day Nixon recorded in his diary, 'I hit Henry hard on the Mideast thing.... [W]e have got to get the Israelis moved off of their intransigent position... I am determined to bite this bullet and do it now because we just can't let the thing ride and have a hundred million Arabs hating us and providing a fishing ground not only for radicals but, of course, for the Soviets.' Later that month Nixon wrote in the margins of a memorandum from Kissinger, 'we are now Israel's *only* major friend in the world. I have yet to see *one iota* of give on their part – conceding that Jordan & Egypt have not given enough on their side. This is the time to get moving – & [Israel] must be told that *firmly*.'[43]

Kissinger, by contrast, was unenthusiastic about launching a Middle East initiative that spring. He thought little could be accomplished until after Israel's next national elections, then scheduled for late October. Nor did he share Nixon's concern about the dire consequences of ongoing stalemate. In a telephone conversation with Sisco on 22 February, Kissinger argued that the *status quo* suited US interests and that the Arabs should be left to stew in their own juice. 'Give it two years and let enough frustration build up', he said, 'and then there is a chance' for a settlement. 'The frustration level is at a... peak right now', Sisco protested. In a February 23 memorandum, responding to Nixon's request for new policy options for the Middle East, Kissinger defended a more modest postponement: 'it is difficult to argue that another few months' delay in moving toward a negotiation would be disastrous for US interests.' 'I totally disagree', Nixon wrote in the margin. 'This thing is getting ready to blow.'[44]

In that memo, Kissinger outlined three options for addressing the Egyptian–Israeli impasse. The first option was to '*stand back* and let the two sides reflect further on their position.' The second was to 'renew

the efforts to achieve an *interim settlement* that lost momentum in 1971.' The third was to 'try to work privately toward an *understanding on the framework of an overall settlement*' between Egypt and Israel. Nixon firmly rejected the first option but favoured a combination of the second and third: while the State Department pursued an interim agreement along a "public track", Kissinger should explore the outlines of a possible overall settlement via a private back channel. 'Nixon did not', Kissinger writes, 'favor me with a hint as to how I might accomplish the feat of a "public track" consisting of State's scheme for an interim partial settlement which was an alternative to and in a sense incompatible with negotiation of an overall settlement.'[45] A more basic problem was that the proposed 'overall settlement' was confined to Israel and Egypt, even though Sadat had long insisted that any Sinai agreement would have to be linked to an Israeli commitment to withdraw from all the territories occupied since 1967. The Israeli government had been equally adamant about denying such a linkage, and Nixon, for all his brave talk about getting tough with the Israelis, was implicitly endorsing their position.

In late February, Hafiz Ismail, Kissinger's Egyptian counterpart, made his long-awaited visit to the United States. After a brief meeting with Nixon in Washington, during which the president outlined the two-track approach, Ismail spent two days with Kissinger at a private estate in Connecticut, where the two men had a cordial but inconclusive exchange. Ismail reiterated Cairo's position that 'Egypt could not think in terms of a separate Egyptian settlement unless it is in the context of a general framework of a Middle East settlement.' This meant an Israeli withdrawal from all the lands occupied in 1967 and, sometime thereafter, a resolution of the Palestinian issue – perhaps a two-state solution. Such a comprehensive settlement could be implemented in stages, but 'those . . . stages must be interrelated so they can lead to a defined goal.' Without addressing the merits of Ismail's statements, Kissinger cautioned 'that US persuasiveness with Israel depends very heavily on the positions that Egypt advances.' For progress to be possible, the United States 'must be in a position to answer the question: What is Israel getting out of a proposed agreement?' Kissinger floated the concept of separating the issues of sovereignty and physical control; perhaps Israel could recognize Egypt's theoretical sovereignty over the Sinai but still be permitted to station forces on the peninsula. Ismail showed little interest in this idea.[46]

This, at least, is how the Kissinger–Ismail encounter is recorded in US government documents and Kissinger's memoirs. Ismail provided Sadat with his own account of the exchange, portions of which Sadat quotes in his memoirs. According to that version, Kissinger told Ismail, 'I advise Sadat . . . to be realistic. We live in a real world and cannot build anything on fancies and wishful thinking. Now in terms of reality you are the

defeated side and shouldn't, therefore, make demands acceptable only from victors. You must make some concessions if the U.S.A. is to help you.' Though it is unlikely that Kissinger spoke quite so bluntly, this was a fair rendition of his underlying message. As long as the military status quo persisted, neither the Israelis nor the Americans would have much incentive to take Sadat seriously. By now, Sadat was already engaged in secret discussions with the Syrian government to plan a joint military operation in the Sinai and the Golan. Ismail's report only confirmed to Sadat the necessity of this course.[47]

A few days later Golda Meir visited Washington. Meeting with Nixon on 1 March, Meir accepted the two-track approach. She also offered two modest concessions: if an interim agreement could be concluded with Egypt, Israeli forces would withdraw to the Mitla and Giddi passes, and Egyptian police units could cross to the east bank of the Suez Canal. Meir continued, however, to reject any linkage between an interim agreement and a final settlement, and to rule out a return to the 1967 borders. True to form, Nixon advised Meir not to inform the State Department of the Israeli concessions but rather to confine them to Kissinger's channel. 'State has to be doing something', the president acknowledged, '. . . but don't give them the whole picture.' Nixon then pledged to provide Israel with another 100 Phantom and Skyhawk aircraft. 'We never had it so good', said a grateful Meir.[48]

In the aftermath of the Ismail and Meir visits, Nixon remained concerned about the lack of movement in Arab–Israeli diplomacy, a problem he continued to blame on Israeli foot-dragging. 'In the Middle East', he said at an 18 March cabinet meeting, 'is the problem of Israel. Israel's lobby is so strong that Congress is not reasonable. When we try to get Israel [to be] reasonable, the excuse is an Israeli election, the U.S. election, or something. . . . We have to have policies which don't allow an obsession with one state to destroy our status in the Middle East.'[49]

In the weeks and months that followed, however, neither Nixon nor his administration made any discernible effort to act on these words. Despite the rather peripheral nature of Meir's concessions of early March, Nixon behaved as if they absolved Israel of any further obligation to break the impasse. The ball was now in Egypt's court. 'If Egypt would move a bit', he told Liberian president William Tolbert in June, 'maybe we could get Israel to move.' On other Arab–Israeli matters, the Nixon administration was about as wedded to Israeli positions as it had been in 1972 – even more so in some cases. US officials kept silent over Israel's expropriation of Arab land and construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Sinai Peninsula. In May 1973 the US delegation at the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) cast the sole vote opposing a resolution criticizing Israel for altering the physical and cultural landscape of Jerusalem through archaeological excavations. 'It seems to me staggering',

wrote a British Foreign Office official, 'that the Americans, whose position on Jerusalem has hitherto been very sound, . . . now have lined up with the Israelis even on this. . . . [T]he US delegation [to UNESCO] was too embarrassed even to explain its vote.'[50]

How to account for the discrepancy between Nixon's avowed determination to get tough with the Israelis and the lack of any corresponding action? One possibility is that Nixon never really intended to press the Israelis and that his expressions of impatience were simply a way of blowing off steam, an interpretation Kissinger advances in his memoirs.[51] With Nixon, there always was a potential gap between expression and intention, and the vehemence with which he blasted Israeli intransigence in early 1973 was indeed out of keeping with the modesty and narrowness of the remedy he proposed. That said, Nixon's criticisms of the Israeli attitude in early 1973 are too frequent and extensive to be completely dismissed in this way. A second possibility is that Nixon came to accept Kissinger's view that any major initiative should wait until after the Israeli elections scheduled for late October. Although Nixon rejected this argument on a handful of occasions in February and March, he seems to have dropped his objection thereafter.[52] Kissinger indicates in his memoirs that, from the spring of 1973 until the start of the October War, he operated on the assumption that some modest American initiative, probably to achieve an interim agreement in the Sinai, would be launched in the aftermath of the Israeli elections.[53] Presumably Nixon approved of this course.

A further impediment to vigorous diplomacy was the Watergate scandal, which became a serious threat to Nixon in March and April 1973, shortly after he began his verbal campaign against the Israelis. Watergate not only consumed the president's time and energy but rapidly depleted his political authority. Nixon was suddenly in no position to invite a public confrontation with Israel and face the bruising domestic battle that would surely ensue. In such a battle Nixon's strongest opposition would emanate from Congress, the very body that now held his political fate in its hands. Speaking to a British diplomat in June, Harold Saunders acknowledged that the Middle East impasse was untenable. 'Saunders', the diplomat reported, 'indicated that the difficulty was not so much one of recognizing the dangers as of finding a practical way of tackling them. He . . . alluded to the Administration's especial difficulty in taking steps which might provoke a confrontation with the Jewish lobby and their congressional supporters when they [the administration] have been weakened domestically by the Watergate Affair.'[54]

In the summer of 1973 there were growing indications that the Arab states were reaching the limits of their patience, yet US policy remained unchanged. The Egyptian military conducted ostentatious manoeuvres on the west bank of the Suez Canal, and Arab and Soviet leaders warned Washington that war could erupt at any time. American intelligence

agencies discounted this possibility, reasoning that, since the Arabs were sure to lose any war with Israel, they would be crazy to start one. Oil-producing Arab states grew increasingly explicit about their willingness to curtail oil exports to the West to force a change in US Middle East policy. Kissinger was unimpressed. In late May, he spoke by phone with Deputy Secretary of State Kenneth Rush, who told him that American oil company executives were alarmed: 'all the heads of these companies say we've got to do something to show – to calm this emotional upsurge in the Middle East.' 'But they are always wrong Ken', Kissinger said. 'Every year they have another pet project to calm it, and they are never right.'[55] Nixon took the oil weapon more seriously, but with the further unravelling of Watergate – especially the exposure of the secret White House taping system in July – his control over Middle East policy was rapidly dwindling.[56]

In August Nixon named Kissinger secretary of state, handing him a final victory in his four-year-old battle with Rogers. In a 5 September press conference, Nixon said that he had directed Kissinger to assign 'the highest priority' to seeking a settlement of the Arab–Israeli dispute. Kissinger, however, was lowering expectations. 'There won't be a big initiative when I come in', he assured Israel's ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, on 10 September. Speaking to the Spanish foreign minister on 4 October (and taking a small swipe at his predecessor), Kissinger said, 'I would emphasize . . . that there would not be a "Kissinger Plan" for the Middle East.' Two days later the October War broke out.[57]

V

Even if Nixon had succeeded in launching a vigorous Middle East initiative in the spring or summer 1973, it is highly doubtful that such an initiative would have prevented the October War. Probably the only action that could have convinced Egypt and Syria to cancel their planned offensive would have been an all-out American campaign to compel Israel to withdraw to the pre-June 1967 lines. Such a campaign was never in the cards, with or without the constraints imposed by the Watergate scandal or by Israel's electoral calendar. Indeed (to continue the playing-card metaphor), what the whole 1969–73 experience shows is how completely the deck was stacked against any Middle Eastern settlement involving a full Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory. Israel's military power on the ground, its political influence in the United States, and its determination to seek substantial border revisions were nearly insurmountable. And since neither Egypt nor any other Arab country could accept border revisions – or even a bilateral agreement that restored all of its own territory while leaving other Arab lands occupied – it is tempting to conclude that no settlement was possible between 1969 and 1973.

If one resists that temptation, however, and tries to identify points on the chronology when a settlement was conceivable, the spring of 1971 emerges as one of the more promising moments. Sadat was then at his most conciliatory, his decision for war had yet to be made, the American presidential election was a year-and-a-half away, and Kissinger's vanquishing of Rogers was not yet completed. With full and unwavering presidential backing, Rogers might have succeeded in challenging Israel's position of precluding, from the outset, any return to the 1967 lines. This in turn might have enabled him to soften Sadat's insistence on a prearranged timetable for an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied territory. We will never know whether, under more ambiguous terms of that sort, a limited agreement over the Sinai might have catalysed a broader settlement. But we can point to the circumstances that made this question unanswerable, chief among them a president's failure to support the official policy of his own government.

Notes

1 C. Mark, 'Israel: U.S. Foreign Assistance', Congressional Research Service, 2002, http://www.adc.org/IB85066.pdf.
2 H. Kissinger, *White House Years*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1979, p. 348.
3 W. Rogers quoted in D. Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East Since 1945*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, p. 285.
4 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 352, 354.
5 W. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli Conflict Since 1967*, rev. ed., Berkeley: University of California, 2001, p. 59.
6 Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 564; W. Safire, *Before the Fall: An Inside View of the Pre-Watergate White House*, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975, pp. 565–66; R. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*, New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1978, pp. 481–82, emphasis in original.
7 Nixon to Kissinger, 22 September 1969, B. Oudes, ed., *From the President: Richard Nixon's Secret File*s, New York: Harper & Row, 1989, p. 49.
8 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 63–64.
9 B. Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999, pp. 348–52. For a full account of the War of Attrition, see D. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1969–1970*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1992.
10 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 63–68.
11 Another crucial Arab actor was the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was just then emerging as a fully independent movement. But in 1969 the PLO was still years away from embracing a diplomatic resolution of the conflict or from confining its territorial claim to a fraction of Mandate Palestine. Consequently, US officials had difficulty envisioning a diplomatic role for the PLO.
12 Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 479.
13 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 163.
14 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 372, 376; P. Golden, *Quiet Diplomat: A Biography of Max M. Fisher*, New York: Cornwall, 1992, p. 201; Y. Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1979, p. 162; telephone conversation, Kissinger and Rogers, 11 December 1969, Nixon Presidential Materials Project

(hereafter 'NPMP'), Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Chronological File (hereafter 'HAK/Telcons'), box 3, folder: '1969 9–16 Dec', National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD, USA (hereafter 'NA').

15 Kissinger to Nixon, 2 October 1969, NPMP, NSC Files, Country Files, Middle East (hereafter 'NSC/ME'), box 644, folder: 'Middle East—General, Vol. II (Oct 69–Jan 70) [2 of 2]', NA; L. Garment, *Crazy Rhythm: My Journey from Brooklyn, Jazz, and Wall Street to Nixon's White House*, Cambridge: Da Capo, 2001, p. 192.

16 Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 161, 163–64; Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 68–69.

17 Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 355–59; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 165–204, 225–34.

18 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 71–73; S. Spiegel, *The Other Arab–Israeli Conflict: Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985, pp. 189–92; Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 569–75; Rabin, *Memoirs*, pp. 171–72, 175.

19 Rabin, *Memoirs*, pp. 172, 175; Spiegel, *Other Arab–Israeli Conflict*, p. 189; H. R. Haldeman notes for 11 June 1970, *H. R. Haldeman: Notes of White House Meetings, 1969–1973*, Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1987, microfiche #5-17-45; telephone conversation, Kissinger and Nixon, 27 June 1970, NPMP, HAK/Telcons, box 5, folder: '1970 18–30 June', NA.

20 Rabin, *Memoirs*, p. 179; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 74; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 360–61.

21 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 582–93; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 361–63; Spiegel, *Other Arab–Israeli Conflict*, pp. 194–95; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 263–68.

22 Talcott Seelye, who led a special State Department task force on the Jordan crisis, later insisted that 'Moscow's involvement in fomenting the crisis did not exist to the best of our knowledge. In fact, we had reliable intelligence reports indicating that the Soviets sought to restrain Syria.' Quoted in D. Neff, *Fallen Pillars: U.S. Policy Towards Palestine and Israel Since 1945*, Washington, DC: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995, p. 175.

23 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 594–631; Spiegel, *Other Arab–Israeli Conflict*, pp. 196–203; Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 75–83.

24 See, for example, S. Hersh, *Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, New York: Summit, 1983, p. 249; Little, *American Orientalism*, p. 106; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 83.

25 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 88–89.

26 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 89–91; Eban, *Autobiography*, p. 475.

27 A reference to Hafiz al-Asad, who gained control of the Syrian government in a bloodless coup in late 1970.

28 'Scenario for Seeking to Break Impasse on Middle East', attachment, Theodore Eliot to Melvin Laird, Richard Helms, and Kissinger, 8 March 1971, NPMP, Henry A. Kissinger Office Files, Country Files, Middle East (hereafter 'HAK/ME'), box 129, folder: 'Middle East [Israel, Jordan, Egypt] [Oct 69–May 71] [2 of 2]', NA; Saunders to Kissinger, 17 February 1971, NPMP, NSC/ME, box 637, folder: 'UAR Vol. VI 01 Jan 71–31 May 71', NA.

29 'Scenario for Seeking to Break Impasse on Middle East', attachment, Eliot to Laird, Helms, and Kissinger, 8 March 1971, NPMP, HAK/ME, box 129, folder: 'Middle East [Israel, Jordan, Egypt] [Oct 69–May 71] [2 of 2]', NA; draft telegram, attachment, Eliot to Laird, Helms, and Kissinger, 8 March 1971, ibid.

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32 President's news conference, 4 March 1971, *PPP*, 1971, p. 393; telephone conversations, Nixon and Kissinger, 28 February 1971, Kissinger and Garment, 28 February 1971, Kissinger, John Mitchell, and Martha Mitchell, 2 March 1971, NPMP, HAK/Telcons, box 9, folders: '1971 23–28 Feb.', '1971 1–5 March', and '1971 6–12 March', NA; memorandum of conversation, Nixon and Rogers, 22 April 1971, NPMP, HAK/ME, box 129, folder: 'Middle East [Israel, Jordan, Egypt] [Oct 69–May 71] [2 of 2]', NA.
33 DOS to US Embassy, Tel Aviv, tel #068414, 22 April 1971, NPMP, NSC/ME, box 609, folder: 'Israel Vol. 9 01 Feb–31 Aug 71 [2 of 2]', NA.
34 Eban, *Autobiography*, p. 475; memorandum of conversation, Rogers, Meir, et al., 6 May 1971, *Declassified Documents Reference System Online*, Detroit, MI: Thomson/Gale, 1998, document #CK3100548322.
35 Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 91–92; Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1283–84; Spiegel, *Other Arab–Israeli Conflict*, p. 207.
36 Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1967–1976*, Berkeley: University of California, 1977, p. 143; Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1285.
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38 Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1285.
39 Spiegel, *Other Arab–Israeli Conflict*, p. 211; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 94; Haldeman, *Diaries*, pp. 486–87; Rogers to Nixon, 2 February 1972, and 'Summary Memorandum of Conversations', 2 February 1972, NPMP, HAK/ME, box 134, folder: 'Rabin—1972 Vol. 3 [1 of 1]', NA.
40 Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 1294; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 95.
41 Morris, *Righteous Victims*, pp. 390–91; Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 95–96; Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1295–96; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999, p. 354.
42 Kissinger, *White House Years*, pp. 1295, 1298–1300; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 205; Kissinger to Nixon, 22 February 1973, NPMP, HAK/ME, box 131, folder: 'Egypt/Ismail Vol. II January–February, 1973 [1 of 1]', NA.
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4 The Cold War and the Soviet attitude towards the Arab–Israeli conflict

Galia Golan

The Soviet attitude and policies towards the Arab–Israeli conflict were primarily, if not wholly, a function of the Cold War. Soviet policies towards the parties involved were first and foremost dictated by global considerations, even as regional and local factors were, obviously, taken into account. Attitudes towards peace or war, and continued conflict or settlement were determined not by animosity towards one side or another, sympathy or even ideology, but rather by calculations related to East–West relations and risks. Indeed, the high-risk nature of the conflict, due to the involvement, and at times commitment, of both superpowers, was perhaps the major factor in Soviet decision-making with regard to the conflict. Obviously, other factors and considerations were at play: the state of their relations with the Arab states, interests elsewhere in the Third World (themselves linked to the Cold War); domestic factors, including differences of opinion – or interests – within the Soviet establishment (within the military as well as perhaps between military and other institutions); changing economic interests; and even upon occasion the Sino-Soviet dispute.

Yet, given these factors and even the overriding global (Cold War) consideration, the Arab–Israeli conflict itself did not take particularly high priority in Soviet foreign policy except in times of increased tension or actual warfare in the region. Moscow's Arab partners, including local Communist parties as well as the Arab countries and movements, were well aware of the priority of global interests and the secondary nature of their cause(s) in the dominant Soviet position. At the same time, there were apparently those in the Kremlin who opposed such priorities in the interest of promoting ideological or other considerations rather than Cold War or at least purely strategic considerations. Similarly, there were significantly different policy preferences between those who supported and those who opposed continuation of the Cold War itself. And all of these differences had ramifications for policies towards the Arab–Israeli conflict. Ultimately, with Gorbachev's ascension to power and his abandonment of the Cold War, the Soviet attitude towards the conflict underwent its final transformation.

Valuable material that has come to light following the collapse of the Soviet Union has, on the whole, substantiated these general observations, while adding and occasionally correcting various details. My intention here is not to relate in detail to a specific Soviet decision or event, as I have elsewhere,[1] but, rather, I shall endeavour to provide some examples and explanations of what I perceive to have been the relationship between the Cold War and the Soviet attitude, and policies, towards the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The Arab–Israeli conflict was brought into the Cold War, and the Cold War into the conflict, with the Czechoslovak (Soviet)–Egyptian arms deal signed in 1955 (negotiations having begun over one year earlier, when an arms deal with Syria was also negotiated). Until that time, from 1949 until 1954, the Soviets had been neutral in their attitude towards the conflict, having abandoned their support for Israel and abstained, for example, in the 1951 UN vote on possible Israeli use of the Suez Canal. Soviet interest changed only after the death of Stalin and the introduction of the new policy of 'peaceful coexistence' which called for East–West competition rather than pursuit of Communist revolution in the now acknowledged emerging entity called the 'Third World'. Now, the same Nasser who had been dismissed as a lackey of the West by Stalin's policies, was seen to be a worthwhile investment, particularly in view of the attempt by the West to create an anti-Soviet alliance (the Baghdad Pact) on the Soviets' southern borders. The Arab–Israeli conflict was a convenient vehicle for Soviet competition with the West, and an easy one for providing aid and, especially, arms, in a way the United States was unwilling to provide to either side of the conflict at the time. That this competition with the West (the Cold War) was to affect Moscow's attitude towards the conflict was clearly discernible in the 1954 Soviet veto in the UN of the proposal for Israeli use of the Suez Canal – the same proposal on which they had abstained in 1951. The new attitude was also discernible in Soviet propaganda.[2]

It may be argued that the Soviet move towards Egypt was actually motivated by sympathy for the Arab cause against Israel (or specifically hostility towards Israel), born, thus, by an identity of interests. And global interests were even compatible as Egypt or others would be added to Moscow's anti-imperialist client states. But Egypt was soon to discover that its interest in the relationship with Moscow – assistance in its struggle against Israel – was not Moscow's main interest in the relationship. Specifically, if and when a conflict of interests were to occur – when an action (Soviet or Egyptian) for the sake of Egyptian interests clashed or, more specifically, ran the risk of dragging Moscow into a direct confrontation with the West, as in the 1956 and 1967 wars – Moscow was clearly to sacrifice Egyptian interests to the greater global consideration. Both Nasser and Sadat were to note this fact and their disappointment with Moscow's restraint (what Nasser reportedly called

'paralysis' due to fear of the US) during the Suez war of 1956.[3] In 1967 the Soviets held Cairo back from a pre-emptive strike against Israel (hoping to avoid war and the accompanying risks of Soviet–US confrontation) and, as in 1956, refused any direct involvement.[4] With the outbreak of the 1967 war, Moscow sought to coordinate measures with the US so as to bring about a rapid ceasefire before Egypt was ready for one, and on the second day of the war Moscow was even willing to change its position and agree to a ceasefire without Israeli withdrawal, despite Egypt's demand for status quo ante (a demand supported by Moscow on the first day of the war).[5]

Thus there was a contradiction, or at the least, a serious difficulty for Moscow in its relationship with the Arab confrontation states that led to what appeared to be a dual policy regarding the conflict. In order to achieve and maintain its own globally motivated interests in the region, Moscow strove to fulfil its clients', – Egypt and Syria's – interests, namely the provision of arms and training for war against Israel – a war that Moscow did not, however, desire given its concern over the potential for direct confrontation with the US – i.e. a threat at the level of Moscow's global interest.[6]

Indeed, this contradiction or dual policy between Soviet global and Egyptian regional interests became far more complicated in Nasser's last years, following the 1967 war. The global aspect of Soviet interests in the region had assumed a military as well as political nature. With the changes in Soviet military doctrine in the mid-1960s and the development of the 'external function' of the Soviet armed forces, Moscow's primary interest in the Arab world was to obtain military bases. These were to include storage and servicing facilities for the Soviet Navy's Mediterranean Squadron, airfields for Soviet aircraft, and missile installations. These were sought in order to strengthen Soviet positions vis-à-vis the United States and NATO, among other reasons, in response to the US deployment of its nuclear-armed Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, and until Moscow was to develop a fleet of aircraft carriers, longer-range aircraft and servicing-at-sea capabilities.

After the 1967 war the Soviets obtained these bases, for themselves, and eventually (1968–69) they sent a newly created unit (Operation Kavkaz[7]) of some 10,000 military personnel called 'advisors' to man them, plus, in early 1970 an air defence system including SAM-3 installations. All this was in addition to the 2,000–4,000 military advisors sent earlier (immediately after the 1967 war) to assist the reconstruction of the Egyptian and Syrian military.[8] Thus, the unprecedented dispatch to a non-Marxist third-world country of such a large Soviet military contingent occurred *not* for the sake of the Arab clients in the War of Attrition that had started against Israel (as originally thought by Western observers, including myself[9]). Rather, this force, known as Operation Kavkaz was intended for Soviet use and purposes. These were not forces

to influence or aid the Arabs. Like the bases, which we *did* know were for Soviet purposes, the Kavkaz contingent too was dispatched to augment and enhance Soviet military posture in the Cold War.

However, as pointed out and discussed authoritatively in recent works by Dima Adamsky, a lapse occurred in Soviet policy in the Arab–Israeli conflict when it permitted the use of some of this force in direct confrontation with Israel, assuming responsibility for the air defence of Egypt. The involvement of Soviet pilots was not unprecedented for Soviet behaviour in the Third World – they had been used in Yemen, and they would later be used in the Horn of Africa and elsewhere. Direct Soviet military intervention in and provision of the country's air defences was, however, unprecedented in the Arab–Israeli arena, given the potential risks involved with regard to possible Israeli and American responses. This had been the reason that until then Moscow had repeatedly resisted Egyptian requests to assume responsibility for the country's air defences.

Certainly the Soviets may be said to have taken this risk in order to assist Egypt to withstand growing Israeli ascendancy in the War of Attrition, and, therefore, it was a case of serving the interests of the client at the possible expense of relations with the US. But one may also argue that even in this exceptional instance, the Soviet calculation was first and foremost dictated by its global interest – namely preservation of its military presence, its bases, in Egypt, which would most likely be lost if, as a result of Israeli bombings, Nasser's regime were toppled (or if Nasser resigned as he threatened or turned away from Moscow out of disappointment with Soviet assistance). Later, in the summer of 1970 and following the (unsuccessful) Soviet intervention, Nasser reportedly threatened to shift to the Americans if Moscow did not provide still more aid against Israel (it is not clear just what greater aid he wanted at this time), but it is also the case that Moscow had been pressuring Nasser to agree to a ceasefire because of the dangerous escalation that was taking place. The Soviet decision to allow its contingents to intervene must have been weighed against America's possible reaction – in particular the introduction of the SAM-3s was a risky step (they had not been deployed outside the Soviet Union except very sparingly in the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe). Diplomatic steps were taken to reassure the Americans, which may explain why, even as Moscow was engaging in its most direct involvement to date in the conflict, it produced (and offered to the Americans) its most moderate peace proposal to date.[10]

This plan explicitly referred to Israel's 1967 borders rather than the Soviets' customary if implicit adherence (in maps, for example) to only the 1947 UN Partition Plan borders, and for the first time abandoned Moscow's earlier, consistent insistence on Israeli withdrawal to these lines before any peace negotiations. Its appearance may have been intended by Moscow to cancel or balance the 'wrong signal' Moscow had

emitted by the intervention of its military in the conflict. Or the appearance of the plan at this time may actually have been the first official sign of a shift in the Soviet attitude towards the conflict itself. It may be speculated that the 1967 war had moved the Soviets closer to the idea of actually seeking resolution rather than continuation of the conflict – because of the volatility of the conflict and superpower risks involved. Yet their support, albeit extremely short-lived, for Egypt's War of Attrition suggested that the Soviets still saw value in continued tension and the absence of resolution to the conflict. The floating of a more moderate peace proposal at the peak of the escalation in the War of Attrition may have been a signal of some change in this preference. It is conceivable that the Soviets were beginning to consider a less risky means of maintaining their assets (bases) in the region. Alternatively, it may be that the proposal was the result of differences of opinion in the Soviet leadership, or simply due to other factors such as the fear of American inroads exemplified by such initiatives as the Rogers Plan. Indeed the following year, with the Americans more directly involved with Egypt, Moscow was even willing to add to this plan an offer to the Americans of withdrawal of the Soviet military contingent from Egypt, to leave only a limited number of advisors.[11] Whatever the reasons, the appearance of the new Soviet formulation suggested that Soviet and Arab interests were once again diverging.

The divergence to the point of an actual clash of interests became particularly apparent in the period of Sadat's rule. Indeed Sadat made frequent public references to it in 1972 and 1973; the depth of the disagreement was openly demonstrated by Sadat's expulsion of the Soviet 'advisors' in July 1972. The issue, as in the 1960s, was Egypt's interest in war with Israel, this time Sadat's idea of a limited battle across the Canal and his requests for offensive weaponry for this purpose. This time Moscow's objection was not only opposition to war because of the risk of superpower confrontation but also, and more immediately, because of the damage war would render to the policy of détente that was transforming the nature of the Cold War at the time. There could hardly have been a more direct and open contradiction between the interests of the two: Egypt with its regional interest and Moscow with its global interest, when the US–Soviet summit of May 1972 called for a 'military relaxation' in the Middle East just as Sadat was pressing Moscow for promised offensive weapons deliveries and coordination of war plans. It was this clash that led to the expulsion of the Soviet force and Soviet advisors, plus a six-month 'freeze' in Soviet–Egyptian relations, that included the suspension of arms deliveries.

Even when, in early 1973, the Soviets agreed to resume arms deliveries, the argument over policy continued, openly as well as in bilateral contacts. Indeed the argument persisted even into the war itself, and to a lesser degree between Moscow and Damascus as well. During the war,

the Soviets aroused Sadat's anger by repeated attempts to bring about a ceasefire brokered with US cooperation and ultimately agreed upon by the two superpowers even prior to receiving Egyptian approval.[12] But the Soviets also had a difficult time maintaining their primary interest in détente while trying to preserve their relationship with Egypt. The provision of weaponry during the war and then the pressures to stop Israel's violation of the ceasefire at the end of the war were intended to placate the Egyptians even as Moscow had operated against what Sadat perceived as Egypt's interests. The difficult attempt at juggling the two relationships in fact jeopardized both Soviet global interests – seriously harming détente and even unintentionally precipitating an American alert, while nonetheless having raised the ire of both its Arab clients.

For example, the Soviets were held responsible for reaching a ceasefire agreement with the Americans without the prior approval of Egypt and Syria. The ceasefire was severely criticized in some Arab – and Chinese – quarters as Soviet 'collusion' with the Americans. Responsibility for a ceasefire that subsequently collapsed, seriously endangering Egyptian troops, became a significant consideration in the Soviet decision to apply pressure on the US and Israel regarding Israel's continued offensive. Even so, Moscow had no intention of actually going through with any threat, i.e., intervening militarily to stop these violations. The ramifications of such an intervention were not even discussed, though the most obvious reason for restraint was the risk of provoking a clash with the US.[13] Even at the diplomatic level – the issuing of a threat to consider intervention – the Soviet leadership actually underestimated the severity with which its threatening statement would be perceived by the US. From all indications, they did not expect, nor were willing, to pay the price of confrontation with the US even in order to rescue what was left of the Egyptian army – and the Soviet relationship with the Arab world. Of course in the end, both global and regional interests were lost: détente was seriously harmed (as anti-détente forces in the US were strengthened by perceived Soviet behaviour in the war, namely the Soviet resupply effort, the 'threat' leading to US alert); the relationship with Sadat was dealt its final blow (Soviet pressures for a ceasefire); the Americans 'won' Egypt, and the Soviets lost their Egyptian foothold. Syria's Assad was critical of Moscow regarding the ceasefire,[14] but forgiving, and Moscow sought to compensate for much of its loss in Egypt by fortifying its relationship with Syria and upgrading its relationship with the PLO. Yet Syria's relative isolation in the Arab world and its jealously guarded independence, along with the PLO's limited value as merely a national liberation movement, and at that a highly problematic one, provided poor compensation for the loss of Egypt.

Moreover, both Syria and the PLO were in the same sort of conflict of interests with the Soviet Union as Egypt. In fact, Syria was still more militant towards Israel than Egypt at various times. Syria, like Egypt, had a

falling-out with Moscow over Damascus' insistence upon going to war in 1973, and there was almost continuous disagreement well into the 1980s over arms supplies – with Moscow refusing to go beyond aiding Syria to maintain a strategic balance with Israel.[15] Syrian militancy was problematic for Soviet cooperation with the United States on such matters as UNSC Resolution 242, which was not accepted by Syria when Egypt accepted in the fall of 1967. Actually, one of Syria's objections to the ceasefire (UNSC Resolution 338) obtained by Moscow in the 1973 war was its reference to Resolution 242. It was only Syria's ultimate acceptance of the 1973 ceasefire that was interpreted, eventually, to imply acceptance of 242. Resolution 338 also called for an international peace conference (the December 1973 Geneva Peace Conference), which Syria refused to attend despite urgings by the Soviets as joint chairs of the meeting.

Even on other regional matters, Syrian policies threatened Soviet global interests, be it the Syrian invasion of Jordan in 1970 which almost precipitated American and Israeli intervention, or the Syrian invasion of Lebanon in 1976 which threatened the Soviet position in the area. In the latter case, the Syrians, who zealously guarded their independence from Moscow, acted in a way that temporarily served American interests in the Lebanon situation. Later, following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Moscow had to remind Syria that its commitments did not include assistance to Syria outside Syria, meaning, do not expect Moscow to get involved in any more than a temporary advisory capacity to Syrian forces in Lebanon, especially during the post-war period when the United States was there. At various times, both before and after the Syrian invasion of Lebanon, Syrian support for more radical groups or actions on behalf of the Palestinians also worried Moscow because of possible escalation or provocation of Israel to all-out war. In the early 1970s, Moscow was even critical of the Syrian Communist Party for supporting Palestinian nationalism, accusing the party's leadership of contributing to Palestinian objectives (the destruction of Israel) that would bring about a third world war.[16]

Thus, Soviet relations with the PLO were fraught with similar contradictions between the interests of the two sides. Indeed Soviet support for the PLO, as was generally the case regarding national liberation movements, was instrumental and tactical. Moscow was supportive only so long as the PLO served Soviet interests, for example as a card to be played against the Americans – who could be portrayed as ignoring the plight of an oppressed people, the Palestinians, colonized by Washington's allies, Israel; or as a means of entry into discussion on the eastern (Jordanian) front of the conflict – in which the Soviets had no other ally in view of the American–Jordanian relationship. The Palestinian issue became the Achilles heel of the otherwise increasingly successful American policy in the Middle East of the mid–late 1970s, and as such, useful to Moscow.

But as with Egypt and Syria, so too with the PLO, the interests of each side in the relationship differed, and often clashed when the bilateral relationship threatened Moscow's global interests. It almost goes without saying that Moscow would not intervene militarily for the PLO, a national liberation movement, in the Lebanon war for example, inasmuch as it would not even intervene for state allies such as Egypt and Syria in their wars with Israel. There was never direct Soviet intervention on behalf of a national liberation movement (beyond training, arms, etc.) prior to a movement's gaining state power (for example Marxist MPLA in Angola) – and the PLO was no exception.[17] Moreover, there were serious issues on which there were clearly clashes of interests. The PLO's rejection of Resolution 242, of Israel's existence, and of the idea of negotiations all ran counter to Moscow's interest in an international conference which would provide a role for the Soviet Union as one of the two superpowers. In addition, the idea of armed struggle against Israel, including international terrorism, threatened an Israeli response that might lead to war and escalation, or at the very least threaten the stability Moscow sought to achieve in the region at various times.[18] As with other national liberation movements, indeed as with the Arab states, Moscow was (in time) willing to provide the wherewithal for armed struggle but only at the same time that it sought to prevent the implementation of this struggle or at least limit it to certain areas and certain forms, and this only so long as it did not get out of control (a control that Moscow sought but never achieved) or become too provocative. Indeed there were components of the PLO, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), that suspended relations with Moscow because of these policy differences. And, by the same token, Moscow was willing to abandon demands on behalf of the PLO if and when they proved an obstacle to the greater interest, for example, in reconvening the Geneva conference. An irony in the Soviet–PLO relationship (similar to that with the Egyptians) was that success in efforts to moderate the PLO (to accept 242, to limit demands to a two-state solution, i.e. accept the existence of Israel, give up armed struggle and terror) facilitated a PLO shift to the United States (as indeed had occurred with Sadat) most likely at the expense of the Soviet Union.

Altogether, Moscow's Arab partners in the conflict, Egypt from mid-1950s to the 1973 war, Syria mainly from the mid-1960s, and the PLO from the early 1970s, were to serve as cards in Moscow's deck in the Cold War. As the United States became increasingly involved in the conflict, Moscow used these cards to prove that it, the Soviet Union, was essential both to prevent war and to bring the Arabs to the peace table. To do so, however, it had to maintain its position as representative of the Arabs (and some influence over them). But to achieve and maintain this, Moscow had to support many of their more radical demands and, more importantly, provide them with the wherewithal for the use of

force via arms and training. This then was the heart of the contradiction that basically forced Moscow into what appeared to be a dual policy referred to above: apparently encouraging and enabling the Arabs to fight while seeking to restrain them from doing so. Moreover, the Soviets had to prove themselves, especially if they were not supporting a policy of war, either by actually gaining the Arabs' objectives through other means or by at least demonstrating that only Soviet backing promised to bring any results. Thus they claimed that only Soviet pressure on the US could bring the US to exercise its influence to gain concessions from Israel. So long as Moscow had some control over the situation, its dual policy might be pursued. But its actual lack of such control, the volatility of the conflict, and the dangerous risks of escalation in a situation in which both superpowers were involved, coupled eventually with increased American inroads to the exclusion of the Soviets, all ultimately led to a situation in which Soviets' interests were not being served and the cost of the Arab–Israeli conflict as a vehicle for Soviet Cold War interests was beginning to outweigh the benefits. Therefore, even before the changes brought by Gorbachev, possibly well before, the Soviet attitude towards the conflict underwent the change apparently portended by the new peace proposal floated in the early 1970s and offered more formally at the Geneva Conference of December 1973.

Increasingly the Soviets appeared to seek a continued presence in the region not through a perpetuation of the Arab–Israeli conflict but by means of participating, as sponsors and guarantors together with the Americans, in an Arab–Israeli accord. One may assume that this was not the Kremlin's ideal choice, particularly once the demise of détente reduced the chances for superpower cooperation and revived the more dangerous aspects of the Cold War. Yet, given the circumstances, it would appear to have been Moscow's only choice. Such a choice may have been strengthened by changes that had occurred in other realms of Soviet policy, such as Moscow's economic difficulties at home and a shift of interests to areas such as the Persian Gulf that promised a greater economic return, or changing military capabilities and interests that rendered the eastern Mediterranean air and naval bases somewhat less critical.

Differences of opinion and the ascension of certain views may also have contributed to the changing attitude towards the conflict in the 1970s, as well as to what appeared to be dualism in Soviet policy. There were differences over specific steps, such as the matter of assuming responsibility for Egyptian air defence in the War of Attrition, noted in Adamsky, and still more risky steps such as direct assistance at the end of the 1967 or 1973 wars.[19] In both the last two cases, the military, in the form of chief of staff (Grechko, in both cases), reportedly raised the idea of military intervention of some form.[20] Yet these and other specific differences of opinion in the Arab–Israeli context were largely derivative of broader policy options at the global level, as well as what might be

termed bureaucratic/functional orientations or domestic power struggles. For example, while the interests of the navy in its post-Cuban expansion, which envisaged deployment in most of the world's seas and a blue-water response to the US's Polaris and Poseidon, favoured deployment in the region, there may have been hesitations on the part of the Soviet strategic forces, possibly because of the risks involved or preferences regarding the direction of missile development. One step higher, so to speak, there were apparently differences regarding the 'external function' of the Soviet armed forces – the task of protecting and promoting friendly regimes abroad, or serving and protecting the Soviet bloc.[21]

While within the military itself there were various views, outside the military, and in contradiction to some military thinking, there was also the attitude of those more concerned with ideology, those who tended to advocate support for revolutionary forces abroad. Even within the latter group, however, there were those who were wary of investing in dubious nationalist rather than Marxist groups or leaders.[22] Indeed in the early 1970s, following the failures with Nasser, Nkrumah, and Sukarno, a rethinking led to the rise of those who favoured a more ideologically pure policy, namely promotion of Leninist-type parties with relatively strict socialist demands for Soviet third-world clients (to better ensure Soviet interests or assets). These in turn conflicted with the simultaneous rise in the advocacy, in Moscow, for a more efficient economics-driven policy in the Third World, at the expense of past preferences for purely political interests. And all of these were affected by the still broader issue – and disagreements – over détente. My favourite example of the détente/Arab–Israeli disagreement may be found in the virtually simultaneous but separate pronouncements of Brezhnev and Grechko on 8 October 1973, each pointing to the war in the Middle East as evidence of the need for détente (Brezhnev) and the dangers of détente (Grechko).[23] Despite this somewhat obvious difference of opinion, presumably the result of different functional orientations, a pro- or anti-détente position was itself more complicated, for there were those who saw no contradiction or potential harm to global détente by what may be called a 'division of détente' policy. Namely, involvement and support for third-world regimes or movements, while nonetheless pursuing relaxation with Europe and the United States. Kosygin, for example, who was a strong supporter of détente, primarily for economic reasons, nonetheless expounded Moscow's commitment to armed struggle in the Third World.[24] Admittedly this was on the occasion of a visit by Castro and it was a position often taken to defend the policy of détente against those who opposed it on the grounds that it meant neglect of national liberation movements and revolution. As already pointed out, both Egypt and the PLO were well aware of the problem, and the limits of the divisibility of the détente school. As the Soviets' position deteriorated in the Arab world, Brezhnev

and others would actually call for détente in the Arab–Israeli context so as to regain a role for Moscow, to reaffirm its superpower status, in what had become an exclusive American diplomatic offensive under Kissinger and his successors.

At the same time, one must not overestimate the role of the Arab–Israeli conflict in détente or in Soviet global policy. While Moscow sought to prevent its policy towards the Arabs from harming détente, and even sought to use the conflict to improve its global position, its policies towards the West were guided by far more important issues. Even as Soviet–US disagreements arose over the conflict (e.g. during the US brokered Egyptian–Israeli rapprochement from 1975 onwards), the Soviet policies in the Third World (as distinct from the still more important matters connected with the arms race and East–West relations in Europe) which disrupted détente in the view of Washington were the Soviets' involvement in the Horn of Africa, Angola, and ultimately Afghanistan, of course. This is borne out by the almost total absence of references to the Arab–Israeli conflict in the post-Soviet accounts and memoirs by former Soviet officials discussing Soviet leaders or policies.[25] Clearly the conflict was the subject of Politburo attention when a crisis broke out in the region, leading to intensive Soviet–US or international diplomacy. It was on the international agenda at times when the United States pursued linkage (with Vietnam, under Kissinger, for example) or focused on the issue (briefly under Carter, for example), but even in these periods it was but one and then not the most important topic in Soviet–American deliberations. East–West agreement at the Helsinki conference in 1975 or arms limitation agreements throughout the 1970s were far more important than – and not to be disturbed by – US–Soviet disagreements over the stationing of US observers in Sinai, for example.

Thus while the Arab–Israeli conflict could and did serve as a vehicle most of the time for broader Soviet interests, its greatest importance for Moscow lay in its capacity to disrupt global relations and, especially, lead to a war that might trigger a third world war (as the Soviets like to phrase it) – namely the 1973 US alert. Therefore, in response to a combination of these dangers, changing Soviet regional, military and economic interests, along with American successes in the region, and possibly changing relative strengths of differing opinions within the Kremlin, the conflict gradually lost its value or role in the Soviet conduct of the Cold War.

The final break came with Gorbachev, who ended the Cold War. Gorbachev sought to de-link global considerations from regional conflicts; to take regional or local conflicts out of the global relationship, thereby greatly reducing their dangers – to themselves or others. Such a policy, however, was part and parcel of Gorbachev's 'new political thinking' which eschewed competition with the West – competition that was borne of an ideology-driven foreign policy. Interests, rather than

ideology, were to motivate foreign policy, and even interests were to be viewed in the context of an increasingly interdependent world system of nations, for which a 'balance of interests' was essential. Thus the removal of ideology and Cold War competition from regional conflicts was to strip them of much of their instrumental importance for the superpowers, and in so doing possibly eliminate the element that enabled the conflict situation to continue. This was not détente, which had been designed to change the global environment in which a conflict might continue, as part of a moderated superpower competition, but rather an entirely different concept. The elimination of the Cold War competition enabled the superpowers to deal with conflict according to new criteria, that of the balance of interests, which was the prescription for the resolution of the conflicts as well.

If the Cold War in the past had dictated a Soviet message to Nasser, Sadat, Assad, and Arafat that they could rely on Soviet support at least for a relatively peaceful pursuit of their interests, the Arab leaders were now told that Moscow would support only a balance of interests: those of Israel as well as those of the Arabs.[26] Just as the Cold War had dictated Moscow's attitude towards the conflict after Stalin's death (i.e. use of the conflict as a vehicle in the Cold War), so now with the advent of Gorbachev, the end of the Cold War also dictated Moscow's attitude towards the conflict: neither bases nor even allies were needed if there were no longer competition. And strangely, perhaps, the policy dictated by the end of the Cold War was similar in a way to that of the old one, i.e., neutrality such as evidenced in 1951, albeit derived of course from a totally different set of Soviet global interests.

The removal of Cold War considerations from the Soviet attitude towards the conflict was to have its contradictions as well. Theoretically at least, economic interests, for example from the sale of arms, might dictate not only involvement but encouragement of conflict – not out of competition with the West but simply to make money. Similarly an interest in being a player, not necessarily a competitor, on the world scene – even, for example, so as to ensure respect for a balance of interests (and the Soviet Union's own interests) – might dictate involvement or the accumulation of allies. In fact Gorbachev had to face some of these contradictions, and the 1991 post–Cold War Gulf War, which, for example, created a number of dilemmas for his nascent foreign policy. But the reduction of the Soviet Union from the status of a superpower to that of a great power, its withdrawal from a Cold War with the West, its abandonment of ideology and of the external function of the Soviet armed forces in service of that ideology, greatly changed Moscow's value and potential, in the eyes of the local actors as well as those of the United States. It also contributed to a significant change in the nature of the Arab–Israeli conflict itself.

Notes

1 I did this, for example, in G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War,' *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 8/1, 2006, 3–19 and G. Golan, 'Moscow's Policy in The Yom Kippur War: Eyes on the Americans', to be published in Z. Drori, *The Yom Kippur War Revisited* (Hebrew); G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union and the Yom Kippur War', in P. R. Kumarasawmy, *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 138–39.

2 For the changes in Soviet policy towards the Jewish state, see Y. Ro'i, *Soviet Decision-making in Practice*, New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1980, which has stood the test of post-Soviet information on the period.

3 Nasser interview, 7 April 1957 in O. Smolansky, *The Soviet Union and the Arab East Under Khrushchev*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1974, pp. 611–12 and A. Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, p. 146.

4 'Record of Conversation between the Soviet Ambassador to the UAR, D. P. Pozhidaev, and the President of the UAR J. A. Nasser, 1.6.67,' in Naumkin et al. (eds), Documents of the Soviet Foreign Ministry: *Blizhnevostochnyi konflikt*, Vol. 2, Moscow: Uzdatel'ctvo 'Materik,' 2003, p. 573; V. Kirpichenko, *Iz arkhiva razvedchika*, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1993, pp. 317–18. For a more detailed account of Soviet efforts to prevent the 1967 war, see Golan, 'Six-Day War', 3–19. See also King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Tunis Home Service, 12 April 1974 (FBIS/ME Daily Report 74-072, 12 April 1974, p. C1); Salah Bassiouni interview, 28 March 2001; R. B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 12. Regarding involvement during the war, see J. Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc and the Aftermath of the June 1967 War: Selected Documents from East-Central European Archives' (Brezhnev report), paper for Conference: The United States, the Middle East, and the 1967 Arab–Israeli War, Office of the Historian, US State Department. There were those in the Kremlin who did favour direct involvement but were overruled (E. D. Prylin, *Trudnyi I dolgii put' k miru*, Moscow: Rosspen, 2002, p. 68).

5 Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semyonov took the unusual step of an open-line phone call to the Soviet UN delegation to clarify that the ceasefire proposal was to be supported even if the Arabs objected. A. Shevchenko, *Breaking With Moscow*, New York: Knopf, 1985, pp. 134–35.

6 Soviet military thinking from Khrushchev onwards saw serious risk in local or regional wars (including wars of national liberation) because of the likelihood of escalation and the involvement of the superpowers. The Arab–Israeli conflict was one of the local/regional conflicts deemed subject to such escalation to the point of bringing about a third world war. (See, for example, V. V. Zhurkin, and E. M. Primakov, *Mezhdunarodnye konflikty*, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1972, p. 19–21; V. I. Gantman, *Mezhdunarodnye konflkty sovremennosti*, Moscow: Nauka, 1983, pp. 4–5.)

7 As described by D. Adamsky, '"Zero-Hour for the Bears": Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition, 1969–70,' *Cold War History*, 6/1, 2006, 113–36.

8 Ibid.

9 It was understood that the bases were for Soviet purposes, but it was believed that the unprecedented dispatch of 10,000 (and later another 10,000 replacements) Soviet 'advisors', along with the commitment to assume responsibility for Egyptian air defences, had occurred in early 1970 in response to Israeli deep-penetration bombing. See G. Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle*

East from World War II to Gorbachev, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 73.

10 The plan was presented to the Americans on 23 July 1970 (L. Whetten, *The Canal War: Four Power Conflict in the Middle East*, Cambridge: MIT University Press, 1974, p. 115) and published in *Pravda*, 15 October 1970 by Evgeni Primakov. It was preceded by Soviet articles outlining the main points (perhaps to prepare the public) in *Novoe vremia*, February and *Mezhdunarodnye zhizn'*, March 1970 (even as the SAM missiles were being deployed in Egypt).

11 Kissinger revealed the Soviet offer in conversations with Yitzhak Rabin, then Israeli ambassador to the US. (Y. Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 204–5.)

12 After repeated attempts by the Soviet ambassador to Cairo and others to elicit Sadat's agreement to a ceasefire, Kosygin was dispatched to Egypt for that purpose. He left several days later without Sadat's agreement. Sadat's change of mind reached Moscow only after Kissinger and Brezhnev reached agreement on a ceasefire. This was a significant but ambiguous point that I had difficulty proving until confirmed by Israelyan. See G. Golan, *Yom Kippur and After: The Soviet Union and the Middle East Crisis*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 112–14; Golan, 'Yom Kippur War,' in Kumarasawmy, pp. 138–39; V. Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995, p. 108.

13 Ibid., Israelyan has confirmed this analysis.

14 Assad claimed in a 29 October 1973 speech (*al-Anwar*, 30 October 1973) that he and Iraq had been planning a counter-attack, and that Moscow had not informed them about a ceasefire agreement.

15 The Soviets did create an advanced air defence system for Syria in the early 1980s but refused repeated Syrian requests for a nuclear capability.

16 For example: 'Special Document: The Soviet Attitude towards the Palestine Problem,' *Journal of Palestine Studies*, VI/1, 1972, pp. 187–212.

17 See, G. Golan, *The Soviet Union and National Liberation Movements in the Third World*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1988, comparing policy and behaviour regarding 29 national liberation movements.

18 There were numerous Palestinian references to these problems with the 'Soviet friends' over the issues of Resolution 242, existence of Israel, use of terror, for example, George Habash in *an-Nahar* (Beirut), 15 May 1975; *Sh'un Falastiniyyah*, June 1981 in *Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes*, 2, 1982, p. 150; and the lack of direct Soviet assistance (in Lebanon), interviews with Khaled al-Hasan, loc.cit. 6, 1983, p. 33 and *al-Hawadith (London)*, 25 June 1982. For full discussion of Soviet–PLO relations, see G. Golan, *The Soviet Union and the Palestine Liberation Organization: An Uneasy Alliance*, New York: Praeger, 1981 or 'The Soviet Union and the Palestinian Issue', in G. Breslauer, *Soviet Strategy in the Middle East*, London: Unwin and Hyman, 1990, pp. 61–98 or G. Golan, *Moscow and the Middle East*, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1992 or more recent works: G. Golan, 'Moscow and the PLO: The Ups and Downs of a Complex Relationship' in A. Sela, and M. Ma'oz (eds), *The PLO and Israel: From Armed Conflict to Political Solution, 1964–1994*, London: St Martin's Press, 1997; R. Dannreuther, *The Soviet Union and the PLO*, London: Macmillan, 1998.

19 See, D. Spechler, 'The Politics of Intervention,' *Studies in Comparative Communism*, 20/2, 1987, pp. 115–43; Adamski, 'Zero Hour', 17–18.; Golan, 'Six Day War,' 14–15; Prylin, *Trudnyi*, pp. 170–71; and a forthcoming article by M. Kramer, 'The Egorychev Affair, Ballistic Missile Defense and the June 1967 Mideast War: Leadership Struggles and Soviet Foreign Policymaking'.

20 E. Prylin, 'Some Observations About the Arab–Israeli War (1973)', unpublished memorandum commissioned for N. Lebow, and J. Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, p. 237; Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin*, p. 168. See also Prylin, *Trudnyi*, pp, 170–71.

21 Opinions of Soviet military and political leadership on this topic are discussed at length in Golan, *National Liberation Movements*, pp. 228–52. Some sample opinions may be found in Volkogonov, Maj.-Gen. D., *Voina I armiia: filosofskosotisologicheskii ocherk*, Moscow: Voenizdat, 1977, pp. 248–49, 353–54 and 'The Soviet Army: A Factor in Peace and Security,' *Soviet Military Review*, 6, 1984, p. 56; V. M. Kulish, *Voennaia sila i mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia*, Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1972, pp. 136–39; Col.-Gen. S. A. Tushkevich, *Sovetskie Vooruzhennie Sily*, Moscow: Voenizdat, 1978, p. 470; Col. E. Rybkin, 'XXV s'ezd KPSS: osvoboditel'nye voiny sovremennoi epokhi,' *Voenno-istoricheskii zhurnal*, 11, 1978, pp. 13–15. Discussion of these topics may also be found in H. F. Scott and W. Scott, *The Soviet Art of War*, Boulder: Westview, 1982; C. G. Jacobsen, *Soviet Strategic Initiatives*, New York: Praeger, 1979, and M. Katz, *The Third World in Soviet Military Thought*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

22 The debate on this topic in the 1970s and early 1980s is also discussed at length in Golan, *National Liberation Movements*, pp. 123–54 and with regard to the Middle East specifically in G. Golan, 'The Soviet Union in the Middle East after Thirty Years', in A. Korbonski, and F. Fukuyama (eds), *The Soviet Union and the Third World: The Last Three Decades*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, pp. 178–207.

23 Grechko in *Pravda*, 8 October 1973 (speech on the anniversary of the battle of the Caucasus referred to the war in the Middle East as proof of the aggressiveness of the imperialists); Brezhnev in luncheon for visiting Japanese Premier Tanaka (TASS, 8 October 1973).

24 *Pravda*, 4 July 1972.

25 Obviously my reference is not to accounts specifically on the Middle East by Middle East experts such as Israelyan, but rather to accounts by Burlatsky, Arbatov and Volkogonov, just to mention some that appeared in English and therefore might have been expected to deal extensively with international issues considered of particular significance among the topics they discussed.

26 This was done directly, by Gorbachev, during visits by Assad and later Arafat to Moscow (*Pravda*, 25 April 1987; *Pravda*, 10 April 1988 respectively).

5 Israel's traumatic pre-1967 war experience and its implications for Israel's foreign policy decision-making in the post-war period

Zaki Shalom

During and after the Yom Kippur War, various political circles in Israel and the international community blamed Israel, at least partially, for the outbreak of hostilities. According to this train of thinking, although Egypt and Syria made a ruthless surprise attack on Israel's holiest day of the year, Israel should be held largely responsible for the war.

The main argument in support of this allegation is that despite Israel's long-standing advocacy and formal support of peace after the Six Day War, it was not really willing to exhaust all options for a political accommodation with the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular. Its ongoing statements on its quest for peace with the entire Arab world were in fact a 'lip service' which lacked sincerity. Israel, it is argued, knew very well that peace or even political accommodation with Arab states could be achieved only if Israel would be willing to withdraw from the territories it had occupied from Arab states in the Six Day War. Israel had no intention of making such a 'sacrifice' necessary for transforming a vague peace aspiration into a concrete political option: namely, withdrawal from territories captured in the Six Day War.

According to this view, following the Six Day War, a pragmatic vision gained hold in Egypt, as well as in various other Arab states, regarding the Arab–Israeli conflict and its resolution. In the aftermath of the war, it is claimed, Egypt, as well as other Arab states, felt it was thoroughly worn out by the continuous struggle with Israel over the past two decades. Egypt, thus, came to the conclusion that it had in fact no inherent conflict with Israel. There were no territorial controversies between the states. Furthermore, a big and wide desert (Sinai) separated each state from the other and ensured that neither could easily threaten the other. Consequently, Egypt concluded that its previous wars with Israel, in which Egypt paid a very high price, did not well serve her national interests. Those wars, it became clear to the Egyptians, had not really improved their standing with Israel or the international community. It was doubtful if those wars enhanced the status of the Palestinians, for whose sake they were supposedly carried out.

Despite Egypt's customary predilection to congratulate itself for imagined victories, it was fully aware that Israel had emerged from all of the confrontations in a superior position. Thus, the argument went, after the Arabs states had been stung again by defeat in the Six Day War, they realized that the option of annihilating Israel which they had adopted in the 1950s, and their proclivity to maintain a no-war-no-peace relationship with Israel, were no longer realistic options and in fact had caused them inestimable damage and suffering.

The following are the main considerations that supposedly led Egypt and other Arab states in the aftermath of the Six Day War to dramatically change their attitude towards Israel and espouse the idea of reconciliation:

a. Israel had proved it was a most formidable military power. It defeated the Arab countries in three major clashes: the 1948 War (referred to in Israel as the War of Independence); the Sinai Campaign (October–November 1956); and the Six Day War (June 1967). In the future, Israel would further enhance its power. Its apparent scientific-technological capacity would ensure its future military superiority over the Arabs.
b. Israel was believed to possess a 'nuclear option'. This assessment dominated the American intelligence community throughout the mid-1960s, and also seems to have prevailed in the Arab world. As far as Egypt was concerned, this estimate meant that even a 'worst-case scenario' – from Israel's point of view – in which the Arabs succeeded in defeating Israel on the battlefield, Israel still had the 'Samson Option' that could wreak indescribable havoc in the Arab world. This actually meant that the so-called 'military option' which would annihilate Israel was no longer a viable and realistic one. There could not be a destruction of the 'the Jewish state' without a similar destruction of Arab states.[1]
c. Even if the Arabs managed to defeat Israel in war, it could be reasonably assumed that Israel's main ally, the United States, would not remain indifferent. No American government would allow another holocaust to befall the Jewish people. Thus, Egypt could assume that the United States – and perhaps other Western states too – would embark upon a massive intervention either politically or militarily (or both) in order to prevent the destruction of the Jewish state.

As a result of those considerations and probably others, so the argument runs, following the Six Day War, Egypt was ready to implement a pragmatic policy, and reach an agreement with Israel. Her willingness to reach a settlement depended on one crucial condition, namely that Israel would be ready to withdraw from the territories it captured in the Six Day War. As far as the Arabs were concerned, the Six Day War

testified to Israel's aggressive policy and dream of expansionism. Therefore, no justification could be found for Israel's continued occupation of the captured territories.

This Arab demand was generally supported by the international community, including Israel's main ally – the United States. There were indeed controversies over the scope of the Israeli withdrawal – not on the principle of withdrawal. This position was best reflected in United Nations Security Council's Resolution 242, whose preamble stated 'the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war' and 'the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict'.[2]

According to the argument, Israel adamantly refused to meet this international demand. In the aftermath of the Six Day War, Israel had become 'intoxicated' by its dazzling victory over Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. A near-messianic euphoria had engulfed almost all of the country. Many people believed that the events that preceded the war, and Israel's amazing triumph were all part of the 'divine grace' which has guided and protected the Jewish people throughout the centuries. An atmosphere of 'sacredness and prophecy fulfilment' was the natural outcome of the newly won territories that many Israelis believed were an integral part of the biblical Jewish land.

As a result of its swift victory the Israel Defense Force (IDF) was confident in its power and ability to defeat any alliance of Arab countries in the future. It seemed that the qualities of the Arab armies had not really improved since the early 1950s, and that the 'apocalyptic prophecies' of the growing power of the Arab states, in particular Egypt, were extremely out of proportion. Israel not only retained its superiority over the Arab states, but probably even enhanced it. There seemed to be reason to think that this balance would remain so in the future. Under these circumstances, Israel saw no reason to acquiesce to the Arabs' demands.

Furthermore, conventional wisdom held that the occupied territories – the Sinai Peninsula, Jordan River and Golan Heights – were essential to Israel's national security. Many Israelis believed that Sinai served as an ideal buffer zone with Egypt since Egypt would find it extremely difficult to launch a surprise attack against Israel. Such an attack, it will be recalled, had been the nightmare of Israel's leadership in the days before the Six Day War. Israeli leaders feared an Egyptian strike that targeted not only military but also civilian objectives. Following such an attack on civilian centres and transformation facilities, Israel's ability to muster its reserve forces – the main element in the army – would be severely impaired. Consequently, Israel might be defeated in a military confrontation in which it would be caught by surprise.

The occupation of Sinai was also considered crucial to Israel because it granted control over the Straits of Tiran, thus ensuring the passage of Israeli vessels to and from Eilat. After the Sinai War (1956), the bulk of Israel's oil imports (almost 90%) came from Iran and passed through the

Straits of Tiran. A blockade of the straits would, therefore, be disastrous to Israel's strategic posture and deterrence capability, but would also inflict upon her extremely severe economic losses. Egypt's blockade of the Straits of Tiran had been one of the reasons for the outbreak of the Sinai War in 1956 and the *casus belli* in the Six Day War of 1967.

It was also claimed that for all practical purposes, Israel had 'fallen head over heels' for the newly occupied territories and the post-1967 *status quo*. Israel's policy was in fact aimed at ensuring the perpetual retention of these lands, including Sinai. Israel was accused of not really intending to use the occupied territories as bargaining chips for a future settlement with the Arabs. This policy was based on Israel's sober realization that any reconciliation with the Arabs would have to include its withdrawal from the newly acquired lands.

This policy clearly conflicted with pre-war statements made by Israeli leaders that the only thing that Israel was interested in was the survival of the Jewish state. This attitude was reflected in Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's message to President Johnson on the very day that the Six Day War erupted (June 5, 1967): 'We seek nothing but to live in peace within our territory.' Similar statements were made by other Israeli leaders in the aftermath of the Six Day War.[3]

Because of Israel's arrogant intransigence, it was claimed, the Arab world in general, and Egypt in particular, drew the conclusion that the only way to jump-start the political process would be by military means. Israel's policy, it was argued, left Egypt no other option but to initiate a war that would shatter Israel's overweening confidence, and force the Israeli government to rethink its rigid position on the occupied territories and the 'necessary sacrifices' for an Arab–Israeli settlement.

Bearing these circumstances in mind, the Yom Kippur War, it is argued, should not be viewed as an act of Egyptian–Syrian aggression against peace-loving Israel. Egypt's president, Anwar Sadat, did not think for a moment that the war would enable him to defeat Israel or crush 'the Zionist entity' (although Israeli leaders undoubtedly believed otherwise during the war). Sadat merely understood that inflicting a painful surprise attack was the only way to convince Israel to be more accommodative towards a regional settlement. Therefore the Yom Kippur War should be seen as an exceedingly daring act that Egypt was compelled to undertake in order to create suitable conditions for an Arab–Israeli reconciliation. There was no other way open to Egypt to move the political process forward.

Israel's incriminators charge that it was a needless tragedy, that only after the Yom Kippur War, in which thousands of soldiers on both sides lost their lives and many others were wounded, was Israel ready to make the required concessions to conclude a peace treaty – that is, the willingness to concede control of Sinai and make other commitments towards a solution of the 'Palestinian problem'. As future events would

show, Israel's willingness paved the way to the signing of an Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty that remains intact despite the 'desert storms' that have lashed the region since then.

I believe that this portrayal of Israel's positions and policies regarding a reconciliation of the Arab–Israeli conflict after the Six Day War presents a partial and distorted picture of the real circumstances prevailing at the time. Therefore, it is crucial to explain *why* so skewed an image was created. I will try to present a more balanced assessment of Israeli policies and the reasons for the failure of a comprehensive settlement to emerge.

In my view, the reason that Israel is depicted as the main agent for the failure to achieve a political settlement is linked to the public protest that was heard during the War of Attrition (1968–70) and the Yom Kippur War (October 1973).

It should be recalled that until the War of Attrition, Israel had never experienced domestic controversy over the justification of its wars. The War of Independence (1947–48) was fought without any disagreement over it by the Jewish community. A widespread consensus existed, even though certain political factions felt that war could have been averted or at least delayed if the declaration of independence had been postponed. No one doubted that this war was intended to guarantee the survival of the Jewish community in the embryonic state. Therefore, notwithstanding the extremely high number of casualties (over 6,000 out of a total population of 600,000) there was no argument about the need to take up arms.[4]

Similarly there was no protest of consequence during the 1956 Sinai War although many questioned Ben-Gurion's avowals that it was launched solely for self-defence. Some people wondered about the claims that Israel's survival was jeopardized by the weapons Egypt had received from the Soviet Union in 1955–56 (Egypt's Czech arms deal in 1955). These voices also challenged the argument that Arab infiltration posed a major threat to Israel's survival and vital interests. Many others criticized Israel's collaboration with 'imperialist superpowers' – Britain and France – during the war, fearing that Israel would be tainted with this stain for many years to come. However, Ben-Gurion's authoritative leadership and the government's dominating control over the media guaranteed that these controversies remained muted during the fighting.

The Six Day War, too, was considered a 'classic' case of a just war. Israelis felt the very survival of the Jewish state was in the balance because of Nasser's provocative acts: Egypt's massive military incursion into Sinai, the evacuation of the United Nations forces from Sinai, and the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Given these developments, no one questioned the war's justification.[5]

This was not the case with the War of Attrition or the Yom Kippur War. In both cases there were wide-scale protests and national disunity over the handling and justification of the war. The predominating belief

in Israel was that the War of Attrition had broken out because the IDF had deployed its forces on the banks of the Suez Canal 'within spitting distance' of the Egyptian army. Many people felt that Israel should not have undertaken so taunting and flouting a measure in front of Egypt.

In fact, many Israelis recalled that at the outset of the war, Defence Minister Dayan had ordered the IDF units not to approach the Suez Canal too closely. Dayan realized that the Egyptians would be hard-pressed not to maintain quiet on the canal with the Israelis sitting opposite them barring the waterway to shipping and Egyptian revenues. Correctly estimating that Israel had no need to 'straddle' the canal, Dayan instructed his commanders to halt their advance a few kilometres short of the water.

If this order had been kept, many contended, the Suez Canal might have remained open and Egypt would not have been driven to launch a war against Israeli troops in Sinai. In short, Israel could have avoided the War of Attrition and its large number of casualties. However, it is known that during the Six Day War, Israeli commanders were eager to enhance their victory and humiliate the Egyptians as much as possible; therefore they disregarded orders and made a dash to the banks of the Suez Canal.

As already mentioned, many Israelis believed that this was the main reason for the War of Attrition. Consequently, they advocated the IDF's withdrawal to positions in Sinai's hinterland. This withdrawal would allow Egypt to reopen the canal to international shipping. In time, a de facto state of peace would prevail in the region. Interestingly, some high-ranking IDF commanders – most noteworthy, Arik Sharon – also adhered to this view. However, the chief of staff, Chaim Bar Lev, unconditionally dismissed the idea, and his view was eventually approved by Prime Minister Golda Meir.[6]

Israel's refusal to re-deploy its forces in Sinai, even tactically, is often used as 'proof' of her willingness to retain the whole territories in her hands. Consequently, the 'tactical' debate over the deployment of Israeli forces in Sinai became linked to the 'strategic' debate over Israel's policy regarding the occupied territories. In this context, we will now examine the claim that Israel's desire to hang onto the territories was the main reason for the absence of a political settlement in the period prior to the Yom Kippur War.

One can hardly deny the claim that many Israelis viewed the *status quo* that was created after the Six Day War – and especially the acquisition of the territories – as a major political-strategic-economic asset. They wanted the *status quo* to remain in effect for as long as possible. As a result, it is further argued, there was little interest in embarking upon a political process that might lead to an accord with Egypt since this would obviously involve Israel's withdrawal from the newly won territories. Supporters of this position came from a wide range of circles, and were undoubtedly backed by leading political figures.

To counter this line of argumentation, I claim that what really matters in a debate of this nature are not the beliefs, aspirations, and dreams of individuals – even if they hold key positions in the state's leadership. When analysing the prospects of an Arab–Israeli settlement – and the reasons for its failure to emerge – in the pre-Yom Kippur War period, we have to look at the Israeli government's official position.

Following the Six Day War, Israel's official position stated that the government was prepared to sign an Arab–Israeli peace agreement that would include Israel's withdrawal from the captured territories. As far as Egypt was concerned, Israel was ready to pull back from Sinai to the June 5 1967 lines. Israel's non-negotiable condition was that an official and comprehensive peace treaty would be signed by both sides.

Again, to emphasize, Israel insisted that its 'compensation' from the Arabs as a result of its willingness to withdraw from occupied territories would have to be in the form of a formal peace treaty – not just another armistice agreement or non-belligerency pact, but a settlement based on the principle that all the major issues still disputed by Israel and the Arab world would be reconciled only by peaceful means. Such a settlement would have to include the establishment of diplomatic relations between the parties and the free passage of people and goods between countries. Israel believed that only such a settlement would ensure that peace would prevail for a long period of time. This would be a peace between the people of both sides, not just a peace between governments. Tight economic relations between the nations would ensure that this peace would not collapse whenever a conflict arose between the parties. The educational framework of both sides would have to undergo a radical change to educate youngsters as to the value of peace. The 'other side' would have to be portrayed positively. War would have to be defined as a phenomenon of the dark years in the past.

The Arabs in general, and Egypt in particular, were apparently not ready yet for so sweeping a deal. One may lament the tragedy that Egypt was prepared to sign such an agreement only after the Yom Kippur War when Sadat visited Jerusalem, delivered a speech in the Knesset, and made the 'breathtaking' declaration: 'no more war, no more bloodshed'. This statement did not imply that Egypt and Israel had finally solved all their controversies; but it did mean that in 1977, four years after the Yom Kippur War, Egypt had accepted the long-standing Israeli position that disputes between the parties should be resolved only through peaceful political processes, and not on the battlefield. Since the Israeli–Egyptian peace treaty was signed, Israel and Egypt have found themselves in bitter conflicts. These included, among others, controversies over Israel's policy towards the Palestinian authority, Israel's military operations in Lebanon and Israel's nuclear activity. None of them have led to the breakdown of the peace treaty.

Israel's insistence on a comprehensive peace agreement was best reflected during Golda Meir's tenure as prime minister. On assuming office in February 1969, she insisted, as her predecessor, Levi Eshkol, had, that Israel's position regarding the Arab world and an Arab–Israeli settlement must be defined in the clearest of terms. Hence, Israel stated its position in the following manner:

a. Israel's primary goal is to obtain a comprehensive peace treaty with the entire Arab world.
b. The treaty will include the end to hostilities between Israel and Egypt.
c. The treaty will also grant Israel recognized and defensible borders.
d. Until a comprehensive peace treaty exists with Egypt, the *status quo* that has been in effect since the end of the Six Day War will remain in effect.
e. Until there is peace with the Arabs, Israel will undertake all measures necessary to maintain its security and strengthen its deterrent power in order to convince the Arabs that another military confrontation with Israel will end in another humiliating military defeat.[7]

The wording of this position unequivocally reflects Israel's determination to withdraw from the occupied territories – not necessarily to the armistice lines of 1949 – within the context of a formal and comprehensive peace treaty. From time to time, Israel added another demand: that the peace treaty would be hammered out only through direct talks between the parties.

Some scholars describe this position as Israel's 'traditional' intransigent policy. In my opinion such an assertion takes the Israeli position too literally rather than analysing its roots. I believe that if the position is presented in a wider historical context, it will be seen that it was the outcome of what Israel saw as a bitterly frustrating experience with the Arab world since the founding of the state in 1948.

After the 1948 war, Israel signed Armistice Agreements with Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Many Israelis were certain that those agreements would soon be replaced by comprehensive peace treaties. They reckoned that considering the Arabs' ignominious defeat, they would 'rationally' conclude that peace with Israel would best serve their interests.

The Arabs, it was argued, would naturally realize that as Israel's strength increased, their ability to defeat it on the battlefield would diminish. Furthermore, the Arabs would finally see that peace offered the opportunity to greatly improve their standard of living and solve some of their most implacable social and economic problems.

Indeed, the Armistice Agreements which were signed between February and July 1949 included visible indications that they would lead the parties to a comprehensive peace settlement:

a. The preamble stressed that the agreements were undertaken 'in order to facilitate the transition from the present truce to permanent peace in Palestine.'
b. Article I states, 'With a view to promoting the return of permanent peace in Palestine.'
c. Article I (2) states, 'No aggressive action by the armed forces – land, sea, or air – of either Party shall be undertaken, planned, or threatened against the people or armed forces of the other.'
d. Article I (3) states, 'The right of each Party to its security and freedom from fear of attack by the armed forces of the other shall be fully respected.'
e. Article III (2) states, 'No element of the land, sea or air military or para-military forces of either Party, including non-regular forces, shall commit any warlike or hostile act against the military or para-military forces of the other Party, or against civilians in territory under the control of that Party.'

However, soon after the Armistice Agreements were signed, Israel realized that a wide discrepancy existed between the text of the agreement and the actual policies being implemented by the Arab world. The Israelis also perceived that in three main areas the Arabs had little inclination to accept the post-war *status quo*. Their positions on those issues sharply contradicted those of Israel.

a. The nature of the armistice lines: The Arabs claimed that there was nothing 'sacred' about these lines. They merely reflected the positions of the military forces when the ceasefire went into effect. Therefore, they had no political meaning. The only lines that contained some political validity and international legality were those of the Partition Plan approved by the United Nations General Assembly on 29 November 1947. Therefore, Israel should withdraw to those lines at least.
b. The Arab refugee problem: The Arabs pointed out that Israel alone was responsible for the expulsion of almost 700,000 Palestinians from their homeland. Israel should therefore be willing to implement General Assembly Resolution 194 (11 December 1948), which stated that 'refugees wishing to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law

or in equity, should be made good by the governments or authorities responsible.'[8]

c. Jerusalem's status: The Arabs claimed that they would not accept Jerusalem's status as a city divided between Israel and Jordan. Israel, they emphasized, should be willing to implement the clause in the partition resolution (29 November 1947) which stipulated that 'the City of Jerusalem shall be established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime and shall be administered by the United Nations.'[9]

From the Arabs' point of view, since the Armistice Agreements were no more than military arrangements of limited scope, they should in no way be interpreted as expressions of Arab willingness to accept the outcome of the 1948 war. The Arabs were extremely interested in proving to the international community that the Armistice Agreements had not put an end to the state of war with Israel. The only way the Arab world would realize its goals would be by prolonging the campaign against Israel on the military, political, and economic fronts. If a peaceful atmosphere prevailed in the Middle East, then the international community would undoubtedly be led to believe that the Arabs had reconciled themselves with the war's results.

From Israel's point of view, the only consideration that could deter – and did in fact deter – Egypt from launching a full-blown war in the aftermath of 1948 was their realization that Israel was far superior to them militarily and could deliver a second thrashing. The Arabs had already tasted Israel's power in the 1948 war. Israel had single-handedly overcome several Arab states whose populations and resources far exceeded hers. Also, Egypt could assume that in time Israel's strength would increase and their chances of overpowering the IDF in a major confrontation would decrease.

Thus, the Egyptians faced an agonizing dilemma. On the one hand, they wanted to maintain a state of war with their avowed enemy, Israel *inter alia*, to demonstrate that they unconditionally rejected the newly established *status quo*. On the other hand, they had every reason to believe that they would be severely trounced in another military showdown with Israel. The only way they could meet the challenge of this dilemma would be to wage low-intensity warfare against Israel in the form of attrition.

The Arabs probably estimated that the 'strategy of attrition' would exact Israeli blood, instil a perpetual sense of dread in Israel's citizens, and above all, demonstrate to the international community the Arab world's determination to remain in a state of war with Israel, and to oppose by every means possible the post-1948 *status quo*. At the same time, the Arabs could assume that low-intensity war would deny Israel an excuse to launch a major campaign against the Arab countries since

Israel would not risk a war that could not be justified before the international community.[10]

However, within a few years the Arabs learned that all their assumptions with regard to the effects of their strategy and Israel's expected response were wrong. It was obvious that the impact of low-intensity warfare on the Israeli populace was far greater than had been estimated. It created a pandemic of anxiety and insecurity throughout the country, especially in the peripheral areas close to the borders which suffered most from the Arabs' campaign of terror. The inhabitants of these areas exerted relentless pressure on the government to end the security threat by any means.

Some of the people living in the periphery (mostly new immigrants) threatened to abandon their villages if the government did not retaliate in force against Arab states abetting the infiltrators. For several years, the Israelis in the border settlements had been complaining that the government deliberately discriminated them vis-à-vis citizens in the centre of the country. No Israeli government could continue to ignore such charges. The Israeli leadership realized that without a suitable military response, domestic opposition parties would gain the votes of the disgruntled electorate.

In short, as opposed to the Arabs' initial assumptions, Israel perceived low intensity warfare as a severe strategic threat rather than 'merely' a painful annoyance. Gradually Israeli leaders, foremost among them Ben-Gurion, came to realize that the struggle against Arab low-intensity warfare could not be carried out by retaliation operations only. That to bring an end to this warfare – at least for several years – Israel would have to launch an all-out war against the leading Arab state – Egypt. There is little doubt, then, that this misguided Arab strategy contributed much to Israel's decision to cooperate with Britain and France in a war against Egypt in 1956.

The Sinai War (October–November 1956) was a highly successful military operation. It took the IDF only a few days to conquer the entire Sinai Peninsula. Israeli troops also gained control over the Straits of Tiran. But Israel failed to accomplish its main war aim: the downfall of Nasser's regime and the creation of a new system of relations with Israel's Arab neighbours. Just as the war seemed to be over, the United States and the Soviet Union took joint action – against all odds – and forced Israel, Britain, and France to withdraw almost unconditionally.

As a result of this international pressure, Israel pulled out of Sinai a few months after the war's conclusion. Her formal relations with the Arab world, based on the 1949 Armistice Agreements, remained intact. Nasser's regime lived on to rule, and even enhanced its status and prestige. Israel's only apparent gains from the war were the demilitarization of Sinai and deployment of UN troops in the peninsula as a

buffer between Israel and Egypt. In addition, the United States guaranteed Israel's navigational rights through the Straits of Tiran.

Following the Sinai War, Israel learned the meaning of the term 'limitations of power'. Military superiority was certainly a vital asset – it had ensured a swift victory over Egypt – nevertheless it was insufficient to secure a comprehensive strategic victory. An effective strategic victory would be gained if military power was accompanied by political, that is, international backing. As for Israel's relations with the Arab world, it could only conclude from the Sinai War that the superpowers would always deny it a decisive victory over the Arabs. In other words, Israel's military victories would always be limited and short-lived.

In the aftermath of the Sinai Campaign, Israel also received a sober lesson in the limitations of international alliances and guarantees: the United States had abandoned her main NATO allies, Britain and France, and collaborated with NATO's number one rival – the Soviet Union. Washington justified its conduct by claiming that Britain and France had ignored American pleas by acting behind the United States' back when they decided to go to war against Egypt. Therefore, they had, to a certain extent, forfeited their status as America's allies. Furthermore, both countries had launched an attack against another state – Egypt. The support to NATO allies was given only in the event that a NATO member state was being attacked and needed assistance in repelling the aggressor. This clearly was not the case in the Sinai War. However, those formal, legalistic arguments could hardly serve to justify US policy towards her closest allies. Israel, on its part, had to conclude that at a time when her national interests would be under threat it could not rely on the United States to fulfil her guarantees and assurances to come to Israel's support.

The arrangements agreed upon following the Sinai Campaign remained intact until May 1967. Throughout this period, Nasser made it clear that until the Egyptian army was rearmed and retrained he would not go to war against Israel. In fact, he publicly admitted that he was deterred by Israel's military superiority. During the interregnum between Arab–Israeli clashes, Nasser made unparalleled efforts to prevent provocative acts against Israel. He even pressured Syria, the most bellicose Arab state at the time, to refrain from carrying out instigative operations.

This *status quo* remained in effect until the summer of 1967. In mid-May massive numbers of Egyptian troops rolled into Sinai without prior warning, an act that annulled the post-Sinai Campaign agreement for the demilitarization of the peninsula. Soon afterwards Egypt decided to abrogate another international agreement that it was committed to when it demanded the withdrawal of the UN forces that had been stationed in Sinai since the end of the Sinai War. A few days later, Nasser 'raised the ante' in his sabre-rattling campaign when he announced the closure of the Straits of Tiran to ships flying the Israeli flag and to all vessels carrying

'strategic goods' – arms and oil – to Israel. Nasser had no illusions that Israel would interpret this move as a *casus belli*.

This chain of events was a perilous blow to Israel's deterrent shield. For almost a decade – since the end of the Sinai Campaign – Nasser had repeated that Egypt would not attack Israel in the foreseeable future. The Zionist state's military superiority, he declared, would guarantee Israel victory and the Arabs would suffer another humiliating defeat. Suddenly, in May 1967, his qualms seemed to have vanished. No one could explain the dramatic change in Egypt's attitude towards Israel. Nasser now initiated a series of provocations that clearly signalled his readiness for a military confrontation (even if we accept the claim that he did not really intend to go to the brink).

In view of these ominous developments, Israel careened between panic and confusion, unable to decide on the appropriate response to Egypt's goading. It hesitated to undertake military measures – although this seemed the most natural reaction – for several reasons: First, Egypt's brazen confidence generated deep worry in Israel about the outcome of a military face-off. Israel could not rule out the possibility that Egypt was planning to unleash 'surprises' that Israel's intelligence community had no knowledge of. The fear of these potential 'surprises' undermined Israel's long-standing confidence in the consequences of a clash with an Arab state.

An even more important consideration in Israel's decision to refrain from reacting militarily at this stage was Washington's position on the crisis. At the outset of the crisis, Israel was uncertain if it would receive American support for a military operation. The Johnson Administration was cold-shouldering Israel at this point, not only refusing to publicly back Israel, but also prevailing upon it to avoid a military strike against Egypt.

This US position was best reflected in the Eshkol–Johnson exchange of letters. On 17 May, Johnson sent a memo to Eshkol expressing his understanding of the gravity of Israel's situation and at 'having your patience tried to the limit'. However, he admonished Israel 'in the strongest terms' to restrain itself from undertaking military measures against Egypt.[11]

Moreover, Johnson demanded that Israel remain in the 'closest consultation' with the US administration. In practical terms, this meant that Israel should not precipitate any act without Washington's approval. In order to hammer home his threat, Johnson declared that he would be unable 'to accept any responsibility on behalf of the United States for situations which arise as the result of actions on which we are not consulted'.[12]

Johnson's letter reflected an extremely aloof attitude on the part of the US administration towards one of the gravest crises that Israel ever faced. The message was essentially a denial by the highest US government

authority of clearly defined commitments given by a number of American presidents, including Johnson himself, to protect Israel's security and territorial integrity in the event of an external threat.

Even more dismaying, from Israel's point of view, was Johnson's intention to deny Israel the natural right to self-defence by warning that such an act would curtail American support. While the Johnson Administration might find formal and legal justifications for such a cynical and arbitrary attitude, the core of Washington's commitments to Israel were not of a legal nature, but rather of a political and moral one. At a time when the credibility of US commitments to Israel was being put to test, the Johnson Administration had decided to renege on them because they appeared as liabilities to American national interests.'[13]

To sum up: Israel's decades-long experience with the Arabs and the unbearable tension in the weeks preceding the Six Day War combined to shape Israel's policy towards the Arab world in the aftermath of the Six Day War. We shall now proceed to examine the main conclusions that Israel drew from these events.

The Israelis' most important conclusion dealt with the formal legal structure that was the basis of Israel's relations with the Arab world since the 1948 War – namely, the Armistice Agreements. Israel had learned the hard way that these agreements were insufficient to stave off hostile acts. Thus, Israel concluded that it was crucial to insist that the agreements be replaced by a more comprehensive arrangement – a *bona fide* peace treaty that would include diplomatic representation and the free and uninterrupted movement of people and goods between Israel and the Arab world.

Nevertheless Israel was sensible enough to realize that even a peace treaty is no guarantee that war will not erupt. History had too often shown that states were capable of cynically revoking so-called peace treaties and mounting full-scale onslaughts. Israeli leaders were wont to repeat Ben-Gurion's statement at the end of the War of Independence that Israel must be prepared for war even if peace agreements were signed with Arab states. Despite this cynical insight, it could be reasonably assumed that states would be much more reluctant to ride roughshod over a peace treaty than an armistice agreement.

Israel also learned that it could not rely on US commitments and guarantees even if they were given by the highest elected official in American government. During a crisis, when the 'chips were down', Washington would plot out its position according to American interests regardless if they clashed with previous commitments made by American presidents.

To re-emphasize, Israel also realized the limitations of its military superiority. After two impressive victories (1948 and 1956), Israel was granted a limited period during which Egypt seemed deterred from going to war. This period lasted only ten years. Egypt's decision to move large forces into Sinai, the removal of UNEF from Sinai and in particular

the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping all marked the collapse of Israeli deterrence. There could be no doubt that Nasser was well aware of the high probability that those acts would lead to a military confrontation with Israel. His readiness to undertake such a risk indicated that he was no longer deterred.

In addition, the Six Day War itself – notwithstanding the highly impressive victory Israel gained in the war – had not produced deterrence. Shortly after a ceasefire was agreed, Egypt carried out provocative operations against the Israeli forces which were deployed along the Suez Canal. These sporadic attacks continued notwithstanding the retaliation operations which Israel carried out against Egypt. In October 1967, only a few months after the war, Egypt attacked an Israeli destroyer, *Eilath*, killing over 40 Israeli soldiers. Sinking a destroyer sailing in the open sea is clearly considered an act of war. It obviously indicates the collapse of Israel's deterrence at that period.

Furthermore, the 1967 crisis caught Israel by surprise. Its security assessment had been based on the assumption that war would not break out until 1970. This assessment was based on various factors, foremost among them were the fact that large portions of the Egyptian army were engaged in a protracted civil war in Yemen; the long-enduring rifts and deep controversies within the Arab world and Egypt's awareness of its strategic inferiority vis-à-vis Israel. In addition, Israel's intelligence estimated that Egypt's commitment to support Syria in case the latter would be attacked by Israel was not sufficiently solid, and Egypt would be extremely cautious in fulfilling this commitment.

Despite the massive entry of Egyptian troops into Sinai, Israeli intelligence still estimated, at the initial stages of the crisis, that it was 'all for show' and posed no immediate threat. Latter on, when it became evident that Nasser was serious in his moves, and UNEF was removed from Sinai, there were still grave doubts whether Nasser would escalate the tensions, and order the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. This indeed was termed a *casus belli*. The Israeli intelligence authorities estimated that the probability Nasser would dare undertake such a risk were not high. When developments proved the fallacy of this assessment, Israeli leaders realized that the country's 'legendary' intelligence network had deeper cracks in it than they could have imagined, and could not be relied on blindly to supply an early warning of an impending Arab offensive.

Bearing in mind its bitter lessons since 1948 and Israel's frustrating, even traumatic, experience in the weeks that preceded the Six Day War, I believe it was only natural that in the aftermath of the Six Day War Israel decided on a new direction in its relations with the Arabs. The outstanding expression of this new track was Israel's insistence that in the future, relations with the Arab world would be based on a comprehensive peace treaty rather than on tenuous armistice agreements or non-belligerency pacts.

It is within this context that we should recall that Israel approached Egypt and Syria with a lucidly drafted peace proposal a few days after the Six Day War. On 19 June, the Israeli government adopted Resolution No. 563, which stated that Israel proposed signing a comprehensive peace treaty with Egypt based on the international border between the two states and Israel's security needs. According to this proposal, Sinai would be demilitarized. A similar proposal was presented to Syria also stating that until Israel and Syria signed a peace treaty, the captured territories would remain in Israel's hands.[14]

Foreign Minister Abba Eban was instructed to inform the US government of these proposals. Their content was delivered to Arab states, in particular to Egypt. However, as far as Israel was concerned no positive response was forthcoming that might have led to the opening of a direct dialogue between the parties. Indeed, the proposals did not cater to all of the Arabs' demands. However, Egypt was perfectly aware that such proposals only reflected initial negotiating positions in what would have to be a lengthy dialogue with Israel on numerous other aspects of the conflict.

Egypt could rightly assume that international as well as domestic pressure would compel Israel to exhibit more flexibility towards the Arab world. However, six months after the Six Day War, Defence Minister Moshe Dayan concluded that 'it became clear there were no real chances for peace'. The United States, Dayan asserted, informed President Nasser that Israel was ready to withdraw to the international border in exchange for a comprehensive peace treaty. However, Nasser did not want to change his attitude towards Israel. 'He was determined to rebuild the Egyptian army and unite the whole Arab world for the decisive war against Israel'.[15]

In August 1967 the heads of the Arab states convened a summit conference in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan. At the end of the meeting, Nasser presented his draft resolution outlining the principles for the Arab–Israeli conflict Egypt had to adopt. According to Nasser's resolution there would be no peace treaty with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no dialogue with Israel. Those resolutions were interpreted by Israelis as a clear indication that Nasser had no interest in any political solution of the Arab–Israeli conflict.[16]

Furthermore, Egypt reaffirmed her determination to safeguard the rights of the Palestinian people and restoration of their homeland. A few months later, Mahmoud Riad, the Egyptian foreign minister, announced that the resolution's aim was 'to eliminate the consequences of [Israel's] aggression [in the Six-Day War], and secure the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories'. At the same time, President Nasser advanced the principle that 'what was taken by force would be returned only by force'.[17]

On 22 November 1967 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 242, which included the following main points:

a. The inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war.
b. The need to work for a just and lasting peace in which every state in the area can live in security.
c. The establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.
d. The withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.
e. The termination of all claims or states of belligerency, and the respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.
f. The guarantee of freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area.
g. The request that the secretary-general should designate a special representative to proceed to the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the states concerned in order to promote an agreement and assist in the efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution.

In conclusion, in the years following the Six Day War Israel was unwilling to display any flexibility in its basic positions on the settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict. Israel insisted that any settlement with the Arab world take the form of a comprehensive peace agreement. I tend to believe that such an option was unrealizable in this period. Egypt showed no willingness to conclude a comprehensive agreement with Israel. Seen thus, both states were locked in a pressure hold that neither could escape from. Peace agreements can be concluded only when the circumstances are ripe for them. This, unfortunately, was not the case in the six-year interval between the Six Day War and Yom Kippur War.

Notes

1 See Z. Shalom, *Israel's Nuclear Option, Behind the Scenes Diplomacy Between Dimona and Washington*, Brighton: The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University and Sussex Academic Press, 2005, pp. 50–51, 172–73.
2 http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/UN/242toc.html.
3 Report from the United States Embassy in Israel to the State Department, 5 June, 1967, NND 969000, BOX 1816 B, NA.
4 There were 721 casualties in the War of Attrition – 594 were soldiers. See http://www.ynet.co.il/yaan/0,7340,L-24035-MjQwMzVfMzQxNzY5NTk0X-zIxMzUyNQ==-FreeYaan,00.html
5 On the Israeli intelligence community's performance during the Yom Kippur War, see R. Bergman, *The Yom Kippur War – a Time of Truth*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot Publishers, 2003, pp. 250–64 [Hebrew].
6 On Levi Eshkol's character traits, see H. Herzog, *Thirty Years to the Yom Kippur War*, Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot Publishers, 1998, pp. 33–34 [Hebrew].

7 See S. Golan, 'The Objectives of the Yom Kippur War,' in H. Golan and S. Shai (eds), *Research on the Yom Kippur War*, Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2003, pp. 96–97 [Hebrew].
8 See Internet site http://www.mideastweb.org/194.htm
9 Ibid.
10 See Z. Shalom, *Policy in Dispute, Israel's Defense Policy 1949–1956*, Israel Defense Ministry Publications, 1996, pp. 11–15 [Hebrew].
11 State Department Memo, 17 May 1967, NND 969000, box 2185, NA. See also State Department memo, 17 May 1967, *FRUS 1964–1968*, XIX, pp. 10–11.
12 Ibid.
13 The original wording of President Johnson's statement following his meeting with Eshkol:

> President Johnson reaffirmed to Prime Minister Eshkol American support for the territorial integrity and political independence of all countries in the Middle East, and emphasized the United States firm opposition to aggression and the use of force and the threat of force against any country.

See E. Evron, 'Israel and the United States, in the Six-Day War,' Dayan Research Center, Tel Aviv University, 25 November 1987.
14 See Israeli government protocol, 18 June 1967, File A-8164/7, Israel National Archives. See also: M. Dayan, *Milestones*, Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, p. 491.
15 Dayan, *Milestones*, p. 512.
16 On the meanings of the resolution, see Y. Meital, 'The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy After the 1967 War: A Reexamination', *Middle East Journal*, 54/1, 2000.
17 Israel Foreign Ministry memo, 23 December 1967, HZ 6546/9, INA.

6 Military/political means/ends

Egyptian decision-making in the War of Attrition

Laura M. James

Introduction

The crushing Arab defeat in the 'Six Day War' of June 1967 had a cataclysmic effect on the Egyptian decision-making environment.[1] In the short term, President Gamal Abdel Nasser seems to have been affected by the shock of defeat to the point of irrationality – although there is no evidence that the condition persisted.[2] In the longer term, the 'setback' caused the autocratic Egyptian leader to be subject to greater domestic constraints.[3] Although he had turned potential disaster into triumph with the popular response to his 9 June resignation speech, Nasser's position had become less secure. There were increased internal regime divisions between the pro-Western right and the left, which was supported by Soviet patronage.[4] The army was dangerously discontented and kept temporarily in barracks.[5] Growing support for the *fidā'iyūn* was a major problem, as were unprecedented student riots.[6] The economic situation was particularly bad, and continued to deteriorate. Even before the war, Egypt had been saddled with a large, unserviceable foreign debt.[7] Now she had lost her major sources of revenue, and the loss was only partially made good by Arab aid – which was in any case dependent on the appearance of continuing the fight against Israel.[8] More than at any period since the beginning of his rule, Nasser was forced to pay attention to the opinions of others regarding foreign policy. Nonetheless, his control of the state-run media allowed him to influence opinion formation, and he remained the principal decision-maker within the Cairo regime.

The fundamental issue dominating Egyptian foreign policy during this period was the Israeli occupation of Sinai – and, to a lesser extent, the other territories occupied in June 1967. One major controversy concerns whether Nasser was ultimately seeking a military or a political solution to this problem. Small linguistic nuances came to be of great importance. The political solution ('al-hal al-siyāsiyy') called for in the international arena was distinguished both from a peaceful solution ('al-hal al-silmiyy'), which would rule out the use of military means, and from political action/means

('taḫarruk'/'wasā'il'), emphasized more in a domestic context, which would not ultimately rule out a military solution. To probe for the consistent purposes behind this creative ambiguity, this chapter considers developments immediately after the 1967 war, as well as during the subsequent 'War of Attrition' between Egypt and Israel. Finally, it asks whether Egyptian policy before Nasser's death in 1970 constituted any sort of coherent strategy, leading to a planned endgame.

Confrontation or compromise?

When Nasser spoke of the ongoing confrontation with Israel, he usually referred to the period from July 1967 until August 1968 as the phase of 'Resistance' ('ṣumūd').[9] It was marked out by the reconstruction of the Egyptian armed forces and the fortification of defences along the Suez Canal.[10] Concurrent with these military preparations was political dialogue, particularly in the UN. In the end, however, the military goals are generally seen to have taken primacy over political initiatives. Nasser made various pacific statements to Westerners, as well as to the insistent Soviets.[11] However, these were only partially supported by the course of the UN negotiations. Although former Foreign Minister Mahmoud Fawzi's opening speech on 19 June was relatively moderate, he proceeded to reject the text of a Latin American resolution calling for full Israeli withdrawal in return for recognition of Israel's right to exist.[12] When Egypt finally agreed to the more ambiguous Resolution 242 in November, it was on the basis of her own declaration that it meant withdrawal from *all* occupied territories.[13] Just three days later, Nasser told his senior commanders:

> Everything you hear us say about the UN resolution is not meant for you, and has nothing to do with you . . . Please remember what I have said before – what has been taken by force can only be recovered by force. This is not rhetoric: I mean it . . . So you don't need to pay any attention to anything I may say in public about a peaceful solution.[14]

Two months earlier, at the Khartoum summit, the Arab leaders had agreed on the 'three noes' – no negotiation; no recognition; and no peace with Israel. At the time, this was cited as evidence, Nasser was resolved on another war.[15] However, many historians now see the agreement as a victory for the 'moderates' Nasser and Hussein, since it legitimated the use of diplomacy and prioritized the return of the occupied territories over Palestine.[16] Although Palestinian rights were reaffirmed, no mention was made of the *means* by which these should be restored, and when the PLO leader objected, 'they literally shouted him down'.[17] Mohammed Fayek remembers,

> When Nasser came from Khartoum, I told him: 'How am I going, as Minister of Information, to say 'No Peace'?' He said: 'No, we don't say this, we say 'No Peace Treaty' . . . I cannot negotiate now. But this doesn't mean that I am not going to negotiate forever.'[18]

However, it does seem that Nasser was genuinely sceptical about the prospect of a peaceful solution. Most Egyptian sources argue that Nasser from the outset saw war as his only option, believing that it would never be possible to negotiate with Israel from a position of weakness.[19] The president announced that it would be 'impossible to reach a reasonable political solution' without the inevitable military battle.[20] He did not expect it to be easy, nor did he expect Egypt to be ready for at least three years.[21] But when even the foreign minister believed that diplomacy was hopeless, and the army and navy were desperate to show their mettle, it is hardly surprising that military preparations were given a high priority.[22] Nasser promoted two martinets to organize, train and expand the debilitated army: General Mohammed Fawzi became overall commander and General Mohammed Abdel Moneim Riad was his chief of staff. Nasser gave them full support, and the Soviets also provided substantial assistance, including weapons and advisors.[23] There had been small military incidents along the Suez Canal in early July, and the exchanges of fire began again on 26 August, continuing into September. Extensive damage was caused in the Canal Zone towns, and much of the civilian population was evacuated. Korn concludes, 'Nasser was clearing the decks for war.'[24]

The key moment that is generally identified as signalling the resumption of hostilities was the sinking, on 21 October 1967, of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat*. However, it is not clear that this constituted part of a deliberate escalatory plan. On balance, the evidence suggests that the attack was ordered in advance from Cairo, and that Nasser approved it.[25] The motive was probably to improve morale, and perhaps to draw international attention by demonstrating that Egypt would not accept the occupation peacefully.[26] The Israelis retaliated three days later, as the Egyptians had expected, with a devastating attack on the Suez oil refineries.[27] However, the Egyptians did not respond in force, which implies that the *Eilat* incident should not be seen as a major change in strategy.[28] Nasser knew that his defences were not yet strong enough, and sought only a controlled escalation, 'like a game of ping-pong'.[29] He wanted the front to remain active, and small exchanges of fire continued throughout December and into the spring and summer of 1968 – but there was nothing else as significant as the attack on the Israeli destroyer.

The principal military aim during this period was not to allow the front to 'freeze' and Israel to consolidate her possession of Sinai. As time passed with no speedy Suez-type withdrawal, Israel was portrayed as

ever more expansionist and arrogant, likely to exploit any sign of Arab weakness, such as an agreement to direct negotiations.[30] On the other hand, as Nasser told the Council of Ministers, 'as long as the Israelis cannot sign a peace treaty with us, Israel will not consider that it has won the war'.[31] Nasser was convinced Israel would not willingly return Sinai, telling the Egyptian armed forces that her 'fundamental objective' was 'expansion at the expense of Arab territory'.[32] Nasser's confidant, the journalist Mohammed Hassanein Heikal, wrote that Israel was 'intoxicated by its cheap victory'.[33] This charge of arrogance was linked to the assertion that Israel was not 'the dreadful unconquerable enemy' and was in no way 'extraordinary'.[34] She had simply mastered certain military virtues, which Egypt could also learn.[35] 'We must know our defects and correct them,' exhorted Nasser, 'to become equal to our enemy.'[36]

All of this pointed to the eventual necessity of a renewed confrontation with Israel, a conclusion which was reinforced by an ongoing re-evaluation of the US–Israeli relationship. 'Before the 5th June, Israel was virtually a tool in US policy,' wrote Heikal. 'After the Six Day War, Israel became almost a partner in US policy.'[37] US–Egyptian relations in the aftermath of the June war were dominated by 'The Big Lie' – the allegation that American (and British) planes participated in the Israeli attack, which caused the breaking of diplomatic relations.[38] Most Egyptian sources claim that Nasser genuinely believed this, at least at first.[39] However, both Western and Eastern observers interpreted the allegation as posturing for domestic consumption once the president realized the scale of the disaster, and some Egyptians agree.[40] In fact, it seems that Nasser believed in the active participation of Western planes only briefly, if at all, but saw this as relatively unimportant when set against his broader belief in US imperialist 'collusion' with Israel, evidenced, he said, by factors such as the presence of the *USS Liberty* and Johnson's reported comment: 'we have a war on our hands.'[41] This belief in US–Israeli collusion led the Egyptian elite to conclude that the two were even more intimately associated than had previously been believed and now engaged in full 'strategic' co-operation over Middle Eastern issues.[42]

Nasser's options were thus very limited after the June defeat. He was constrained by public opinion, by the need to retain elite support, by Arab regional dynamics and by international power realities. His primary foreign policy goal was first formulated in his resignation speech of 9 June, and remained constant thereafter, namely 'removing the traces of the aggression'.[43] However, it was unclear how this was to be achieved. At first, Nasser was preoccupied by his extreme vulnerability to Israeli attack and Egypt's lack of any viable military option. But even while the president could not make war, neither could he make peace, since anything interpreted as an acceptance of defeat would certainly have upset his delicate domestic and regional balance.[44] As a result, he

formulated a sophisticated strategy that attempted to combine military and political action. The latter was explained to his domestic constituency in terms of the need to placate international opinion; the former was explained to foreign diplomats in terms of Arab pressures.

To some extent, the two strategies were complementary. 'Political action cannot be separated from military action,' argued Heikal; since 'policy must be backed by force, whereas force alone is ineffective if not preceded by political action'.[45] The essence of political action was to persuade the United States to press Israel to withdraw, through a complex diplomatic game, in which the Egyptians generally emphasized that Israeli withdrawal was a precondition, but occasionally hinted that a declaration of intention to withdraw could be the starting point for a comprehensive settlement.[46] The problem was that Nasser was not consistently prepared to make substantial concessions in order to achieve such a settlement.[47] He became convinced that Israel would not withdraw voluntarily from the occupied territories and that the USA would never force her to do so. This scepticism about the prospects of diplomatic success did not necessarily mean that a military solution would work either – but it was the only thing left to try.

The War of Attrition

In September 1968, with 150,000 troops concentrated along the Suez Canal, President Nasser and General Fawzi announced the completion of the phase of 'Resistance' and the inception of the phase of 'Deterrence' (*rada'*). The army would begin to engage with the enemy, restrict its movement, inflict casualties and destroy equipment ('preventive defensive operations').[48] It was seen as the final stage before 'Liberation' (*taḫrīr*), and coincided with a series of strategic exercises held by General Fawzi, designed to prepare the soldiers for war and train them to cross the canal.[49] On 8 September, the Egyptian forces opened fire, breaching the UN ceasefire and triggering a major artillery duel from Suez to al-Qantara, which resulted in fairly high Israeli losses.[50] Smaller incidents followed throughout the month, culminating in another massive artillery barrage on 26 October.[51]

The Egyptian attempt at a change of strategy in autumn 1968 had a twofold motivation. On the one hand, there were important local reasons to escalate. The restored army was eager to take action, and there was a need to raise both military and civilian morale, particularly in the context of the student riots and the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) Congress. There was pressure from the Arab arena as well, with the Saudis wanting to see their subsidy well spent, and Jordan complaining that Egypt was once again sending commandos to Amman while her own front remained quiet.[52] Second, the Egyptians had lost faith in the diplomatic option.[53] The candidates in the US election campaign were

vying with one another to promise Israel all the arms she wanted, while the Israelis were seen as more intransigent and expansionist than ever.[54] They didn't want a settlement, Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad claimed to former Ambassador Lucius Battle, when the latter visited Cairo. They published maps showing Sinai as part of Israel; they refused to accept Resolution 242; they made ominous public statements. When Battle pointed out that Tel Aviv had repeatedly disclaimed any desire to retain Arab territory, Riad replied, 'we don't believe them'.[55]

However, the Egyptians' new confrontational strategy was cancelled after only a month and a half. The reason appears to have been that the Israeli reprisal, a deep-penetration commando raid on the transformer and bridges at Nag Hammadi, was much more severe than had been anticipated, breaking out of the previous paradigm that had limited hostilities to the canal area. It led to civil disturbances and clearly demonstrated to the Egyptian regime that the country's economic infrastructure was vulnerable, and that more time was needed to prepare the army and the local population to counter such actions.[56] Internal defences were strengthened and a 'popular militia' set up to protect vital installations. Meanwhile, Egyptian troops were once more ordered to keep the ceasefire.[57]

However, the strategy of escalation had only been temporarily abandoned. On 12 November, Nasser told the Supreme Executive Committee (SEC) that 'sustained campaigns of attrition' would begin within a month.[58] The following month he explained the delay: 'We need time to rebuild our armed forces . . . This is not surrender.'[59] However, important developments in December cemented the Egyptian determination to resume the fight as soon as possible. First, the Israelis began to construct the 'Bar Lev' line of defences along the canal front, which was seen as an attempt to turn it into a permanent border.[60] Nasser took it as

> glaring confirmation of what he was already firmly persuaded: that Israel meant to hold all of Sinai, that it had no intention of ever getting out, and that the only way to prevent it from staying forever was to pry it loose by force.[61]

This conviction that no political solution was possible was reinforced by the 28 December Israeli commando raid on Beirut airport that destroyed 12 Arab airliners on the ground, which Nasser said showed that Israel had become 'reckless', proving 'that it is Israel which exerts pressure on America and not the other way round'.[62] By February, frontline troops had been authorized by General Fawzi to use small-arms fire, and the General Staff was ordered to prepare for battle. A major operation was imminent.

On 8 March 1969, Egypt opened a massive artillery barrage. There was an immediate setback when the chief of staff, General Riad, was

killed, and the front was relatively quiet for the rest of the month. The escalatory rhetoric, however, continued. On 27 March, Nasser announced to the ASU Congress that Egypt was entering a new, more dangerous stage of confrontation.[63] Three days later he told them:

> There was a time when we used to ask our soldiers at the front to account for their actions if they fired at the enemy on sight for we were not prepared for complications. Now the picture has changed. We ask every soldier at the front to account for his action if he sees the enemy and does not fire at him.[64]

At the same time, the army stepped up pressure on the Bar Lev Line.[65] On 29 April, Israel launched a second raid on Nag Hammadi, but this did not have the same deterrent effect as the previous one.[66]

The confrontation across the canal that began in March 1969 had three aims.[67] First, in domestic terms, it was 'a practical and moral preparation for battle', which would instil an aggressive spirit in the impatient troops and give them practical training in crossing the canal and overpowering the enemy.[68] It would also mobilize the public and relieve their frustration, which had been expressed in severe student riots.[69] The second aim was to destabilize the region and bring in the superpowers, hoping to convince the world that Egypt would fight to regain Sinai if political channels failed.[70] And the third aim was to convince Israel that staying in Sinai would not bring her long-term security by demonstrating the high costs: both psychologically, in terms of the loss of life, and economically, due to the impact of long-term mobilization.[71]

It has been argued that, in addition, the War of Attrition was originally seen as a step leading straight to the military liberation of Sinai.[72] This claim might be supported by Heikal's editorial of 6 June, in which he predicted 'a dangerous summer' spent mobilizing the Arabs, to be followed by 'a hot winter of explosions, flames and fire'.[73] Korn also claims that in May, heartened by their success, 'the Egyptian General Staff did draw up a plan to send two divisions across the canal to take and hold its southern sector'.[74] However, General Mosallem, who was Korn's source, now states, 'We had many plans, but it was for study more than for execution.'[75] There is no evidence that the Egyptians underestimated Israel's relative strength to such a great extent. Given the military balance at the time, and the nature of attrition as a long-term strategy based on the avoidance of escalation, it seems unlikely that such a plan could have been intended for immediate implementation.[76]

Equally, however, Egyptians remained sceptical of the diplomatic option. They were disappointed by the perception that the Middle East policy of the Nixon administration would not be substantially different to that of President Johnson.[77] On 8 June, Nasser told the Council of Ministers that the US had 'finally reached total partiality for Israel and

complete agreement with Israel's views'. He also claimed that the Americans were attempting to overthrow his regime, warning of CIA plots and lavish payments to foment domestic opposition.[78] Cairo became even less optimistic about the prospects of a peaceful settlement, and the diplomatic game was played with reduced enthusiasm. In November 1968, to offset negative Arab reactions to arms sales, Dean Rusk had offered the Egyptians a generous 'Seven Point' peace settlement (apparently conceived without consultation), including full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, but the legalistic and noncommittal Egyptian reply was interpreted as a rejection.[79] In April 1969, Mahmoud Fawzi, meeting President Nixon when in Washington for Eisenhower's funeral, said that 'the time was not yet ripe' for the resumption of diplomatic relations. He had no power to offer any concessions *vis-à-vis* Israel.[80]

The tide turned on 20 July, when the Israeli air force began a massive retaliation that devastated Egyptian air defences. The Egyptian High Command, Marshal Gamasy later remembered, 'had not expected Israel to put its entire air potential into the war, a move which quickly gave the Israelis a tremendous advantage'.[81] The Egyptian attitude remained belligerent, with Nasser declaring 'the battle of liberation' on 23 July.[82] But by September, humiliating deep-penetration commando raids were destroying key radar installations, while Egyptian positions on the west bank of the Canal were subjected to regular bombing by the Israeli air force.[83] On 18 September, after dismissing several senior military officers, Nasser cancelled a planned visit to the USSR on the grounds that he had influenza. In fact, he had just suffered his first heart attack, which laid him low for eight weeks.[84] By December, the Egyptian SAM-2 air defence system had been wiped out, along with a substantial proportion of the air force. It was clear, propaganda notwithstanding, that the strategy of attrition had failed and that the war was being lost.[85] At the end of 1969, therefore, the Egyptian leaders were faced with only three options.

First, they might have accepted the latest US peace initiative – the Rogers Plan.[86] However, the Egyptian attitude to the United States remained extremely suspicious. Nasser had rejected the Sisco Plan, which he portrayed as tantamount to 'surrender', in July 1969.[87] Fearing CIA assassination plots, he had warned his colleagues that the US was 'grooming a Suharto in the ranks of the army'.[88] Heikal wrote that the American attitude had ended any chance that the Egyptian regime would consider resuming diplomatic relations. 'Our enemy's friend,' he noted, 'is our enemy.'[89] The atmosphere was not propitious, therefore, when the US presented the Rogers Plan on 28 October. Ten days later, Nasser made a speech to the National Assembly that constituted a comprehensive rejection of the proposal:

> It has now become clear to us all . . . that there is no alternative to battle. Despite his losses, the enemy continues his pressure and

> arrogance. The enemy's friends, with the USA foremost among them, continue to give him aid, thus helping him continue his aggression.[90]

There has been much debate over Nasser's reasons for this rejection. It is, of course, possible that the content was simply unacceptable. But the Egyptians themselves suggested that their motivations were tactical. They could not accept any plan under conditions of strategic inferiority, when Israel was in such a strong military situation. Moreover, by the time of his inimical 6 November speech, Nasser had already been informed of reports current in Washington that the US government was backing away from the Rogers Plan.[91]

The second option was to attempt to persuade the other Arab states to provide support. At the Rabat summit in December 1969, comprehensive action plans through which Jordan and Syria might activate a second front were considered; while the oil-producing states were asked to donate additional funds for the purchase of the advanced electronic weapons systems that the USSR had thus far refused to provide. Nasser had been trying to organize another Arab summit for some months, but in the event it was a major disappointment, and no agreement was reached. Kerr argues that Nasser himself sabotaged the summit as part of a deliberate strategy to *avoid* war, so that when the other Arab states dragged their feet on the issue of immediate confrontation, Egypt could flounce out – the ultimate implication being 'that without the means for war, the thing to do was to make peace'.[92] However, this argument is weakened by the fact that Egypt did not then proceed to make concessions in order to achieve peace.[93] The Rabat summit is better viewed as the culmination of a long series of squabbles between the 'confrontation states' and the providers of Arab aid.[94] Once it was over, any possibility of seeking from the Arabs the additional assistance that the Egyptians needed was definitively ruled out.[95]

Some sort of assistance, however, was becoming an ever more urgent necessity. Egypt had begun to move in new SAM-2 batteries, but on 25 December most of these were destroyed in a massive Israeli air attack, soon followed by the extraction of an entire radar installation from Ras Gharib.[96] A furious Nasser called a series of meetings of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces between 6 and 10 January 1970, at which Egyptian military shortcomings were considered. It was agreed that, although there was no imminent prospect of crossing the canal, it was necessary to take some action to defend Egypt's dignity. Nasser determined to ask the Soviet Union for additional assistance with air defences, a decision that was only reinforced by Israel's initiation of deep-penetration bombing raids on Egyptian military bases from 7 January.[97] The deep-penetration bombings were perceived as part of a broader Israeli strategy of psychological warfare, the ultimate aim of which was

to overthrow Nasser, thus forcing a settlement that would perpetuate the ceasefire lines.[98]

On 22 January, therefore, Nasser made a secret trip to Moscow, where he requested advanced SAM-3 air defence missiles.[99] Since the Egyptians were not trained to operate these, he also asked for Soviet missile crews. The Russians apparently argued that they could not send crews, because the missile bases were part of an integrated network requiring protection from the air. Nasser then asked them to send planes (the advanced MiG-21J, which was said to be as good as the Phantom), to be flown by Soviet pilots. Egyptian sources claim that the initial response was negative, until Nasser threatened to step down as president, recommending that he be replaced by someone able to make peace with the USA, since that would then be Egypt's only option. Consequently, by the end of March, 60–80 Soviet pilots and 4,000 members of missile crews had arrived in Egypt, where they were sent to special Soviet-controlled bases.[100] This was a significant moment, constituting the first dispatch of Soviet combat personnel to a non-communist country.[101] Politically and militarily, it proved an effective deterrent against Israeli deep-penetration raids.

The principal difficulty in evaluating Nasser's request for Soviet troops concerns the question of whether it should be viewed as a defeat for his overall policy, or an integral part of his strategy. There is substantial evidence that Nasser tried to persuade the Soviets to deepen their combat role in Egypt in the summer of 1967. Brezhnev depicted Nasser to Soviet bloc leaders on 11 July as begging: 'let the USSR take upon itself command of anti-aircraft defense and bring to the UAR military aircraft together with crews'.[102] However, at that point, Nasser was desperate, fearing another attack across the canal by Israel. Once the situation had stabilized he was less likely to welcome as an unmixed good the loss of policy control that a full-scale Soviet military presence denoted.[103] The dire situation of late 1969 made it clear that there were no other options. Nasser's decision to seek Soviet help was probably made before the deep-penetration bombing raids began, although they increased the urgency.[104] It remains to determine, however, whether the move was part of a longer-term strategy to liberate the Sinai Peninsula.

The Endgame?

In March 1970, as Egypt once again began to step up incidents along the canal and the first of the SAM-3 batteries became operational, the United States and Israel realized that Soviet military personnel were being deployed in the Egyptian interior. The Israelis scaled back the deep-penetration bombing, hoping to avoid confronting the Soviets, who stayed away from the Canal Zone until late April. During May and June, the Egyptians and Soviets continued to build the missile wall, sometimes

installing dummy batteries to divert the constant Israeli strikes against it. At the same time, they maintained the confrontation with Israel, keeping up a constant artillery bombardment of the Bar Lev Line. At the end of June, when the network of bases had been set up and the first missiles brought in, two Israeli planes were shot down by Soviet missiles, heralding the beginning of the high-casualty 'electronic war'.[105]

On the face of it, it seems odd that it was during this period of high tension and confrontation that the first moves were being made towards agreement on a ceasefire. The turning point came with Nasser's 1 May speech, which included a message to Nixon. Nasser stated that Egypt was now in a position of strength, and thus might be open to dialogue, provided that the US ceased supplying Israel with advanced aircraft.[106] In response, on 19 June, William Rogers announced a new, extra-simple plan, which required merely that both parties express their acceptance of UN Resolution 242, their willingness to negotiate, and their agreement to a three-month ceasefire. In addition, there was a disputed clause mandating a military standstill in the combat zone. Nasser's initial private response was non-committal, although his belligerent speech of 25 June seemed like an informal rejection.[107] He put the proposal neutrally to the SEC members, all of whom stated that they were opposed to acceptance.[108] Heikal was initially dismissive in his editorials, and Cairo Radio was scathing.[109] Nasser did not announce his acceptance of the initiative until he returned from Moscow on 23 July, presenting it as a matter of form: the proposal contained 'nothing new', and Egypt's rejection would have been exploited by the United States. Otherwise, the speech took a hard line, reasserting that 'we must be prepared to reply with force to the enemy who only understands the language of force'.[110]

The claim that agreement to the ceasefire involved no new concession was not, in fact, true. It involved an unprecedented separation from the positions of the other Arabs, and an acceptance of progress without Israeli withdrawal as a precondition, as well as a commitment to negotiations before the same had been accepted by Israel.[111] Nasser's decision therefore had significant domestic and regional costs. The Egyptian army was restive, particularly the lower ranks.[112] Moreover, the announcement jeopardized Arab subsidies and radicalized Arafat's *fidā-'iyūn*.[113] Nevertheless, the ceasefire was instituted on 8 August, following Israeli acquiescence under pressure from the United States.

There is a question regarding the extent to which the Soviet attitude affected the Egyptian decision to accept the Rogers initiative. Based on Nasser's switch to more peaceful language after his July visit to Moscow, it has been suggested that the Soviet leaders pressured him to compromise.[114] Heikal, however, who was an eyewitness, has stated that although Nasser originally kept his views to himself, he had decided on

acceptance from the beginning.[115] When Nasser told Brezhnev of his decision,

> Brezhnev pushed his spectacles down his nose and stared at Nasser over the top of them. 'Do you mean to tell me that you are going to accept a proposal with an American flag on it?' he asked.[116]

Minister for Presidential Affairs Sami Sharaf, who also claims to have been present, agrees that Brezhnev was opposed, asking, 'What about the battle?' Nasser said that it was his country and his battle, and he would resign if Brezhnev did not accept that. After five hours' consideration, the Russians reconvened and approved Nasser's decision.[117] Vice-President Anwar Sadat confirms that Brezhnev was angry, at which point Nasser told him he that he was willing to accept any solution, 'even if it came from the Devil himself'.[118]

The international community's hope was that the Rogers initiative should lead to a lasting peace, and some suggest that Nasser shared this aim.[119] It is certainly true that the costs of the War of Attrition for Egypt had been very high.[120] Nevertheless, the balance of evidence suggests that Nasser's acceptance was tactical. He told the ASU that he had 'no hope at all' of a political solution, suggesting that the main aim was to put his enemies in a difficult position; and he had made a similar point in greater privacy to his SEC colleagues the previous week.[121] Most agree that Nasser accepted the initiative 'in bad faith', seeing it as a respite to allow him to move his missiles up towards the Suez Canal (despite the standstill agreement) and to prepare for war, rather than as an opportunity for negotiation.[122] The critical importance of the movement of the missiles – in order to prepare for the battle in Sinai – is accepted by almost every Egyptian source.[123] Even Mahmoud Riad later explained,

> Nasser saw the US proposal as a situation in which we could not lose. On the one hand, we give the Americans the chance to try for a diplomatic solution. If that doesn't work, we will have improved our military position.[124]

Nasserist sources go further, claiming that the acceptance of the Rogers initiative was merely an intervening stage in a comprehensive plan to retake the Sinai, which would have been implemented shortly thereafter had Nasser not died. Marshal Gamasy claims that Egypt began to prepare for all-out war in August 1970, while Abdel Magid Farid says that Nasser had 'nearly exactly the same plan' as Sadat implemented in 1973 and did a rehearsal a few weeks before he died.[125] Sami Sharaf suggests that the plans were all ready for a two-phase attack to retake the Sinai even before Nasser's acceptance of the Rogers initiative,

and all that was needed was the opportunity to install the air defence system. The attack would apparently have taken place either on 5–6 October 1970 or between the third week in April and the first week in May 1971. The strategy would, he says, have differed from that in 1973 in that it would have been a concerted Arab operation, and the goal was not just to establish a bridgehead but to take the Sinai passes.[126] Mohammed Fayek suggests that the latter date was specifically chosen:

> there was a plan which was ready and it was supposed to be the spring of '71. This was definite. It was very important that it should take place . . . before the end of '71: why? Because at the end of "71 the . . . F16 was going to be ready in the battle . . . At that date they were not yet in the battle.[127]

This plan, variously called 'Granite One' or 'Operation 200', is said to have been shelved after Nasser's death on 29 September 1970.[128] The following day, his successor, Anwar Sadat, met with Heikal, Fawzi, Riad, Sharaf and others, deciding to extend the ceasefire temporarily, because of the conditions of internal uncertainty.[129] But by November, Sadat had rejected the plan altogether.[130]

However, this particular group of Nasserists, most of whom lost power and influence under the new president, certainly have a motive to depict Sadat as betraying Nasser's legacy, and taking credit in 1973 for implementing an inferior version of a pre-existing plan. Marshal Saad El-Din Shazly, conversely, claims that when he became Chief of Staff in May 1971, no offensive plan had been prepared. The plan code-named 'Operation 200' was purely defensive, while 'Granite One' included raids into Sinai, but no proper canal crossing.[131] Although it is difficult to judge what might have happened had Nasser not died, it seems likely, therefore, that the military plans referred to by his supporters were relatively vague contingency plans, which would probably have been delayed yet again when the critical date approached.

Conclusion

The Egyptian regime appears to have felt that its choices during the War of Attrition were extremely limited, and to a large extent this was accurate. Gamal Abdel Nasser was faced by a variety of pressures, both internal and external. He had to maintain his position in Egypt in the face of a major blow to his legitimacy, while seeking to regain the lost Sinai territory. A real threat of unrest from the army and disaffected domestic groups, together with the wider Arab attitude, limited the political concessions he was able to make. But the unfavourable international situation, especially a Cold War context encouraging a hostile US attitude and limits on Soviet assistance, equally constrained his military options. The

dual approach adopted by Nasser in the immediate aftermath of the June defeat, according to which he combined military and political action, using each to reinforce the other, had become unsustainable by late 1968. It depended upon a deliberate ambiguity about whether Egypt ultimately sought a military or a political settlement, which collapsed as it became clear that the regime no longer believed that political means could serve any more than a tactical purpose.

However, although the subsequent War of Attrition constituted a rational strategy to maintain pressure on a more powerful enemy and involve the superpowers, it could not solve Egypt's basic problems. Nasser was realistic about his poor military chances, but deeply sceptical about the prospects of a political solution. This fundamental pessimism was based upon an image of Israel as expansionist, arrogant and abetted by United States. The United States was seen both as unable to press her ally to withdraw (due to changing perceptions of the balance of power in their relationship, founded particularly in a new emphasis on the importance of the Jewish lobby in the United States) and as unwilling to do so, because of a fundamental hostility to the Egyptian regime and to Nasser personally. This accounts both for the constant refusal to negotiate from a position of inequality and for the final, desperate expedient of begging for active military involvement from the Soviets. And it is not contradicted by Nasser's acceptance of the Rogers ceasefire initiative in the summer of 1970. All of the evidence suggests that this was not inspired by any fundamental change of heart regarding the US, which was still perceived to be entirely aligned with Israel. Instead, it was a tactical move to improve Egypt's chances in any future military confrontation – which, despite later claims, remained a nebulous prospect.

Notes

1 For a background account of Egyptian decision-making in the 1967 war itself, see L. James, *Nasser at War: Arab Images of the Enemy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pp. 102–22.

2 For indications of mental distress, see Marshal Tito quoted in J. Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc and the Aftermath of the June 1967 War: Selected Documents from East-Central European Archives', papers distributed at a conference on *The United States, the Middle East and the 1967 Arab–Israeli War*, US Department of State, 12–13 January 2004, p. 41; M. Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Arab World*, London: Collins, 1978, p. 190; J. Bowen, *Six Days: How the 1967 War Shaped the Middle East*, London: Pocket Books, 2003, p. 290; A. Farid, *Nasser: The Final Years*, Reading: Ithaca, 1994, p. 127; author interview with Ambassador Mohammed Abdel Wahab, Cairo, 30 March 2004. For claims of long-term rationality, see Hussein Shafei quoted in S. Imam, *Ḫusayn al-shāfi'i wa asrār thawrat yūlīyū wa ḫukm al-sadāt*, Cairo: Maktab Awziris lil-Kutub wa al-Magalat, 1993, p. 132; author interviews with Sami Sharaf, Cairo, 28 March and 7 December 2004; N. Schonmann, 'Tactics of Peace: The Role of Peace Overtures in

Nasser's Postwar Foreign Policy Making', unpublished MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2005, p. 23.

3 Farid, *Nasser*, p. 2.

4 R. Springborg, *Family, Power and Politics in Egypt*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982, p. 162.

5 Author interview with Marshal Saad El-Din Shazly, Cairo, 13 December 2004.

6 M. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir and His Rivals, 1958–1970*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 138; *Foreign Relations of the United States* [*FRUS*], *1964–68*, XX, p. 167; S. Mar'i, *Awrāq siyāsiyya*, Cairo: 1978, Vol. 3, p. 570; M. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1983, p. 114; Y. Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967–77*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997, p. 19.

7 *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 299.

8 M. Barnett and J. Levy, 'Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962–73', *International Organization*, 1991, Vol. 45, 382–83; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 55; M. Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*, London: New English Library, 1972, p. 46.

9 *Wathā'iq 'abd al-nāsir: khutab, ahādīth, tasrīhāt*, Cairo: Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Social Studies, p. 510. Egyptian leaders often said that the conflict would consist of three stages: 'sumūd' (resistance), 'rada'a' (deterrence) and 'tahrīr' (liberation).

10 M. Gamasy, *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt*, Cairo: AUC Press, 1993, p. 98.

11 Author interviews with Amin Howeidy, Cairo, 27 March and 9 December 2004; Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc', pp. 18–22, 44–45; L. Whetten, *The Canal War: Four-Power Conflict in the Middle East*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1974, p. 51; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 500; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 31.

12 D. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967–1970*, Boulder: Westview, 1992, pp. 25–29; M. Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, London: Quartet Books, 1981, p. 47; Sharaf interview; interview Transcripts, *The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs* [FYW]: Private Papers Collection, Middle East Centre, St Antony's College, University of Oxford: Bassiouny interview.

13 Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 57; Mohammed Riad in Frankel, N. 'Interviews with Ismail Fahmy, Ashraf Ghorbal and Mohamed Riad', *American Arab Affairs*, 1990, Vol. 31, p. 105; Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 38.

14 Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 47.

15 Y. Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, pp. 137, 140.

16 R. Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography*, London: Penguin, 1971, p. 523; A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*, London: Penguin, 2000, p. 258; Y. Meital, 'The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War', *Middle East Journal*, 2000, Vol. 54, p. 65; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, pp. 26, 46. Egyptian diplomats downplayed the importance of the Khartoum language. UK National Archives [TNA]: FCO17/757; PREM13/2073.

17 *FRUS*, *1964–68*, Vol. XX, p. 12.

18 Author interview with Mohammed Fayek, Cairo, 25 March 2004.

19 Author interview with Abdel Magid Farid, London, 14 June 2004; author interview with Ambassador Hassan Issa, Cairo, 4 April 2004; Wahab interview; Howeidy, A. *Hurūb 'abd al-nāsir*, Beirut: 1979, p. 180; author interview with Dia al-Din Dawud, Cairo, 24 March 2004; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 86–87; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 56; Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 47. Nasser also told one of his

ministers, 'we are going to do everything to solve it peacefully, but I *never* expect that this will be possible.' Fayek interview.

20 25 January 1968, *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts* [BBC-SWB]: ME2681. See also Farid, *Nasser*, p. 93.

21 Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 50; Fayek interview; Howeidy interview.

22 Mahmoud Riad in Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 89; Shazly interview; author interview with Admiral Moheeb Helal, Alexandria, 2 March 2004; author interview with General Ahmed Abdel Halim, Cairo, 1 April 2004.

23 Farid interview; author interview with General Talaat Mosallem, Cairo, 8 December 2004; Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc', p. 15. Estimates of the number of advisors range from 1,500 to 4,000. By October, 60–80 per cent of the huge Egyptian war losses had been replaced, and a Soviet naval squadron was stationed in the Mediterranean. Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 56; R. McLaurin, M. Mughisuddin and A. Wagner, *Foreign Policy Making in the Middle East: Domestic Influences on Policy in Egypt, Iraq, Israel and Syria*, New York: Praeger, 1977, p. 84; E. O'Ballance, *The Electronic War in the Middle East, 1968–70*, London: Faber and Faber, 1974, pp. 18–19, p. 49; Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 59. The Soviets were still refused some of the base privileges they requested as a policy priority. M. Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, London: Collins, 1975, pp. 39–40; C. Andrew and O. Gordievsky, *KGB: The Inside Story of its Foreign Operations from Lenin to Gorbachev*, London: Sceptre, 1990, p. 502; Howeidy interview; author interview with Dr Mourad Ghalib, Cairo, 19 December 2004; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 13.

24 Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 96–97. See also TNA, FCO17/525; R. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 127.

25 TNA, FCO17/525; Howeidy, Sharaf and Helal interviews.

26 Sharaf interview; TNA, FCO17/525.

27 Herzog, C. *The Arab–Israeli Wars*, London: Arms and Armour Press, 1982, p. 198; author interview with Hamed Mahmoud, Cairo, 24 March 2004; Howeidy interview.

28 Admiral Helal confirms there had been a long-standing order to sink the destroyer if she ventured into Egyptian territorial waters. Helal interview.

29 Howeidy interview. See also Tito in Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc', p. 58.

30 This did not preclude indirect contacts via the UN-appointed mediator, Dr Gunnar Jarring, US channels and certain self-appointed private messengers. Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 37; S. Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1948–1979*, Princeton University Press, 1982, p. 136.

31 7 April 1968, Farid, *Nasser*, p.94. See also Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 75.

32 29 April 1968, BBC-SWB:ME2758; *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 1, pp. 444–45.

33 29 March 1968, BBC-SWB:ME2735.

34 Nasser's speeches of 23 November 1967 and 29 April 1968, BBC-SWB:ME2630; *Wathā'iq*, Vol.1, p. 445.

35 See Heikal's 20 October 1967 article on the modern and educated Israeli army, as well as Nasser's 10 March 1968 and 2 November 1969 speeches. BBC-SWB:ME2601; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 12; Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 91; Wahab interview; Mosallem interview.

36 29 April 1968, BBC-SWB:ME2758.

37 29 December 1967, BBC-SWB:ME2657.

38 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 24; W. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Foreign Policy Toward Egypt, 1955–1981*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985, p. 170. It seems clear that the allegation was indeed a lie, despite claims to the contrary in S. Green, *Taking Sides: America's Secret Relations with a Militant Israel 1948/1967*, London: Faber & Faber, 1984, pp. 204–11. See Parker,

Politics of Miscalculation, p. 108; R. B. Parker, *The Six-Day War*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996, p. 261; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 262.

39 Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 222; Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar*, p. 181; A. Baghdadi, *Mudhakkirāt*, Cairo: Al-Maktab al-Hadith, 1977, Vol. 2, pp. 284–89; Howeidy interview.

40 A. Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, London: Collins, 1978, p. 175; author interview with General Salah al-Din Hadidi, Cairo, 12 December 2004; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 224; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 171, fn4.

41 See Nasser's speeches of 9 May 1967 and 23 July 1967, *Wathā'iq*, Vol.1, pp. 226–46; Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 223; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 178; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 19; Riad in R. Churchill and W. Churchill, *The Six Day War*, London: Heinemann, 1967, p. 91; Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 77; TNA, FCO17/598; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 412.

42 Author interview with Ambassador Gamal Naguib, Cairo, 19 April 2004; Farid interview; Fayek interview; Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar*, p. 183.

43 'izālat athār al-'udwān'. *Wathā'iq*, Vol.1, p. 227.

44 For example, giving up territory, sitting down at the same table as the Israelis to negotiate, coming to a separate agreement with them, or signing a peace treaty. Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 88; A. Nutting, *Nasser*, London: Constable, 1972, p. 444.

45 28 July 1967, BBC-SWB:ME2530. Or, in Nasser's own words: 'Actually we believe that reaching a sufficient degree of strength may obviate the need to use it in practice.' 23 November 1967, BBC-SWB:ME2630.

46 See Nasser's words to US envoy Robert Anderson in November versus his January meeting with chargé Donald Bergus, resulting in the US report that 'we seem to be getting two separate sets of signals from the UAR'. *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XIX, p. 500; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 34; Meital, 'Khartoum Conference', p. 71.

47 This chapter does not argue that a political settlement acceptable to Egypt necessarily *was* achievable at any point, but merely that there were moments at which Nasser could have given it a better chance without incurring excessive domestic costs – for instance, by accepting the Latin American text for the UN Resolution, or by consistently offering the occasional concessions that were suggested to the Americans and then withdrawn. See also Schonmann, 'Tactics of Peace'.

48 *Wathā'iq*, p. 510; Herzog, *Arab–Israeli Wars*, p. 199; Gamasy, *October War*, p. 98; S. Ayubi, *Nasser and Sadat: Decision-making and Foreign Policy, 1970–1972*, Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1994, p. 61.

49 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 92.

50 TNA, FCO17/638; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 129; Gamasy, *October War*, p. 105.

51 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 93; O'Ballance, *Electronic War*, p. 41.

52 TNA, FCO17/629, FCO17/638; Herzog, *Arab–Israeli Wars*, p. 203.

53 The Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad is repeatedly described as 'gloomy' by Western diplomats. TNA, PREM13/2073, FCO17/757.

54 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 70.

55 *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 258. See also Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 57.

56 Mosallem interview.

57 Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 196; Y. Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969–1970*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1980, p. 45; Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 62; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 106–7.

58 Farid, *Nasser*, pp. 101–3.

59 BBC-SWB:ME2942.

60 Mosallem interview.

61 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 108. On 20 January, Nasser reiterated that there was 'no hope of a political solution unless the enemy realizes that we can force him to withdraw by fighting'. BBC-SWB:ME2980; *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 23.

62 Farid, *Nasser*, pp. 92, 104–5, 197. Some Egyptian insiders downplay the significance of this raid. Sharaf interview; Mosallem interview. However, Riad says it was 'huge', explaining at the time to the Council of Ministers that it constituted 'new evidence that a peaceful settlement was neither expected nor even possible'. Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 96. For details, see *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 367.

63 He emphasized its significance, calling it 'marḫala shidīda al-ahmiyya'. *Wat̲hā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 76; BBC-SWB:ME3037.

64 BBC-SWB:ME3039; *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 104.

65 Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 110, 116–17; TNA, FCO17/760.

66 There were some indications of an internal struggle within Egypt over whether to draw back in May, perhaps under Soviet pressure, but the aggressive faction clearly won. TNA, FCO17/759; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 136; *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, p. 327; Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar*, p. 193; I. Ginor, '"Under the Yellow Helmet Gleamed Blue Russian Eyes': Operation Kavkaz and the War of Attrition, 1969–70", *Cold War History*, 2002, Vol. 3, 135; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 196.

67 These were summarized as early as 21 March by Heikal in *Al-Ahram*. BBC-SWB:ME3032.

68 Gamasy, *October War*, pp. 98, 107. The Egyptian army was becoming visibly 'importunate', as Mahmoud Fawzi put it during a UK visit. 11 March 1969, TNA, PREM13/2609.

69 Fayek interview; P. Vatikiotis, *Nasser and His Generation*, London: Croom Helm, 1978, p. 257; Mar'i, *Awrāq*, Vol. 3, p. 570.

70 Gamasy, *October War*, p. 107; Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition*, pp. 50–51; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 63; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 135.

71 Fayek interview; Gamasy, *October War*, p. 107; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 136.

72 'Until the end of July 1969, Egypt aimed at establishing a bridgehead on the eastern bank of the canal,' Bar-Siman-Tov claims. Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition*, pp. 53–58. General Mosallem does confirm that a plan to establish two bridgeheads was under consideration at this time, but adds that the Egyptians knew that they had first to secure their weak air defences. Mosallem interview.

73 BBC-SWB:ME3094.

74 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 166.

75 Mosallem interview.

76 On 7 July 1969, the US State Department estimated that Egypt would not be ready to fight for another four years. Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 31.

77 TNA, FCO17/760, PREM13/2609; Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, pp. 92–94; Sharaf interview.

78 15 April 1969 and 18 May 1969, Farid, *Nasser*, pp. 134–37. The concept that Nasser believed these allegations is more credible given the relatively private forum in which they were uttered. They were not reflected to the same extent in his public speeches.

79 *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XX, pp. 301, 337; W. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy toward the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1967–76*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, pp. 66–67; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 132. Nasser also adopted an uncompromising attitude to third-party mediation attempts in late 1968. Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 38; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 92; Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 53.

80 The Egyptian chargé in Washington, Ashraf Ghorbal, claims that Fawzi sent a telegram to Nasser during this visit asking permission to restore diplomatic relations, but Nasser refused, having told the Soviets he had no intention of taking such a step only two days before. A. Ghorbal, *S̱ʻūd wa inhiyār: ʻalāqāt miṣr wa amrīka*, Cairo: Al-Ahram, 2004, p. 51. See also Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 99.
81 Gamasy, *October War*, p. 114.
82 *Wathāʼiq*, Vol. 2, p. 174; BBC-SWB:ME3134.
83 Gamasy, *October War*, p. 111; Herzog, *Arab–Israeli Wars*, p. 212; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 137; Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 171.
84 Farid, *Nasser*, p. x; O'Ballance, *Electronic War*, p. 92.
85 Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 89; Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition*, pp. 96, 99; A. Shlaim, 'Failures in National Intelligence Estimates: The Case of the Yom Kippur War', *World Politics*, 1976, Vol. 28, 487.
86 This was the final outcome of the 'Four Power' talks, which had essentially become 'Two Power' talks between the US and the USSR, negotiating on behalf of their respective clients aimed at resolving the Arab–Israeli impasse. A 10-point plan including full Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai, it was offered in response to the Russian acceptance, on Egypt's behalf, of the principles of a binding agreement, recognition of Israel's right to exist and 'Rhodes-style' talks, which implied the possibility of direct negotiation. However, an Israeli leak caused Riad to deny publicly that he had accepted the Rhodes formula. Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 156–57; TNA, FCO17/760.
87 Farid, *Nasser*, p. 139; BBC-SWB:ME3134.
88 Heikal, *Autumn*, p. 61.
89 22 August 1969, BBC-SWB:ME3166.
90 6 November 1969, BBC-SWB:ME3224. The official rejection was delivered by the Soviets on 23 December.
91 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 159.
92 Kerr, *Arab Cold War*, p.146.
93 Egyptian insiders emphasize that Nasser genuinely wanted the summit to succeed. Farid, *Nasser*, p. 15, pp. 157–58; Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 74; Sharaf interview.
94 See Meital, 'Khartoum Conference', p. 76; Barnett and Levy, 'Domestic Sources of Alliances', p. 384; Trevelyan, H. *Public and Private*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980, p. 79.
95 Riad suggests, 'The natural result of the failure of the Arab Summit Conference was that Nasser found himself with no choice but total dependence on the Soviet Union, economically and militarily.' Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 119.
96 Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 175–76.
97 Gamasy, *October War*, p. 113; G. Gawrych, *The Albatross of Decisive Victory*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 2000, p. 113; Ayubi, *Nasser and Sadat*, pp.142, 154; O'Ballance, *Electronic War*, p. 105; Howeidy interview; Sharaf interview.
98 The 'official' line of Israeli leaders was that they were not attempting to overthrow Nasser, but the opposite was implied in certain private and public statements. Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 184–85; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 141; Shlaim, 'Failures in National Intelligence Estimates', p. 492. Egyptian insiders emphasize that they were not especially surprised by the escalation. Author interview with Dr Hoda Abdel Nasser, Cairo, 1 March 2004; Sharaf, Dawud and Fayek interviews.
99 The following account is synthesized from the major Egyptian sources: principally the accounts of Heikal, General Fawzi and Ambassador Mourad

Ghalib, all of whom were present in Moscow. Ghalib interview; M. Ghalib, *Ma' 'abd al-nāsir wa al-sadāt*, Cairo: Al-Ahram, 2000, p. 145; Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 81; M. Fawzi, *Al-dubāt al-ahrār yitahaddithūn*, Cairo: Madbouli, 1990, p. 351; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 188–90; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 68. Newly available Soviet sources may suggest, however, that the USSR had already decided to send additional aid, and that Nasser's January visit served, at most, to hurry along the timetable. See D. Adamsky, '"Zero-Hour for the Bears": Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition, 1969–70', *Cold War History*, Vol. 6, 2006.

100 For figures, see Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 198; Ayubi, *Nasser and Sadat*, p. 163; Parker, *Politics of Miscalculation*, p. 143.

101 Ayubi, *Nasser and Sadat*, p. 57.

102 Hershberg, 'The Soviet Bloc', pp. 16, 59." Howeidy interview; Ghalib interview.

103 Even prior to January 1970, the dependence on the Soviet Union and the presence of military advisors caused some problems. Springborg, *Family, Power and Politics*, pp.182–83; Sharaf, Shazly and Mosallem interviews.

104 See Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 163–64; Gamasy, *October War*, p. 114. On the other hand, it may have been those raids, constituting an immediate threat to a client regime, which changed the Soviet decision.

105 Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 97; Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 195–98, 200–203; Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition*, pp. 159–64; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, p. 101.

106 'Innani aqūl lil-ra'īs Nixon…' *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 372; BBC-SWB:ME3369.

107 Whetten, *Canal War*, p.103; *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 458.

108 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 253, based on interviews with Egyptian insiders.

109 BBC-SWB:ME3414, ME3422, ME3428.

110 *Wathā'iq*, Vol. 2, p. 488. BBC-SWB:ME3439.

111 I. Karawan, 'Identity and Foreign Policy: The Case of Egypt', in S. Telhami and M. Barnett (eds), *Identity and Foreign Policy*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 160; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 74.

112 TNA, FCO17/1161; Ayubi, *Nasser and Sadat*, p. 143; Shazly interview; Mosallem interview.

113 Issa interview; Whetten, *Canal War*, p. 114.

114 Many Egyptian insiders confirm that, in general, Soviet pressure at this juncture continued to be towards restraint. Mar'i, *Awrāq*, Vol. 3, p. 604; Farid, Shazly, Mosallem and Ghalib interviews.

115 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 251.

116 Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 91.

117 Sharaf interview. See also Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, pp. 143–46.

118 Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, pp. 198–99. Sadat, of course, later had a political interest in portraying Nasser as turning away from the USSR.

119 Author interviews with Ahmed Hamrush, Cairo, 8 and 12 December 2004; Naguib interview; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 73.

120 Israeli Intelligence estimated that the Egyptians suffered 10,000 casualties, including 8,000 wounded and 2,000 killed, as well as 750,000 refugees and the loss of 110 planes. Military expenditure doubled from $718 billion in 1967 to $1263 billion in 1970, while GNP declined by 2.5 per cent, development crumbled, and luxuries were unavailable, although basic food was subsidised. Korn, *Stalemate*, pp. 208–10; O'Ballance, *Electronic War*, p. 127; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 64.

121 24 July 1970, BBC-SWB:ME3440; Farid, *Nasser*, p. 182. Riad quotes him as saying, 'there is a great possibility that the three-month period will end in

absolutely nothing... When Jarring resumes his mission, we shall never agree to talk for another year.' Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 148.

122 In the broadcast ASU proceedings of 24 July, Nasser read out the beginning of a written question: 'Will the ceasefire enable us to install a network...' Then he broke off: 'This we shall answer in the closed session.' BBC-SWB:ME3440. In that session, Nasser promised to move the missiles during the ceasefire, which he later did. TNA, FCO17/1161; Korn, Stalemate, pp. 264–68; O'Ballance, *Electronic War*, p. 129.

123 Mar'i, *Awrāq*, Vol. 3, p. 604; Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 89; Sharaf, Mahmoud and Dawud interviews.

124 Quoted in Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 252. Maoz and Astorino agree that from a game-theoretic perspective, 'regardless of what Israel and the US decided to do, Egypt did better continuing to construct its defences'. Z. Maoz and A. Astorino, 'Waging War, Waging Peace: Decision Making and Bargaining in the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1970–73', *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 36, 1992, 390.

125 Gamasy, *October War*, p. 98; Farid interview. See also Mahmoud interview; Imam, *Ḫusayn al-shāfi'i*, p. 132.

126 Sharaf interview. Esmat Abdel Magid agrees that 1973 involved a major change to Nasser's plans, but implies that was because Nasser would not have been nearly so well prepared. Magid interview.

127 Fayek interview. He is referring to the advanced aircraft that the USA was expected to send to Israel. Nasser is also said to have told Colonel Gaddafi as early as 14 February 1970: 'We have to begin the hostilities and cross the canal in 1970 or 1971 at the very latest.' Farid, *Nasser*, p. 170. Riad similarly identifies the spring of 1971 as Nasser's deadline. Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 138.

128 See Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 269; Heikal, *Sphinx and Commissar*, pp. 198, 201; Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 138; Hamrush interview; Howeidy interview.

129 General Fawzi said that although he would attack now if given written orders, he would be in a better position in two months' time. Heikal, *Nasser*, p. 105.

130 Korn, *Stalemate*, p. 273. Jihan Sadat says that her husband sent a message to the US Ambassador saying he wanted peace at Nasser's funeral, but received no answer. FYW Transcripts: Jihan Sadat interview.

131 Shazly interview. Genral Mosallem and the military historian, Gamal Hamed, also specifically deny General Fawzi's claims that the Egyptian armed forces were ready to move in 1970. Mosallem interview; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, pp. 99–100.

7 How American and Israeli intelligence failed to estimate the Soviet intervention in the War of Attrition

Dima P. Adamsky

Introduction

Soviet military intervention in the Egyptian–Israeli War of Attrition – a war that took place between March 1969 and August 1970 – is a remarkable event in the history of the 'Cold War'. Never before this confrontation had the USSR put its military forces in jeopardy for a Middle Eastern country. However, in spring 1970, Moscow deployed an Air Defense (AD) division of about 10,000 men, including two regiments of jet fighters, in Egypt. Traditional historiography has interpreted the Soviet act as a reaction to Israeli deep-penetration raids in January 1970; however, recently declassified material refutes this assumption and gives credence to the claim that Moscow's decision to introduce Soviet units into Egypt – dubbed Operation 'Kavkaz' ('Caucasus') – was taken months before Egyptian–Israeli hostilities broke out. The initial Soviet decision did not derive from regional considerations, but was formulated within the global context of the Cold War, specifically vis-à-vis NATO and threats projected by the presence of US forces in the Mediterranean. However, in the late summer of 1969, as a result of the severe deterioration in Egypt's position during the War of Attrition, Moscow decided to change its forces' objective and introduce an AD division in order to save its regional client. It was the Soviet response to Egypt's increasing difficulties in confronting the Israeli Air Force (IAF) which from July 1969 was used as 'flying artillery' to compensate for the weaknesses in the ground artillery of the Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) during this static war along the Suez Canal.[1]

The Soviet division was composed of units from the military districts of Dnieperpetrovsk, Byelorussia, Moscow and Leningrad. Its core component consisted of SA-3 surface-to-air missiles, backed by two squadrons of MiG-21 interception planes (70 planes, 102 pilots), ZSU 23X4 anti-aircraft guns and SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles. In early September 1969, the two MiG-21 squadrons began training near the Black and Caspian Sea. In December the 'Kavkaz' task force's first jets landed in Egypt. At approximately the same time, the division's just formed AD

units were sent to the Ushuluk training area in Kazakhstan. Their shipment from the port of Nikolayev in the Black Sea to Alexandria began three months later. By 5 March 1970, the first units arrived in Egypt and by 15 March the division became operational. During this first stage, the division was used for the defence of Egypt's rear – Cairo, Alexandria and Aswan areas. Once this target was secured and the IAF, ceased flying in the Egyptian hinterland, the Soviet deployment started moving eastwards, in order to provide an AD for the Egyptian ground forces in the Canal front zone. This led to bitter clashes with the IAF resulting in relatively heavy casualties on both sides.

Operation 'Kavkaz' surprised the US and Israel. No intelligence warning was issued in advance of the Soviet intervention – neither in Washington nor in Tel Aviv. Prior to the events, the Soviet experts in both intelligence communities persuaded the decisionmakers that there was a low probability of such a Soviet move. Close intelligence cooperation between Israeli and American officials occurred on a frequent basis, especially in the light of the relative inexperience of Israeli Military Intelligence (AMAN), in the 'Soviet intelligence businesses'. The necessity of obtaining the US perspective on Soviet behaviour became crucial during the War of Attrition when, in late 1969, Israel considered escalation by sending the IAF deep into Egyptian territory. Since the American experts estimated the risk of the Soviet intervention as low, the lion's share of the responsibility for the Israeli misperception in 1970 must be attributed to the US intelligence. Only in retrospect does it become apparent that for several months prior to the Soviet invasion, analysts in both countries possessed sufficient intelligence data to issue an appropriate warning. However, neither the Americans nor the Israelis were able to assemble accurately the pieces of the intelligence puzzle which were in their hands, and to warn their decision-makers about the upcoming Soviet intervention in Egypt.[2]

This discussion will be divided into four parts. The first one describes the US and Israeli intelligence conception concerning the USSR. Crystallization of the intelligence estimate on the probability of Soviet intervention in 1970 constitutes the second part. The third part deals with the various intelligence data that were acquired but eventually ignored during the assessments. The fourth part describes the consequences of the intelligence surprise. The conclusion provides several explanations for the blunder. With the exception of recently released Israeli Foreign Office documents, most of the intelligence documentation for this episode will not become available until 2020. Consequently, the account below relies to a great extent on interviews conducted with the relevant intelligence officers, and other documents which provide a partial description of the event. Although based on fresh American archival sources, this research mainly makes use of National Intelligence Estimates, but includes limited materials from other relevant collections.

Since the available sources are valuable but still insufficient, the chapter does not claim to offer the last word on this issue and therefore its conclusions are cautious, constituting an analytical beginning and not a definitive clarification.

The intelligence conception regarding the USSR

Israeli perception

It was not until the mid-1960s that Israeli intelligence had any independent collection and analytical capabilities vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. In 1966 a Soviet section was created within the framework of a new, 'Superpower' Branch (Branch 3), in AMAN's Research Department. The ability of the new section to properly assess Soviet conduct was rather limited: Its analysts did not speak Russian, possessed no academic or practical background in Soviet affairs and had no independent sources of information about the Kremlin's policies. They primarily relied on Western press reports, the translation of articles from the Soviet media into English, accounts from new immigrants, and occasional intelligence support from counterpart services.[3]

When the May–June 1967 crisis started, Israeli policymakers became concerned about the probable risk of Soviet military intervention. The inexperienced experts of Branch 3 were urged to present their assessment of the Kremlin's mode of operation. Among other things, on the basis of this assessment, the AMAN Director, Maj. Gen. Aharon Yariv, estimated that if Israel launched a war the Soviets would threaten and protest but might not intervene militarily.[4] The war's events confirmed this thesis – the USSR threatened but eventually did not intervene. The foundations of Israel's intelligence conception with regard to Soviet intervention had been born.[5]

The post-war period witnessed a massive delivery of Soviet arms to its regional clients, a substantial increase of military advisors in the Arab armies, and the growth of an independent presence – Soviet naval and naval aviation bases – in Egypt and Syria. In late 1967, in order to meet the emerging challenge, AMAN had established a Soviet-designated Signal Intelligence unit titled 'Masrega'. 'Masrega' was made up of Russian-speaking soldiers and officers. They were called 'Grechkoes' after the name of the then Soviet Minister of Defense Grechko. Shortly after its inauguration, 'Masrega' started to yield high quality information about the Soviet advisory contingents, their structure, daily activities and conduct, as well as the activities of the regular Soviet Mediterranean fleet and the naval aviation units based in Egypt and Syria.[6] AMAN's improved collection abilities regarding Soviets were not matched by a similar upgrading of its analytical know-how. The poor professional background of the Branch 3 analysts remained the same as it was before

1967 and so did their sources of information. 'Masrega' provided an important tool for the collection of information about Soviet military regional conduct but understanding of the Kremlin's decision-making at the strategic level remained its weak spot.[7]

AMAN's conception of Soviet intervention in the Arab–Israeli conflict had been crystallized and occasionally tested since the war of 1967. In a nutshell, it claimed that the Soviets had not intervened directly outside the Warsaw Pact parameter, because of a fundamental interest in avoiding a direct confrontation with the Americans, and thus the likelihood of such a move in the Middle East was very low. The conception relied on three assumptions: First, the future conflict would be decided by the superpowers.[8] The USSR's prime concern and most vital interest was to avoid a direct confrontation with the US. Second, firm American conduct was the best guarantee against Soviet expansion. AMAN's experts took for granted that if faced by a Soviet challenge, the US would take all the necessary measures to meet a Soviet offensive.[9] Finally, the third assumption claimed that a firm Israeli stand against the Soviets would reduce the likelihood of Soviet regional expansion.[10]

Following the Six Day War, the Egyptians rejected the new status quo and attempted to change it by force. Israel's actions were mostly responsive and none of the IDF's acts were considered to be provocative enough to trigger a direct Soviet response. In July 1969, however, Israel began using the IAF as 'flying artillery' to compensate for its relative weakness in fire power in the static war along the Suez Canal. Consequently, AMAN was requested to provide accurate information about the deployment of Soviet personnel in the Egyptian army – particularly within AD deployments, which were a prime target of the IAF's attacks.[11]

As a result of the escalation, the threat of Soviet intervention had now become more realistic. AMAN's experts continued to preach taking a firm stand as a means to deter the Kremlin from stepping into the arena. If their advice was ignored, they regarded it as a grave mistake. Thus, following an aerial raid on the naval facilities of Port Said, in which a Soviet ship was damaged, Israel used diplomatic channels in order to make it clear to the USSR that the IDF was instructed to avoid targeting non-belligerent personnel, implying that the damage made to the Soviets was collateral and unintended.[12] AMAN's Soviet experts estimated that a far tougher message, one that would put the Soviets on notice that their personnel in the war zone were not immune, would have been a more suitable measure to deter them from expanding their involvement in the conflict.[13] Within a short period of time the dynamics of the conflict appeared to have confirmed this stand. Once again, the IAF attacked targets in Port Said and a number of Soviet sailors from a ship docked in the port were wounded. The Kremlin delivered a protest but it was drafted in a

rather cautious tone. The Americans estimated that this was 'the least the Soviets could do'.[14] Backed by the American assessment, AMAN recommended refraining from responding to the Soviet note and Golda Meir accepted the advice. As AMAN's analysts forecast, the Soviets avoided making any additional protests and shortly afterwards, their ships left the port.[15]

What at the time appeared to be a confirmation of the conception of Soviet unwillingness to take active measures against Israel enhanced the belief of AMAN's analysts in the validity of their thesis. It also boosted the confidence of the intelligence clients in the agency's ability to understand the Soviet *modus operandi*. However, when the Soviet ships left Port Said, the Soviets were already preparing for the dispatch of significant military forces to the region. In other words, by the summer 1969 AMAN's conception was already invalid.

American perception

Relative to other intelligence communities, the US possessed the best collection capabilities and the largest research infrastructure on the USSR during the Cold War. However, while US intelligence did extremely well in terms of technological collection, it was relatively poor at comprehending Soviet intentions.[16] The CIA and other intelligence services were able to pinpoint the build-up of Soviet forces but could not say whether and when they would be deployed. Capability for intervention could be monitored, but the intentions of the Soviet leaders were not known. Intelligence monitoring of non-crisis developments was stronger in observing actions than in divining intent.[17] In many cases, US predictions of Soviet behaviour relied more on overt signs, past performance and intuition, than on hard intelligence, although there were exceptions.[18] In 1973, Robert Gates, then an analyst in the Soviet section and future Director of the CIA, expressed explicitly the difficulties of American intelligence in predicting Soviet intentions:

> Our intelligence collection capabilities are not adept at obtaining accurate information on the thinking of the Soviet leadership. U.S. intelligence resources are best suited to collecting intelligence on military hardware. In predicting Soviet intentions, we work in an area where our special assets are of only marginal assistance.[19]

The same held true *grosso modo* concerning US analysing of Soviet behaviour in the context of the Arab–Israeli conflict. From the Six Day War until the Soviet intervention in the War of Attrition, US experts collected extensive information on Soviet activities in the Mediterranean. However, they lacked a basic understanding of Soviet strategic considerations there. One of the reasons for the miscalculation of 1970 was the analytical

code which US experts developed regarding Soviet policies in the Middle East since the Six Day War.

The uneasy modus vivendi between Israel and its Arab neighbours caused the Office of National Estimates to analyse, in spring 1967, the current phase of the Arab–Israeli dispute. The estimate was unambiguous on the Soviet position, claiming that 'Moscow almost certainly views the Arab–Israeli dispute as promoting its interests, but at the same time the Soviets do not want an outbreak of a large scale conflict in the area.'[20] The estimate was extremely accurate in assessing the military balance between Egypt and Israel, the duration of the future war and especially the Soviet non-intervention stance.[21] The DCI Richard Helms labelled the 1967 assessment as 'one of his proudest achievements in the CIA'.[22] Encouraged by their successful analysis during the pre- and post-1967 periods, and in line with their colleagues in AMAN, US analysts took the USSR's watchful conduct in the Middle East to be axiomatic.[23] While generally accurate, on several occasions, and especially with regard to the War of Attrition, it would prove to be fatally flawed.

Thus, in line with this conception, the CIA estimated, notwithstanding the likely influx of Soviet advisors, instructors and technicians to the Middle East and increased Soviet use of naval and air facilities, that it was unlikely that the USSR would be seeking permanent military bases in Egypt or defence pacts. Establishing such bases would increase the likelihood of being drawn into a local conflict, bringing the Russians closer to a military collision with the US – a course of action Moscow sought to avoid.[24] An analysis which was made in January 1968 doubted that 'in the foreseeable future the Soviets intend to make binding military commitments to any Arab states, or to establish military bases as such in the Middle East'.[25] The annual intelligence overview on the Soviet Union reinforced this assumption.[26]

In this analytical setting, the first blunder was inevitable. In March 1968, Moscow concluded a bilateral treaty in Cairo[27] which gave it definitive permission to establish its own naval and ground installations and to deploy its military units on Egyptian soil and marked the climax of Soviet influence.[28] The US experts concentrated on the regional issues, while the explanation for Soviet behaviour lay in global considerations. The Mediterranean basin was perceived by the Soviets as the most likely arena for US naval forces to launch a nuclear attack.[29] To create a counterweight to the Western threat, Moscow decided, at any price, to enhance its permanent military presence in that dangerous area of the world.[30]

In its effort to make the analysis as succinct as possible, US intelligence oversimplified the Soviet operational code. Most of the estimates from the period are characterized by an analytical dichotomy of Soviet scenarios which proposed that either the USSR would encourage the Arab military initiative against Israel or it would vigorously object to it. The common wisdom opted for the second option. This tendency towards a

black-and-white depiction seemed to leave no place for a scenario in which Soviet investments in Egypt were endangered by Israel or in which, under certain circumstances, Moscow might estimate a low probability of US retaliatory action. The US experts argued that if the Soviets failed in their efforts to restrain Arab hotheads and hostilities were resumed, the USSR would probably seek to avoid direct military involvement of its forces.[31]

Estimating the low risk of the Soviet intervention in the War of Attrition

The Israeli intelligence

The IDF escalated the conflict in July 1969 by introducing its Air Force as flying artillery. Israeli strategy was to hit the Egyptians sufficiently hard to make a further Egyptian assault unrewarding, but not so hard as to globalize the conflict by provoking Soviet intervention. Towards the end of 1969, this view was being treated sceptically by the Israeli establishment, which started to contemplate the idea of exploiting the IAF's success to destroy Egypt's air defence system in order to bring the war deep to the Egyptian hinterland. Israeli ministers were divided between those willing to take the risk of a deep-penetration of Egypt's airspace for massive attacks on Cairo, and those who feared that this would bring the USSR to Egypt's defence, with a consequent disturbance of the strategic balance. Prime Minister Meir had no firm stand. Her main concern was the Soviet reaction and she was about to make her decision based upon this standard.[32] The Israeli policymakers turned to AMAN, and thus a decisive element in this discussion was the assessment made by Israeli intelligence experts regarding Soviet conduct.

The AMAN director assessed, on the basis of the common intelligence conception, that the expected volume of the bombings would not prompt the Soviets to send combat forces to Egypt.[33] To him, the US was expected to take a firm deterring posture to prevent the Soviets from making an aggressive move, thus making it even more unlikely.[34] AMAN also estimated that the deep-penetration raids might have a devastating effect on Egypt's morale and should pressure Nasser to end his War of Attrition[35] or might even remove him power.[36] Rabin provided the cabinet with a detailed explanation as to why the White House would support the increase in Israeli pressure on Egypt,[37] and the IDF commanders assured the cabinet that the new Phantom planes were capable of conducting this mission.[38] AMAN determined that if the Kremlin was to take more drastic measures, it would be done gradually. Prior to any commitment of Soviet troops to fight in the region, Moscow would provide Egypt with more advanced weapons.[39] AMAN's analysts avoided describing scenarios under which their conception might cease

to be valid, and, notwithstanding some minor attempts to raise alternative possibilities, the dominant view continued to regard Soviet intervention as highly unlikely.[40]

The US intelligence community

Despite relatively high confidence in their estimate that the USSR was unlikely to intervene directly in the conflict, AMAN analysts needed to verify their assessment in the light of the greater wisdom of their American colleagues. What, then, was the essence of the American analysis?

The intelligence memorandum which was issued on 9 January 1970 reflected the US analytical insights regarding the Soviet position. The memorandum observed that the Soviets were tempering their ambitions and hostility with feasibility estimates and cost–benefit analysis. Furthermore, in its relations with the US, the USSR would behave pragmatically. The memorandum stressed a shift in Soviet thinking towards the view that it might be possible to achieve some sort of stabilization in Europe, in the arms race and in the Middle East. With reference to the latter assertion, the document noted that 'the Soviets seem to be aware that there are pitfalls and dilemmas implicit in their policy, but this is a delicate game and they could miscalculate as they did in 1967. While the Soviets wish to keep the level of tension low enough to head off confrontation with the US, they are also publicly supporting the Arab cause'.[41] In the light of the belief in Soviet cautious conduct in the Middle East discussed above, it is not surprising that the intelligence experts essentially rejected the possibility of Soviet intervention.

US intelligence expected Nasser to turn to the Soviets for assistance,[42] and when he eventually did so in the late January 1970, it uncovered his secret visit to Moscow. What exactly transpired there was unknown at the time, but it was assumed that the Soviets had promised the Egyptians more arms.[43] US intelligence failed to comprehend that as an arms supplier of mammoth proportions, Moscow would be inextricably linked to the 1969 Arab defeat in terms of political prestige. An additional Arab debacle would have a devastating impact on Soviet weaponry and doctrine in purely military-operational terms. The American estimate was not a random cluster of factual mistakes resulting from a lack of information. In contrast to their Israeli colleagues[44] they insisted that the USSR had sufficient airlift capabilities to intervene in the Middle East.[45] Despite a thorough understanding of Soviet capabilities, the experts still calculated that there was little the Soviets could do to assist Egypt effectively unless they sent military personnel and pilots to fly against Israel. However, that option was generally regarded as too risky for the Soviets to undertake.[46]

That wisdom, transmitted to Israeli colleagues, was not only supported by the CIA's estimates but also by the assessments of other senior officials in the American administration and academia.[47]At the time when Soviet units were training intensively for dispatch to Egypt, the Director of the Office of Soviet Affairs at the State Department estimated that the situation was not acute in Soviet eyes and that Moscow would not take drastic steps.[48] The Director of INR claimed that Israeli pressure on Egypt undermined the Soviet position in the region, but given Moscow's apparent limitations, it could only enhance the political dynamic.[49] Another source suggested that the Israelis treat the threat of Soviet intervention as Egyptian disinformation,[50] aimed to enhance Cairo's deterrent posture. Operations Staff of the NSA assessed that in the light of the Israeli deterrent factor and due to insufficient logistical means and fear of a confrontation with the US, the Kremlin was unlikely 'to operate a military force' in the region.[51] The head of the USSR Desk in the State Department assessed that the Soviets did not seem to be too worried about the situation in the Middle East, since they were not rushing to find a diplomatic solution.[52] The analysis of Nasser's January 1970 visit submitted to President Nixon underscored the superficiality of American understanding: 'Nasser is about to demonstrate Soviet inability to get him out of a box.'[53]

This low estimation of any likely Soviet retaliatory move was transferred to AMAN. Since the latter placed a great deal of weight on US assessments, it suggested that the government go ahead with the bombing.[54] Notwithstanding continued concerns, but relying upon AMAN's assessment of the low probability of Soviet intervention, the cabinet approved the IAF's launching of operation 'Blossom' on 6 January 1970.[55]

The hard data that changed nothing

When the decision to start the deep-penetration raids in Egypt was made, AMAN and the CIA had no concrete information that Soviet preparations to intervene in the conflict were underway. And yet, an ample quantity of indirect but valuable indications that, if interpreted properly, might have changed the estimate of Soviet behaviour was available. The closer the arrival of the Soviet military units was, the more hard intelligence indications that were accumulated. However, for a period of almost five months, the incoming information failed to convince intelligence analysts that their thesis has lost its solid ground. The conception collapsed in early March 1970 when the presence of Soviet military units on Egyptian soil was positively identified. Below are the intelligence indications about the forthcoming intervention which the CIA and AMAN received between summer 1969 and March 1970, organized according to means of collection.

Diplomatic signals – 'Kosygin's note'

The most important means used by the Kremlin to signal its intention to take drastic measures was a note from Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin to President Richard Nixon, President Pompidou of France, and the British Prime Minister Wilson, which was delivered on 31 January 1970. The message warned that if Israel continued to bomb Egypt, the Soviet Union would be forced to see to it that the Arab states had means at their disposal to rebuff the 'arrogant aggressor'.[56]

Given the lack of a blatant threat of intervention, there is little wonder that the note was interpreted in Washington, as well as in London, Paris and Jerusalem, as an indication of the Kremlin's reluctance to send forces to the region.[57] Joseph Sisco, the State Department Undersecretary for Political Affairs, estimated that the note was the result of high-level Egyptian pressure on the USSR to take more firm measures, and reflected the Soviet interest in advancing diplomatic negotiations in order to find a way out of a difficult situation. The only threat that it carried was to send the Arabs more advanced weapon systems[58] – a move that had been regarded as very likely for quite sometime. The almost unanimous opinion among the Soviet experts in the White House, CIA, State and Defense Departments was that Moscow was bluffing and would not, when push came to shove, go beyond supplying additional equipment to Egypt.[59] Based on the assumption that the Soviets were bluffing, Nixon's response was unprecedented in its unwillingness to compromise. Rabin characterized the forceful tone of the US statement as 'quite unlike the one I had been hearing from the Americans'.[60] The counter threat, it was hoped, would deter the Soviets from upping the ante in the Middle East arms race.[61]

The Israeli Foreign Office intelligence assessment (which appeared to reflect the consensus within the Israeli intelligence community) was that the Kremlin would gradually increase its support of Egypt by supplying advanced weapon systems, in addition to increasing the number of advisors, instructors and technicians necessary for the manning of the more complicated systems. The paper also anticipated the increased stationing of a Soviet independent presence in sensitive sites in Egypt in order to deter Israel from attacking them. Summarizing its forecast, the report concluded, that the USSR did not want war and would do everything possible to avoid direct intervention. Moscow would strengthen its regional base and seek a political solution.[62] The Soviet note was discussed in the Israeli government on 8 February. The AMAN Director participated in the meeting and argued that analysis of President Nixon's response indicated that Washington had decided not to retreat. If, indeed, the USSR realized that there was no chance of blackmailing additional concessions from the US, it might recommend the Egyptian President to be more flexible with regard to the Rogers

Plan. Summing up, the ministers agreed that the Soviet Union was not achieving its goals.[63] In mid-February AMAN continued to reject any notion that the Soviets might intervene in the conflict.

There was an unhealthy reciprocal influence between the US and Israeli intelligence communities in estimating the Soviet note. On the basis of its own hard information on Nasser's visit to Moscow, the Israelis saw Kosygin's missive as an indication that the deep-penetration raids had had a positive impact on Moscow. The Soviets were, in the view of Israeli intelligence, little more than 'paper tigers',[64] and would hesitate to take on Israel's highly skilled air force.[65] The Americans were clearly influenced by this reading. It was only after the Soviets intensified their intervention in April 1970, that Kosygin's letter was seen for what it was: not a warning but an announcement of plans that the USSR was soon to carry out.[66]

Open sources intelligence

In retrospect, one realizes that if the experts had looked beyond the Kosygin message, a slightly more penetrating inquiry and critical thinking would have revealed numerous indications which appeared in the Soviet media, as well as additional overt signals of what was about to transpire.

The Soviet press

First indications of a possible shift in the Kremlin's traditional policy appeared in the Soviet press shortly after the massive use of the IAF as 'flying artillery' started. In August 1969, the Soviet media started an intensive anti-Zionist campaign.[67] On 31 October 1969, a TASS Statement accused the US of 'offering Israel an opportunity to not only receive military aircraft, but to also have the use of American pilots and personnel for technical maintenance.' The statement warned that the American decision 'could lead to serious complications in the Middle East.'[68] Following the TASS Statement, the anti-Zionist campaign repeated accusations regarding the alleged participation of American pilots in the IAF's bombing campaign in Egypt.[69] The November 1969 issue of *Communist*, carried an editorial written by the chairman of the International Department of the Central Committee. It emphasized the military aspects of the relationship and the way they developed after the 1967 war.[70] Given that *Communist* was a major organ of the Communist Party it can be assumed that the editorial aimed at preparing party members for a major shift in the Kremlin's Middle Eastern policy. Another indication of this potential shift was a firm statement about the Arab–Israeli conflict that was released at the end of the Prague summit of the Eastern bloc.[71] The anti-Zionist campaign reached its peak around March 1970 and was at a level similar to that of the anti-Israeli campaign waged in the Soviet media during the 1967 war.[72]

Overt signals

While Kosygin's note provided no clear warning that the USSR might intervene in the conflict, a number of Soviet officials hinted that this might be the case. A Soviet diplomat in London leaked to the press that the USSR would intervene if a war broke out. It did not cause any concern in Jerusalem and was regarded as part of the Soviet campaign to wage psychological warfare that was aimed at intimidating Israel.[73] The second secretary in the Soviet embassy in Washington invited an American journalist, who was known to have good connections with Israel, to lunch. The official spoke about the Israeli hijacking in late-December 1969 of a Soviet P-12 RADAR from Egypt. He added that some in the USSR 'regarded this act as a very serious business. In the future we will ensure that modern and costly equipment will be guarded by us and the Israelis will have to think twice.' The diplomat repeated this warning a few times and the journalist interpreted it as a Soviet message that was to be passed on to Israel.[74]

The Americans received similar warnings. On 6 February a junior Soviet official initiated a conversation with the Pentagon correspondent of the *New York Times* in order to emphasize the gravity of Kosygin's note and to warn that if the demand to stop supplying American weapons to Israel was ignored, the Soviets would deliver 'offensive weapons' to their clients. King Hussein of Jordan told the American ambassador in Amman that the most recent Soviet warning was more serious than before. The American representative in Cairo heard a similar evaluation from the Finish ambassador stationed there. According to another journalistic source, Egyptian officers on the Suez front interpreted Kosygin's note as an indication of impending Soviet intervention.[75] Similar to their Israeli colleagues, US intelligence ignored those signals or treated them as a bluff.

Signal intelligence

Unlike the officers in AMAN's Research Department, the officers in 'Masrega' were highly concerned by the possibility of Soviet intervention. Since its establishment, the *raison de être* of 'Masrega' and one of its main tasks was to collect indicators of possible Soviet intervention. Although the most likely scenarios were an intervention by airborne troops or the marine corps, the unit always kept their eyes wide open for any indication of other forms of Soviet intervention as well.[76] Since late 1969 and early 1970, 'Masrega' had identified the following indicators for irregular Soviet activity in Egypt:

1. A marked increase in the number of Soviet VIP flights to Egypt since late 1969.[77]

2. The build-up and activation, since the beginning of 1970, of new communication channels between the USSR and Egypt.[78]
3. The appearance, since early 1970, of electronic signals that indicated the introduction of new weapon systems, including RADARS.[79]
4. A sharp increase, since late January, in the number of Soviet cargo flights. No information was available about the nature of the cargo, but it was assessed that the planes carried equipment for anti-aircraft systems (missiles, guns, and RADAR and command and control equipment).[80]
5. Verbal communications: In some cases 'Masrega' intercepted verbal communiqués that indicated the possible arrival of Soviet combat units in Egypt. The most important piece of information, from a highly reliable Egyptian source with good access, discussed operational parameters for the arrival of Soviet fighter planes, implicitly with their pilots.[81]

The 'T' excavations

In mid-January 1970 IAF intelligence spotted a large-scale construction project some 30 km west of the Suez Canal. The excavations had a 'T' shape and were too far apart to be fortifications for tanks and troops. IAF Intelligence experts assessed it as the positioning of weapon systems, perhaps anti-aircraft, but did not specifically pinpoint them as SA-3 missile installations. Instead, they assumed that decoys for the SA-2 systems or surface-to-surface missiles were being deployed.[82] Understanding that something massive was underway but still unaware of the full significance of this gigantic project, the IAF bombed the sites during the day and even at night.[83]

Israel transmitted intelligence information to US experts, who traced the strange developments themselves,[84] but no elaboration was offered to Israel.[85] For unknown reasons US intelligence analysts who spotted the Soviet airlift and estimated that it was bringing batteries of SA-3 missiles failed to connect this data with the 'T' excavations project that was simultaneously gathering momentum in Egypt. This oversight seems especially odd, given undoubted US familiarity with the SA-3 deployed in the USSR and in the Warsaw Pact countries.[86] And yet, Israel did not receive any indications from the US that the newly built dugouts were sites for the SA-3 missiles.[87]

Had the American experts assembled these facts into a coherent picture and placed it in the broader context, an accurate and relevant intelligence warning might have been issued. Such a warning would have been of a great assistance to the Israeli intelligence community, which was fully dependent upon American expertise – having no independent knowledge of modern Soviet weapon systems. Consequently, the failure of the American analysts hampered Israel's ability to grasp

what was transpiring under its very nose until late March, when the Soviets had already deployed their forces in Egypt.

The Airlift

In early February, American intelligence detected large Soviet air shipments of equipment to Egypt. The US administration calculated that if the new arms simply augmented the existing arsenal they would be destroyed by the Israelis, while the more sophisticated weaponry was still complicated for Egyptians to operate. Hence, a more ominous possibility remained: if the Soviets were planning to take effective action against Israeli strikes, 'this would almost certainly seem to involve Soviet personnel'. But large-scale Soviet military intervention in the conflict was dismissed almost universally and seemed too remote a prospect even to consider. The first disquieting news was not received until 25 February, when senior intelligence officials announced in the White House situation room that large numbers of Soviet aircraft carrying SA-3 batteries, radar and Soviet military crews had begun to arrive in Egypt.[88] It is clear in retrospect that even this estimate was partially inaccurate. The Americans had spotted an airlift, but explained it inadequately. In fact, the Soviet airlift had begun in late December, intensified in January and, as US experts correctly noted, reached its peak in February. Moreover, the equipment transported to Egypt by air did not consist of SA-3 batteries and their crews, but dismantled MiG-21 planes and their pilots.[89] The Soviet SA-3 batteries arrived in Egypt not by air but by sea and not in February but in March.[90]

'The Cassandras'

A small group diverged from the common wisdom of the intelligence community, although their numbers were too small to have a serious impact. These lone experts began to realize that the Soviets had been backed into a corner together with Nasser. They argued that Moscow had so much at stake that the possibility of sending personnel could not be ruled out. Two active opponents of the deep-penetration raids who predicted a Soviet intervention were Donald Bergus, US representative in Cairo, and Richard Parker, the Head of the Egyptian Desk at State Department. Bergus cautioned that the raids, rather than causing disenchantment with the regime, were causing Egyptians to rally around their president. If the raids continued, he asserted, the Soviets would surely come to Egypt's aid. Most of Bergus' cables went unanswered. In those that elicited a reply, Washington cabled back reassurances that the USSR had no weapon to match the Phantom. Parker tried to get the administration to bring pressure to bear on Israel to halt the raids. He argued that Israeli deep-penetration raids would cause the Soviets to

become directly involved in the fighting. Most of his memoranda ended up in the files with no notations whatsoever. Another dissenter was an analyst in the Defense Intelligence Agency, who shared Parker's belief that the Soviets would probably commit personnel to the defence of Egypt, as well as advanced equipment. Unfortunately, he was a relatively junior intelligence officer with no clout inside the Pentagon and his views were not supported by other experts.[91]

In Israeli intelligence, only 'Masrega' officers warned that the Soviets were coming. The interpretation of SIGINT indications had become a bone of contention between the commander of 'Masrega' and his chief, the head of the COMMINT branch in unit 848, on the one hand, and the analysts of AMAN's Research Department, who refused to give up their conception that the Soviets would not intervene, on the other. However, since 'Masrega's' role was collection and not analysis, their warnings were ignored by AMAN analysts.[92]

Realizing the fiasco and its consequences

In February, Sisco briefed Rabin, reaffirming that he did not think the Soviets would go beyond sending more arms to Egypt.[93] Nothing was heard from Moscow until early March. Kissinger has claimed that during this time it did occur to him that Kosygin's message might have been a smokescreen for Soviet intervention, and that he used this interval for contingency planning in anticipation of some significant Soviet move – almost certainly involving the introduction of military personnel into the Middle East.[94] However, Korn and Parker are rather sceptical of Kissinger's account. According to their and other senior US officials' descriptions, no one at the State Department knew of Kissinger's hypothesis and contingency planning.[95]

Similarly, no coherent warning was transferred either to Israeli intelligence or to the decision-makers in Jerusalem.[96] As late as 12 March, during the discussions between Nixon, Kissinger and Rabin, none of the participants spoke in terms of Soviet intervention in Egypt, but only of the Russian promise to provide Egypt with up-to-date missiles (not Soviet personnel). It was prior to the subsequent meeting on 17 March that Rabin received an urgent cable from Jerusalem informing him that 'the Russians have sent a considerable number of personnel to Egypt for the purpose of manning the SA3 batteries defending Cairo'.[97]

The first intelligence estimate that unambiguously presented Soviet intervention as one of the four possible contingency scenarios was issued on 5 March. It suggested that, in the light of Egyptian vulnerability, the USSR might become more risk-prone and provide Cairo not only with advanced weapons but with their operators and pilots as well. However, this intervention scenario was presented as one hypothesis among a group of others and not as definitive intelligence data or the bottom line

of the estimate.[98] It was only on 17 March that the administration finally realized that the Soviets had deployed forces in Egypt[99] – a fact which came as a severe shock to both the US and Israel.[100]

Most Israeli intelligence officers involved in the War of Attrition agree that the Soviet decision to intervene militarily in Egypt in 1970 surprised Israel, although they disagree about the magnitude of the surprise and its gravity.[101] A CIA memorandum issued at that time declared that Israel had apparently not anticipated that its air attacks on potentially sensitive targets deep inside Egypt would result in such a rapid and impressive Soviet reaction, and that Israel was uncertain as to what the presence of the Soviet forces signified, not only in the short term but for the years ahead.[102] On 20 March 1970, Defence Minister Dayan faced the nation to inform the Israelis about the dramatic change in the situation. He minced no words in order to signal to the Kremlin that Israel had no interest in engaging Soviet soldiers in combat, since it had had no capability to confront the USSR.[103] He made it clear that the IAF would stop its raids on Egypt's rear, which was now defended by the Soviets. Dayan insisted that Israel would do all it could to prevent the introduction of Soviet pilots to the Canal front. At this stage, it was still unknown that two Soviet fighter squadrons had already been deployed in Egypt for approximately two months. Dayan assessed that the Kremlin would avoid such a move.[104]

Dayan's attempt to set the rules of engagement failed. Moscow did not respond to his public statements in contrast to American assessments that it would avoid reinforcing its units in Egypt with fighter planes[105] and would not advance the SA-3 batteries' layout to the front.[106] By early April 1970 the Soviet deployments started moving eastward to the front, using the T-shaped dugouts that the Egyptians continued to build throughout this period. On 18 April 1970 MiG-21s flown by Soviet pilots who made no effort to disguise their identity intercepted two IAF Phantom jets south of Cairo. Incrementally, Israel limited furthermore its activity in Egypt's rear. In May 1970, US experts still believed that Moscow's decision was a response to Nasser's pledge in January and had not yet pieced together a precise picture of the Soviet order of battle; the exact numbers and the kinds of AF and AD regiments deployed were yet unknown.[107]

The sources of the intelligence blunder

The misreading of available indicators by the US and Israeli analysts was not a unique case. Theorists of intelligence studies are familiar with that professional phenomenon. Classic studies on the subject of intelligence surprise conclude that intelligence blunders stem primarily from a lack of comprehension and are not the function of insufficient intelligence information.[108] The events of 1970 seem to fit that theoretical postulate.

A number of specific factors can be proposed to explain this intelligence blunder.

The first factor is the conception that was shared by American and Israeli analysts about Moscow's overriding interest in avoiding a confrontation with the US. This belief was apparently so strong, monolithic and all-encompassing that it outweighed all contrary intelligence indications, diminishing their value accordingly. Too much reliance on past practice as a guide to future behaviour also played a role. The dogmatic stickiness to the 'conception' deprived analysts in both countries of very important insights regarding the Soviets. Certainly, the Soviets took grave risks by directly confronting a militarily capable ally of the United States far from their border. But the West failed to realize how risky, from Moscow's perspective, the alternative was. In retrospect, intelligence analysts admitted that they did not comprehend the devastating effect that the deep-penetration raids had on Egypt.[109] Consequently, they could not properly assess the Soviets' interest in assisting the Egyptians – an interest that led the Kremlin to break from their policy of avoiding direct military intervention far from the USSR's borders. In addition, Soviet experts in both countries failed to comprehend that by 1969, Soviet leaders estimated that the US was too preoccupied with Vietnam and felt that, for that reason, it would not react militarily to a Soviet escalating move in the Middle East.[110]

The second factor involved the creation of a vicious circle of mutual reinforcement of errors, a common pathology in US–Israeli intelligence relations: 'If the Americans aren't worried, why should we be?' It played a role not only in 1970, but once again in 1973 and 1982. 'The Israelis' confidence, based on their reading of the Americans, was reflected back to the US and, together with Israel's minimizing of the seriousness of the War of Attrition, was a factor in US overconfidence. The myth of the infallibility of Israeli intelligence was not questioned in Washington.[111]

The third factor concerns the vague nature of Soviet signals. Given the blurred character of the Soviet signals, it is not difficult to understand why intelligence analysts failed to comprehend their true meaning. Since Soviet warnings were delivered through low-level channels rather than the Dobrynin–Kissinger channel and because of their ambiguous character, American analysts failed to treat them as a sufficiently important and indicative source. The media campaign failed to change the conclusions drawn by AMAN's analysts for three reasons: First, since they did not read Russian they had to rely on the Western press, primarily on the *New York Times*,[112] as the main source of information about the contents of the Soviet press campaign. Second, such campaigns were not unprecedented. Finally, since their American counterparts did not estimate that this campaign was to facilitate Soviet intervention, AMAN's analysts chose to ignore any information that pointed in a different

direction. After all, none of these vague signals specified that direct intervention was a possible course of action.

The fourth factor relates to bureaucratic-organizational structure: very few Soviet analysts in the US intelligence community had specialized in the Middle East. As a result, Sovietologists who assessed Moscow's intentions and the significance of the Kosygin letter could not fully appreciate the seriousness of the situation in which the Egyptians and Soviets found themselves.[113] The organizational explanation also involves the lack of sufficient experience of AMAN in Soviet affairs. AMAN had only recently begun allocating resources to this field, and had no institutionalized memory of Soviet politics and Soviet foreign policy conduct. As a result, the agency lacked sufficient expertise to independently assess the Kremlin's policy, especially when it came to such an unusual move as the intervention decision. In making its judgement, AMAN had to rely excessively on foreign assessments, primarily on the American estimate of the likelihood of Soviet intervention.

Similar to other well-known intelligence blunders of the twentieth century, the scarcity of comprehension and not the shortage of information stood behind the intelligence misperception in the War of Attrition. Unfortunately for them, the Israelis did not learn this lesson in 1970. Less than four years later, on 6 October 1973, they paid a very high price for a similar failure.

Notes

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111 Parker, *Miscalculation*, p. 154.
112 Interviews with *Ben Porat* and *Burgin*.
113 Ibid., pp. 155–56.

8 The origins of a misnomer

The 'expulsion of Soviet advisers' from Egypt in 1972

Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez

> Soviet advisers were thrown out of Egypt in 1972.
>
> Richard M. Nixon[1]

> In 1972 Egyptian President Anwar Sadat dismissed all his Soviet military advisors and asked Soviet technicians to leave the country.
>
> Henry A. Kissinger[2]

> Q. ...But in September-October 1973, ahead of the war, there was another evacuation.
>
> *A.* Everyone cannot leave in one day. In those months, a planned evacuation went on. Every day someone arrived in Egypt, and someone else left. Military-technical cooperation went on.
>
> General of the Army Mahmut A. Gareev, formerly Chief of Staff to the Head Soviet Military Adviser in Egypt[3]

On 18 July 1972, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat announced his decision 'to terminate, as of 17 July, the mission of the Soviet military advisers and experts, who came here in compliance with our request.'[4] Sadat's measure was immediately dubbed, and is still conventionally termed, the 'expulsion of Soviet advisers',[5] frequently with the added modifier 'surprise'. The number of Soviet 'advisers' who were 'expelled' is variously given as 10,000–20,000,[6] and they are explicitly or implicitly described as 'all', or at least the bulk, of the Soviet advisers and/or military personnel in Egypt.

The 'expulsion' is described by Western historiography as the first step towards Egypt's eventual rupture with its erstwhile Soviet patrons, and therefore (to quote one recent study), it 'might have been the single greatest Third World success for the United States during the entire Cold War.'[7] Its direct motive is usually held to be that 'under the guise of détente, the United States had persuaded the Soviets to reduce their support for the Arabs' – that is, to delay arms deliveries that had already been agreed and planned.[8] Specifically, Moscow purportedly refused to

supply Egypt with the advanced offensive weaponry that first Gamal Abdel Nasser and then Sadat desired for a total onslaught on Israel, in order not only to reverse the latter's occupation of Sinai and the rout it inflicted on Egypt in the 1967 Six-Day War, but even to solve the Palestinian problem according to Arab demands.

Israeli military historian Dani Asher recently traced Israel's unpreparedness for the Yom Kippur War to its failure to appreciate the change in Sadat's strategy that was dictated by this supposed Soviet refusal. The offensive was still planned as a total war, but for a limited objective: crossing the Suez Canal and establishing a strip of control to its east, after which the superpowers would stop the fighting and impose a political settlement, taking Egypt's achievement into account and ensuring Sadat a moral victory. Asher puts the finalization of this change in October 1972 – barely three months after Sadat's supposed break with the USSR.[9] This is indeed, as detailed below, a date often given for a rapprochement between Cairo and Moscow.

But why would Sadat undertake an open confrontation with Moscow if so soon afterwards he in effect adopted the limitations it imposed? Conversely, why would the Soviets risk a rift if they were so soon prepared to concede its cause? It remains generally accepted that after 1967 the Soviet Union supported an operation to regain Sinai, as distinct from the total defeat or eradication of Israel. This was confirmed before the 1973 war by the USSR's unprecedented commitment of integral military units to provide the vital anti-aircraft coverage east of the Canal; by its supply of the materiel for the crossing; by Soviet political backing for Egypt during the war itself, and even by limited intervention of Soviet forces in the fighting,[10] as well as military resupply of Egypt during and after the war.

Even some of the earliest writers who perpetuated the 'expulsion' theory noted that its purportedly main reason, the USSR's denial of offensive weaponry, had no basis in fact. As Alvin Rubinstein termed it, 'the biggest canard in all Western reporting on the affair was the prevailing uncritical acceptance . . . of Sadat's claim' to this effect. 'Excluding nuclear weapons, of course, no other weapons in the Soviet arsenal were denied the Egyptians.'[11] Kenneth Stein, writing 22 years later, also notes the 'virtually uninterrupted military supply flow from Moscow,' which 'lends support to the notion that Brezhnev wanted to repatriate Soviet advisers and . . . sustain some leverage over Cairo.'[12] Both this description and the variant whereby arms shipments were interrupted but resumed after a reconciliation by the fall of 1972 hardly confirm an irretrievable clash in July.

In the most glaring discrepancy, most accounts that first speak of 'the expulsion of Soviet (or even *all* Soviet) advisers' go on to mention that a major intelligence indication which Israel (and the United States) detected – but misinterpreted – ahead of the 1973 Arab offensive was the

mass evacuation of *Soviet advisers* and/or their dependents from Egypt (as well as Syria). Henry Kissinger, who (as this chapter argues) played a central role in creating the 'expulsion of advisers' concept, even holds that only the advisers' *dependents* were evacuated in 1973 – that is, the advisers themselves were not only present in Egypt 18 months after their 'expulsion', but even remained there during the war.[13] Soviet participants add that additional personnel were actually sent to Egypt before and during the war.[14] Where this discrepancy is not ignored, it is glossed over by such glib explanations as that some advisers remained after all, or even that some returned – but this, in turn, again conflicts with the claim of an abrupt and decisive break with Moscow.

The same inconsistency appears in accounts by former Soviet officials. Pavel Akopov, the counselor at the Soviet Embassy in Cairo during both events, recounted in a 1997 interview that Sadat decided in July 1972 'about the withdrawal of Soviet military experts and specialists from Egypt'. But a few minutes later, Akopov related how 'two or three days before the war' in October 1973, the Egyptian president warned the Soviet embassy: 'You have too many people and *specialists* here.' Akopov, who directed the latter evacuation, told of 1,700 Soviets leaving by air alone, with others by sea 'including submarines'.[15] The interview provides no similar detail on the *implementation* of Sadat's order in 1972, though Akopov elaborated on Sadat's *decision* itself.

One of the first analyses, by Walter Laqueur in 1974, relies – as do most subsequent works – mainly on Egypt's 'semiofficial version' and Sadat's public statements. But it is actually one of the most accurate evaluations to date, in stating that the expulsion was partial, was later reversed, and concealed the effectiveness of war preparations – aspects that were omitted in subsequent descriptions.[16] While Mohammed Hassanein Heikal's accounts and/or Sadat's memoirs (not to mention Kissinger's) are universally quoted and often analysed in detail,[17] the aforementioned indications to the contrary are ignored, and for the bulk of Western scholarship the 'expulsion' became so axiomatic as to require no attribution beyond listing the Heikal and Sadat accounts in the bibliography.[18]

In the most notable recent exception to this virtual consensus, David Kimche asserted that the 'expulsion' was 'done in collusion with the Soviet Union' as a joint deception move, part of a strategy developed by the Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Leonid I. Brezhnev himself.[19]

The theory that the 'expulsion' was an *Egyptian* ruse meant to lull Israel into complacency was advanced in the mid-1970s by a number of writers. They did not dispute the Soviets' departure from Egypt, but sought to prove that Sadat's postwar break with the USSR and his peace moves towards Israel were a similar tactic. Their evidence included claims that Sadat made in interviews shortly after the war, and subsequent

publications by his confidant, war correspondent Abd al-Satar al-Tawila.[20] This thesis virtually disappeared from mainstream historiography as Egypt moved firmly into the US camp and fulfilled its commitments under the peace treaty. However, in the present writers' view, the two issues are not necessarily interdependent. Even if Sadat's postwar peace moves were sincere, that does not preclude his resorting to such a ruse earlier, in order to achieve military victory as a precondition for peace on acceptable terms. Even if he premeditated a switch to the US side at the peacemaking stage, cooperation with the Soviets was indispensable for the military stage.

Indeed, in recasting the ruse theory and attributing it to the Soviets as well as the Egyptians, Kimche stresses that these partners had divergent strategic objectives: Brezhnev needed the Egyptian offensive in order to divert and destroy Israeli forces and thus facilitate what for the USSR was the main thrust of the war – the simultaneous offensive by Syria, which Moscow by then already considered its main regional client. Moscow too may have been considering a reevaluation of its ties with Egypt, but this did not prevent its continued support of Sadat's war plans.

In the most recent study, Dima Adamsky concludes that the Soviets who left Egypt have been misidentified, but retains the concept of a unilateral Egyptian move: 'Sadat expelled the Soviet military units.... to this day, scholars mistakenly define Sadat's July 1972 step as 'an expulsion of Soviet advisers,' when in fact the advisers remained in Egypt.'[21]

This chapter argues that *both* components of this term 'expulsion of Soviet advisers' are highly misleading. 'Expulsion' implies a decree imposed on the party being expelled. We contend that the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Egypt in 1972 was by prior consent. 'Advisers' indicates that the Soviet servicemen who left Egypt were officers posted individually to instruct and oversee Egyptian military formations. Actually, the personnel withdrawn in the summer of 1972 consisted mainly of the integral Soviet units which had been stationed in Egypt since 1969–70, while at least the bulk of the genuine advisers remained – and continued preparing the Egyptian forces for the cross-canal offensive.

Who knew what, and when?

Sadat is conventionally held to have first informed the Soviet ambassador, Vladimir.M. Vinogradov 'on the spur of the moment' on 8 July 1972, that 'effective 17 July, the services of the Soviet military advisers would no longer be required.'[22] This rests almost entirely on Egyptian sources: a report in *Akhbar al-Yawm* on 22 July that Sadat's decision was made 10 days before his public announcement, and Heikal's detailed

report about Sadat's move, in *Al-Ahram* on 28 July.[23] This version was expanded in Heikal's books[24] and endorsed in Sadat's memoirs.[25]

However, the date of 8 July is not confirmed by any primary Soviet source. Surprisingly, a new, authoritative Russian history of Israel claims that Sadat's 'unexpected' decision was made on 13 July[26] – the start of 'a friendly working visit' in Moscow by Egyptian Prime Minister Aziz Sidqi. The Egyptian delegation included former ambassador in Moscow Murad Ghaleb, a longtime liason with the Soviet leadership,[27] who in September was promoted to Foreign Minister, indicating that the trip was not considered a failure. Sidqi too was known to have strong pro-Soviet sympathies.[28] He had been instrumental in bringing Sadat to power, and evidently enjoyed his confidence.[29] Upon returning to Cairo at 3 am on 15 July, Sidqi reported immediately to the president.[30]

Sidqi's visit has been accounted for in various and conflicting ways, depending on whether it was assumed to have taken place just before or just after the Soviets were informed of their purported ouster. Sidqi was initially assumed to have presented the Soviets with an ultimatum to supply the weaponry that Sadat had demanded; its rejection was held to have led to the expulsion order.[31] A British embassy official (and apparently MI6 operative) in Cairo, Alan Urwick, appears to have put this theory to the senior Soviet defense attaché, Rear Admiral Nikolai Ivliev, as the Briton reported on 21 July that Ivliev, 'relaxed and in good humour,' confirmed Sidqi had presented demands for weaponry 'but he did not say that Sidky had delivered an ultimatum. The impression he gave was that only after Sidky's return to Cairo was the instruction to leave given.' Urwick also quoted another ultimatum version, which was picked up by his Italian colleague: that Sidqi's visit resulted from an ultimatum given to *Sadat* 'in the early part of July' by 'a committee of senior army officers . . . to get rid of the Soviet advisers', but that Sadat intentionally created the appearance that 'the Soviet were refusing 'legitimate' demands.'[32] There thus appears to have been a coordinated effort to spread the ultimatum version.

However, once the Egyptian version emerged that the decision had been made and communicated to the Soviets *before* Sidqi left Cairo, other explanations were called for. Akhbar claimed that the visit was 'a confirmation of continuing friendship and cooperation'.[33] This was rejected at the time by Western diplomats and subsequently by Western historians, who conjectured that Sidqi was 'sent by Sadat to Moscow to . . . permit the Soviets some face-saving,' but 'the Soviets refused to cooperate'; the visit was 'a total failure' and the joint communique a 'lie'.[34] However, except for the subsequent 'expulsion' itself, no evidence is offered for this conclusion; it is based solely on the *absence* of 'any mention of military aid or military cooperation' in Sidqi's parting speech.[35]

This rapid succession of two conflicting versions was traditionally seen as a series of increasingly transparent attempts to paper over a genuine rift;

but it could as plausibly have been intended to create the false impression of a badly concealed rift. The latest Russian dating of the decision at 13 July appears to point in the latter direction, since if the final decision was made in Sidqi's talks, which 'focused on military and political matters' and were 'restricted to a few members on each side' including Defense Minister Andrei Grechko, it was probably not unilateral.[36]

Despite Heikal's much-repeated version about 8 July, Vinogradov's own memoirs do not confirm this date. He does relate that Sadat 'suddenly and without any provocation, very irritably, declared to me that he was giving up altogether the service of the Soviet military personnel'. But, in reminiscences that were not included in his widely published memoirs, he states that this conversation took place in *June* 1972.[37] Vinogradov is not the only recent Russian source to claim that 'in June 1972 . . . Sadat invited the USSR's Ambassador in Egypt and the Chief Military Adviser . . . and declared that the Soviet advisers and specialists . . . were . . . no longer needed, and the time had come to bid farewell.'[38] This is further corroborated by Admiral of the Fleet Ivan M. Kapitanets, then deputy commander of the Mediterranean flotilla: 'In June [1972] . . . Sadat decided to forgo our advisers, and demanded in ultimative form that they leave the country within two days.'[39]

These versions all retain the 'unilateral expulsion' line, which may have been either the only one handed down to the operational echelon, or the official version adopted later. But either way, the June date appears to reveal that Heikal's version concealed an earlier communication with the Soviets, and that Sidqi's talks may well have been aimed at final coordination. However, debate on this issue has now been largely obviated by evidence that a withdrawal of Soviet personnel from Egypt was under discussion among all the parties involved (except the Israelis) at least two years before it occurred, and was apparently the subject of an understanding among them before *any* of the dates suggested so far.

Akopov relates that 'Sadat was already preparing' his break with the USSR from his accession in 1970. But there already were Soviet views that 'he is not our man – he is looking at the West,' and when Sadat 'several times raised this question, to limit the number of Soviet military specialists, the Soviet leadership actually welcomed the opportunity.' This may be by way of retrospective apologetics, but there is little reason to doubt Akopov's assertion that 'their withdrawal was already in the air, but . . . if we withdrew them ourselves, the world would profess that the Soviet Union is giving up friends . . . when the war is about to begin.' So when Sadat took his overt step, Akopov argued to Vinogradov (whom he describes as furious), 'Here we have Sadat . . . facilitating the task for us to withdraw the Soviet specialists and advisors . . . he played in our favour.'[40]

It seems odd that Akopov had to lecture his boss on this. According to Vinogradov himself, by 1972 'the embassy reached the conclusion that it

would be desirable for the Soviet side itself to propose to Sadat a reduction of the number of Soviet military experts.... It would be better, we thought, if our military men would begin a gradual 'exodus' at our own initiative, than to have Sadat himself raise the question of their withdrawal.'[41]

However, while Moscow's position vis-à-vis other allies militated against its appearing to abandon an embattled client, its emerging global détente policy called for the opposite: to offer such a withdrawal, which it desired anyway, as a concession to the United States. As Akopov puts it, 'Soviet-American relations at that period of time became to develop ... and Sadat was told to wait ... not to weaken our position.'[42]

Both the Egyptians and the Soviets already knew that Washington would welcome a withdrawal and present it as an achievement: Kissinger had set this as one of his primary aims. Indeed, he coined the term 'expulsion' long before the Soviets or the Egyptians mentioned a withdrawal. He first told the Soviet ambassador in Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, on 10 June 1970 (at the height of the confrontation between Israeli aircraft and Soviet missiles along the Suez Canal) that it was 'crucial for us to know whether the Soviet Union would be prepared to withdraw its military forces as part of a negotiated peace.' When an answer was not forthcoming, Kissinger made the point to the press on 26 June, in what has been called 'a famous indiscretion':[43] 'I took the initiative of challenging the Soviet military presence in Egypt ... "We are trying to *expel* the Soviet military presence, *not so much the advisors*, but the combat pilots and the combat personnel." '[44]

The fact that both Egypt and the USSR made the same distinction between combat troops and advisers when they subsequently offered the desired withdrawal strongly indicates that they were responding – most likely in coordination – to Kissinger's initiative. Relying on newly released materials of the Nixon Administration, Craig Daigle demonstrated that at least as early as May 1971 'the United States was well aware of Sadat's intention to remove the Soviet military presence from Egypt.'[45] Sadat's friendly signals to the US started at Nasser's funeral on 1 October 1970, and climaxed in his talks with Secretary of State William Rogers in Cairo on 7 May 1971. Recordings of Nixon's conversations show that Sadat promised Rogers, 'If we can work out an interim settlement ... all the Russian ground troops will be out of my country at the end of six months. I will keep Russian pilots to train my pilots because that's the only way my pilots can learn how to fly. But in so far as the bulk of the Russians – the ten or twelve thousand – they will all be out of Egypt.' Nixon instructed Rogers to take steps to ensure that end.[46]

But on 29 September 1971, the *Soviets* made Nixon an almost identical offer, at Brezhnev's own behest, by means of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in a visit to the White House. On 20 September,

Dobrynin 'forewarned' Kissinger, at that time the National Security Adviser, that Gromyko 'would propose putting the Mideast issue into the special channel' that Kissinger and Dobrynin were developing.[47] In the Nixon tapes, Gromyko cites a 'conversation with Brezhnev', which in effect amounted to instructions. When Nixon stated that 'the main thing' at his projected summit talks in Moscow would be 'to have some things that we can make progress on,' Gromyko listed the following among several proposals from Brezhnev:

GROMYKO: . . . Some time ago you expressed interest of, I don't know, Egypt, about our presence there – our military presence in [Egypt].

NIXON: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

GROMYKO: . . . In a sense we are present there – in a sense, North of Cairo certain personnel . . . In connection with understanding, full understanding on the Middle East, we are ready to agree not to have our military units there.

NIXON: Not civilian, I understand.

GROMYKO: No, not precisely. Not to have military units there. . . . We probably – we would leave a limited number of advisors for purely advisory purposes.[48]

Gromyko's mention of the United States' 'interest' clearly refers to Kissinger's statement. His hesitation in mentioning 'personnel' and 'military units' was not coincidental. The USSR never confirmed these integral units' presence in Egypt, and the terms used to sidestep this issue – 'experts,' 'specialists,' and of course 'advisers' – helped obscure the fact that this original proposal referred to these units alone. Like Sadat, Gromyko offered exactly what this chapter argues actually occurred: the advisers were to remain, while the massive presence of integral Soviet units was to be ended.

The virtually identical content of the Soviet and Egyptian offers can probably be accounted for by a flurry of contacts in the days preceding Gromyko's White House talks: Vinogradov met Sadat on 17 September, purportedly 'to discuss a working paper . . . on Egypt's military position'.[49] Two days later, former Ambassador Ghaleb was promoted to minister of state, as 'a gesture of goodwill towards the Soviet Union';[50] and on 21 September, Egypt's deputy minister of war began a visit to Moscow.[51] While these allies may already have been plotting to ditch each other, they were evidently coordinating at least some of their moves vis-à-vis the US.

While Gromyko had also suggested that the USSR would 'agree on the limitation, or if you wish even on stoppage – full stoppage of delivery [of armaments]' to the Arabs, including Egypt, he demanded the prior acceptance of the latter's major demands from Israel in a final and comprehensive settlement. His condition for implementing the arms

embargo and withdrawal of Soviet units was ‘if *some kind of paperwork* [between USA and USSR] is reached, which would provide withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of the occupied territories,’ but Gromyko hinted strongly that the Soviets would settle for an ‘*understanding* . . . on the interim [agreement].’[52]

Kissinger claims that he ignored this proposal when he met Gromyko on 30 September, heralding the transfer of the Middle Eastern issue from Rogers’ bailiwick to the Kissinger–Dobrynin ‘back channel’. In his memoirs, Kissinger states that the Soviet offer was predicated on ‘a comprehensive settlement’, and that he demurred at declaring the outlines of such a settlement, which would inevitably outrage Israel and its US supporters, at least until after the November 1972 elections.[53] Although newly released records show that the ‘expulsion’ idea remained central to his dealings, Kissinger’s memoirs conspicuously omit any mention of his pursuing the issue after Gromyko’s first offer to Nixon. ‘He indicated a new approach to the Middle East; the Soviet Union would be prepared to withdraw its combat forces from Egypt in case of a final settlement (discussed more fully in Chapter XXX).’ Kissinger wrote nothing more about the proposed withdrawal for 700 pages of dense prose, which include the preparations for the Moscow summit and the conference itself. Still, he too obliquely confirmed that the Soviet military presence in Egypt remained on the agenda as the back-channel talks gathered momentum. In a meeting on 17 March 1972, for example, ‘Dobrynin sought to engage me in a dialogue designed, in effect, to impose the extreme Arab program. This did not fit into our strategy as long as Soviet troops and advisers were so prominent in Egypt. . . . When I countered with proposals related to Israel’s security concerns, he quickly lost interest.’[54] But the recently declassified transcript of Kissinger’s conversation with Gromyko in Moscow the following month confirms that the Soviet withdrawal offer remained constantly under discussion as preparations advanced for the Moscow summit, which was to be recorded – and credited to Kissinger – as the historic outset of détente.

The Soviets and Egyptians continued their discussions, too. When Sadat visited Moscow on 11–13 October 1971, shortly after Gromyko’s talks in the White House, Foreign Minister Mahmud Riyad noted Brezhnev’s interest in the details of Egypt’s contacts in Washington and his advice ‘to cultivate the American connection’. Kimche concludes, plausibly, that they discussed the issue ‘of ‘expulsion’ of about half the Russian personnel’.[55] Vinogradov relates that later he was summoned to a Politburo meeting in Moscow. Before it began, ‘Brezhnev told me that he was in full agreement with the embassy’s well-reasoned and far-sighted proposals [to initiate a withdrawal from Egypt].’

The first speaker in the Politburo was the defence minister, who threatened that if the embassy’s proposals were accepted, he ‘would

disavow any resposibility for the state of the Egyptian armed forces.' Grechko was Brezhnev's wartime commander and political ally, but even as a candidate-member of the Politburo, he was not party to the back-channel proceedings; his resistance to the idea that was already being discussed with the US must have been awkward for Brezhnev, who effectively ended discussion by referring the matter to a committee. Vinogradov, although he enjoyed direct access to Brezhnev, was only a new candidate-member of the Central Committee, and so could not be informed that his proposal had in effect been adopted. It retrospect, he wrote, 'the embassy had looked into a crystal ball.'[56]

At Kissinger's secret talks in Moscow on 20–24 April 1972, the climactic round of preparations for the summit, his memoirs again dowplay the subject. 'There was an inconclusive discussion of the Middle East. Gromyko sought to commit me to some general principles.... Rather than turn him down flatly... I suggested that a detailed discussion be deferred to the summit.'[57]

The transcript of these talks now shows up Kissinger's memory as remarkably selective: The Soviets' demand for 'general principles' was specifically linked with their proposed withdrawal. Gromyko was willing to settle even for partial agreement.

DR KISSINGER: What level of forces do you envisage for yourselves?

GROMYKO: We will leave behind only a certain quantity of advisers and military specialists. All the rest will be withdrawn...

DR KISSINGER: What number?

GROMYKO: That is something we will tell you later, but I do not see any problem – in fact I think you will applaud us when we tell you, and perhaps tell us to leave some more!

DR KISSINGER: I would not bet on the last.

They haggled over the timing. But it was Kissinger's reluctance to frame the contours of an ultimate settlement that still blocked the Soviet offer.

DR KISSINGER: ... The Mideast is the big unsolved problem.

GROMYKO: [in English] Big, big, twice big. I tell you frankly, if it is not solved, it may poison the atmosphere... at the summit.[58]

Sadat was informed in advance that Nixon was to visit Moscow in May 1972, and arrived there unannounced on 27 April – two days after Kissinger's secret visit was unveiled. As recounted by Vinogradov,

> He said that he wanted to make a secret visit to Moscow.... To disguise himself, Sadat dressed in an old coat and velvet hat! In

> Moscow, without any official ceremony, we went directly to the Politburo.[59]

Several contemporary accounts of this visit vary from the now-conventional version that Sadat was flatly denied the weaponry and support that he desired in order to attack Israel. Laqueur states, 'In Moscow Sadat met twice with Brezhnev and received Soviet approval to go to war – if he really wanted to.'[60] A lower-echelon member of Sadat's entourage related that he 'asked for medium- and long-range bombers, offensive weapons and better tanks. The Soviets didn't think we were serious about going to war. Sadat insisted, 'I'm going to war'. They still didn't believe him'.[61] Based on unnattributed records of the Sadat–Brezhnev–Grechko talks, Kimche claims that their purpose was 'to complete arrangments ... to 'expel' about half the Russian personnel,' as 'Brezhnev was particularly interested that nothing should interfere with the policy of detente which he intended to finalize at a summit meeting, barely a month away.'[62]

As the summit began, the Middle East deadlock appeared unresolved. On Kissinger's advice, Nixon told Brezhnev: 'When Mr Gromyko reported to me that ... the Soviet Union would be willing to withdraw its military forces – as distinct from advisers. ... that was very constructive. But that requires something from Israel that they simply have not done.' Nixon's mention of the troop withdrawal offer at a meeting attended by all of the Soviet 'troika' indicates his understanding that they all, and presumably the entire Politburo, had endorsed this measure. He went on to say, 'We have prepared a paper on this matter ... in response to the one that you have prepared.'[63]

Kissinger's memoirs conspicuosly omit any mention of such an American paper. 'The culmination' of the summit, he wrote in 1982, 'was ... Gromyko's agreement ... to a paragraph in the final communiqué so anodyne that it permitted no other interpretation than Moscow was putting the ME negotiations on ice ... The Soviets were willing to pay *some* price for détente. That, in any event, was the perception of Anwar Sadat ... and it led to ... the expulsion of Soviet troops from Egypt.'[64]

Earlier, in his 1979 memoir, Kissinger wrote that 'the upshot was a meaningless paragraph [in the final communiqué] that ... was practically an endorsement of the status quo and was bound to be taken ill ... in Cairo.' His back-channel partner Dobrynin agrees, 'The sides presented their positions ... But there were no concrete advances on this question during the talks.'[65]

However, the communiqué was not the summit's main product in respect of the Middle East; Kissinger relegated to a footnote the text of the 'general principles' that, at the Soviets' demand, he did finally agree to formulate in secret. He belittles this document almost as totally as the communiqué: 'Inexplicably, Gromyko spent four hours with me trying

to agree on 'general principles' ... I conducted what was in effect a delaying tactic.... They were so vague as to leave wide scope for negotiation in implementation ... Their practical significance was to confirm the deadlock ... The Soviets never pressed them. Neither did we.'[66]

William Quandt has already questioned Kissinger's version – politely and rather enigmatically: 'My impression is that Kissinger took the exercise somewhat more seriously, and almost certainly Nixon did ... The principles did not simply parrot UN resolutions, as Kissinger implies.'[67] This is now confirmed by the transcript of Kissinger's final talk with Gromyko. If the principles were so bland, why did these principles have to be kept so secret that Kissinger demanded their concealment from all but the back-channel interlocutors, and particularly from Rogers, the Egyptians, and most of all the Israelis? 'I can assure you this paper would create an explosion in Jerusalem,' Kissinger noted.[68] Towards the end of two long bargaining sessions, he remarked to Gromyko: 'Both of us are terrified of what our allies would do. This is the best guarantee of secrecy.'[69]

Here is one crucial point, on which the discussion ended: an apparent concession by Kissinger on the notorious ambiguity of UN Resolution 242, in its various translations, as to the extent of withdrawal demanded from Israel.

MR. KORNIYENKO: The Foreign Minister is saying that the content of this phrase means *the* Arab territories.

FOR. MIN. GROMYKO: 'All.'

DR. KISSINGER: 'The.' I understand the content the Foreign Minister is giving this principle, and I do not dispute it.

FOR. MIN. GROMYKO: Meanwhile we will leave the second and third points as they are, without any revisions.

DR. KISSINGER: Plus this oral exchange ... When I go back, I will say there are no secret agreements.

FOR. MIN. GROMYKO: We agree.

DR. KISSINGER: You will keep it as we discussed. You will not discuss it with Egypt.

FOR. MIN. GROMYKO: Right.

The secret agreement that, of course, did exist thus included some oral understandings. These were evidently completed when 'the Foreign Minister and Dr Kissinger then adjourned ... for an extended discussion.' They presumably included, as Gromyko had stipulated in the April talks, an 'understanding on arms shipments' to include US weapons sales to Israel as well as Soviet supplies to Egypt – and the implementation of the Soviet offer of a troop withdrawal, which for Kissinger had been the original purpose of the entire exercise.

Returning at last to the subject in his memoirs, Kissinger entitled Chapter XXX 'Sadat *expels* the Soviets,' even though by the time of writing, after the 1973 war, he was obviously aware that this was at best an exaggeration.[70] His omission of all the antecedents described above calls into question Kissinger's claim that Sadat's announcement came 'as a complete surprise' to him: 'I had expected that at some point . . . Sadat would be prepared to offer to trade Soviet withdrawal for progress with us. But . . . I never guessed that he would settle the issue with one grand gesture, and unilaterally . . . for no return.'[71] Contemporary accounts even describe his rhetorical display of astonishment: ' 'Why has Sadat done me this favor?' he asked his aides. 'Why didn't he get in touch with me? Why didn't he demand of me all kinds of concessions first?' For in a curious intelligence failure, Kissinger learned of the expulsion from news dispatches.'[72]

Some who took Kissinger's surprise at face value accounted for it by 'a quid pro quo known only to a few in the CIA', whose 'direct payments' Sadat 'had been apparently receiving . . . since the late 1960s. . . . The expulsion of the Soviets cleared the way for expanding the highly secret American contacts with Sadat, through the CIA and through the Saudis, contacts known to only a very few in Washington.' In this description, Stein rests on several US officials (including Quandt) as to their surprise, but only on a single *Washington Post* report for the purported CIA exploit.[73]

No further evidence of this has emerged. Moreover, as late as March 1972, the CIA itself – in a secret intelligence memorandum – was still leaning only on 'allegations recently circulated in the Middle East press' when it spoke of 'frictions' in Soviet–Egyptian relations which 'spawn recurrent reports that some or all Soviet personnel will be expelled from Egypt.'[74] Still, Soviet sources naturally took up the claim that Sadat was paid by the Americans, personally or in the form of aid for Egypt, to expel the Soviet military.[75]

Kissinger's 'surprise' is thus highly suspect. He even went so far as to accuse Brezhnev of 'amazing chutzpah' when, on 20 July 1972, the latter wrote to Nixon that the Soviet departure was merely 'a down payment, as it were, on the offer to withdraw Soviet forces' that Gromyko made in September 1971.[76] If Nixon himself was so incensed at this claim, he hid it in a press conference a week later. Asked about the impact of the withdrawal, the president fudged: 'It might exacerbate the problem by trying to evaluate what happened between Sadat and the Soviet leaders.'[77]

Kissinger's evident attempt to prove that he had reached no agreement for Soviet *troop* withdrawal, much less granted in return any concession at Israel's expense, while still taking credit for the Soviet setback as a benefit of détente, may indeed account for his central role in establishing the misnomer 'expulsion of *advisers*'. This continued with his

1974 description of Sadat's move as terminating 'the mission of the more than 15,000 Soviet military *advisers and experts*' and culminated in the sweeping statement quoted as this chapter's epigraph. In this, he had the willing cooperation of the Egyptians and the Soviets, for their own motives, during the withdrawal.

It is the newly emerging evidence as to the actual moves of the Soviets in Egypt that offers the best insight into the extent and character of their 'expulsion'. This evidence includes, among others, the memoirs and testimonies of Soviet veterans; Egyptian military documents captured by Israel in the 1973 war; and a recently declassified British Foreign Office file.

Who left, how many, and when

To this day, no official Soviet or Russian data has been given for the number and breakdown of personnel who left Egypt in the summer of 1972. The closest thing to an official Soviet figure was provided by Dobrynin: 'about 17,000'.[78] A former KGB officer in Egypt states that 'in half a month about 20,000 of our advisers left Egypt.'[79] Another recent Russian account puts the number as high as 21,000.[80] A report in the Russian armed forces newspaper puts the number of evacuees at 15,000.[81] The latest official Russian military history curiously quotes only Western publications and Sadat's memoirs, which 'average out' at the same figure.[82]

The latter figure does quite fairly represent contemporary US and Israeli assessments. A week after Sadat's announcement, Israel's ambassador in Washington Yitzhak Rabin estimated that 'while some advisors remain in Headquarters, advisors are gone from units in field . . . [the] bulk of the advisory personnel (4–6,000) have left or will leave Egypt. . . . Soviet forces tied into Egypt's air defense (10–12,000) have been asked to leave. Rabin was not sure if this applied to all or most of the air defense personnel.'[83] The State Department's own assessment was slightly lower: 'in addition to the departure of 4,000–5,000 Soviet advisors and technicians assigned to Egyptian military units, most if not all Soviet air force and other operational units participating in the Egyptian air defence systems are also withdrawn . . . It is likely that the Soviets will retain in Egypt certain instructors engaged in the training Egyptian personnel.'[84]

There were thus indications even at the time that most of the withdrawal consisted of regular Soviet units, while individual Soviet advisers remained. Nonetheless, the prevailing perception was that the expulsion pertained chiefly and definitely to advisers, with the withdrawal of integral units only a possible complement. This perception was not only the reverse of the actual events, but it resulted from misleading Egyptian and Soviet moves, which appear to have been deliberate and coordinated.

The commonly accepted view holds that the Soviets 'complied, indeed over-complied immediately' with Sadat's order for their military personnel

to leave within one week of 17 July, 'withdrawing personnel beyond the advisers sent with the air-defense system in 1970, so that even Soviet instructors working in Egyptian military institutions were withdrawn. They took with them all their SAM equipment and refused to sell any of the systems to Egypt.'[85]

Besides the question how such a prodigious logistical operation could have been accomplished within one week and at only one week's notice (a Soviet account relates that not only aircraft but ships began to arrive within a day or two,[86]) the phrase 'advisers sent with the air defense system' typifies the loose usage of the term 'advisers,' which helped to perpetuate the error that they comprised most of the 1972 evacuation. While individual Soviet advisers were also posted with Egyptian SAM batteries, the bulk of the anti-aircraft personnel sent to Egypt in 1969–70 belonged to an integral Soviet division; most were enlisted men, whereas the genuine advisers were officers. The appellation of 'advisers' or 'experts' stuck to the SAM crews and other regulars in part because 'officially, Moscow was declaring that there were advisers present in Egypt, but not troops.'[87] The United States and Israel, for their own reasons, also downplayed the presence of regular Soviet formations.[88]

The withdrawal of the Soviet anti-aircraft division was indeed the main development of July 1972. The division's manpower was rotated to keep it at a constant level of over 10,000.[89] Therefore, if the overall number of Soviet servicemen withdrawn from Egypt was on the order of 15,000, and it included other Soviet regular units too (some of which Rabin listed), it appears that Western estimates tended to underestimate the integral units and overestimate the advisers.

This is not to say that there was no break in routine for the individual Soviet military advisers. An Egyptian document bearing the significant date of 16 July 1972 confirms that the 112th Infantry Brigade's four Soviet 'experts' and their interpreter 'have handed over all they had in their possession and are now unattached.'[90] However, another captured document, which was composed about ten months later, lists the four Soviet advisers then serving with another infantry brigade, the 2nd, and their interpreter. Two of these advisers arrived before the supposed 'expulsion': one as early as January 1971 and one in April 1972; they were still on duty in May 1973 – that is, they were not even briefly withdrawn in the 'expulsion'. The other two advisers and the interpreter *arrived* in September–October 1972.[91] If indeed the advisers at this level of the Egyptian ground forces were relieved in July 1972, they soon were either reinstated or replaced.

This is also reflected in an annual work plan (December 1972-November 1973) for the Soviet advisers of yet another Egyptian brigade – conclusive proof of their continued activity after the 'expulsion'.[92] Asher describes this plan as representing a 'reduction of [the

advisers'] areas of activity to a minimum', as the training exercises they supervised were 'only from individual up to company level.' However, it was precisely the advisers' penetration of the Egyptian army *down* to this level that had previously been taken as an indication of their increaed influence.[93] Asher stresses that the Egyptian plan for a cross-canal offensive, even after the change of strategic concept by Sadat, was modeled on Soviet military doctrine and made possible by the advisers' efforts.[94]

The 'marching orders' for the 112th Brigade's advisers on 16 July are exceptional in that they all left simultaneously; the routine rotation was staggered. There was, therefore, an extraordinary and sudden recall of the advisers in mid-July, evidently on orders issued before Sadat's public statement. This 'most unusual' disappearance of Soviet advisers from the Canal Zone was also noted by an informant of the French embassy.[95] Within two days after the speech, Israeli intelligence had concluded that Soviet advisers were 'being withdrawn from GHQ down to unit level.'[96] Rabin's aforementioned estimate was probably based on the data that Israeli intelligence then possessed.

The Israelis were not alone in this assessment. As incredibly early as the morning of 22 July, an Egyptian source told British attaché Urwick 'in strict personal confidence' that '*all* the Soviet military advisers had now left Egypt.' Urwick hastened to report this to London, stressing that his source 'should be fully protected.'[97] This proviso now seems somewhat comical, as the informant was Marwan Ashraf, whom Urwick described as 'secretary for information affairs to President Sadat'. He omitted the fact that Ashraf was Nasser's son-in-law – which had made him seem a major intelligence prize when he entered Israel's London embassy in 1969 to offer his services.

In 1973, Ashraf was blamed by Israel's military intelligence chief for providing false information and witholding genuine data, which contributed to Israel's unpreparedness for the cross-canal offensive;[98] he is now held to have been a highly effective double agent.[99] As this cable suggests, he may well have been a triple agent or more. Further, Urwick's correspondence cumulatively indicates that the Western defense attachés in Cairo operated as an echo chamber, amplifying and mutually corroborating meagre information from the same limited sources. At any rate, Ashraf's deployment to spread the palpably exaggerated, if not completely false, version about the advisers' withdrawal appears to support Tawila's claim that various Egyptian 'experts' were instructed to do the same as part of a deliberate deception.[100]

The mass, simultaneous recall of the advisers to Cairo created precisely the misleading impression of their full withdrawal, which would then hardly be reversed when the advisers trickled back to their units. Deliberately or not, this produced a consensus in Western and Israeli intelligence that all the individual advisers were expelled, but not 'at this

stage . . . the Soviet strategic units nor 'experts' attached to air defense units'[101] Even US Defense Secretary Melvin Laird concluded 'that the Egyptian order ousting Soviet military personnel was limited to advisers, and did not apply to the Soviet military forces stationed in Egypt, who were flying and operating sophisticated weapons themselves'[102] – which was almost the exact opposite of the situation on the ground. The back-channel agreement was very effectively camouflaged.

The field-unit advisers were recalled to headquarters in Cairo. Lieutenant Alexei Smirnov was a 'radiotechnical' expert assigned to train Egyptian personnel in the use and maintenance of Soviet-made hardware. In late July 1972, on 'an ordinary workday . . . our people had barely managed to spread maps and documents on their desks . . . when a call came from the office of our ambassador, Vinogradov: 'Everyone is to stay at his workplace, but not to start working.' . . . Suddenly, another call came with a new order: ' . . . The Soviet military experts' mission is being terminated. . . . Gather all documents, papers, and property . . . by the end of the day, prepare lists of those to be evacuated'.'

But after about ten days of idling, which – Smirnov reports – began to cause some drinking problems, 'our superior suddenly appeared . . . "Our group is not being sent away for the time being . . . also, the Arabs have asked us to help them. We have decided to send you out on assignments." Smirnov and a colleague were sent to Alexandria. At the hotel where the Soviets were routinely quartered, they noticed that a large portrait of Lenin was still on the wall. The Egyptian floor manager was, however, surprised to see them, as – he said – "the Russians are leaving," but after reporting their arrival and receiving instructions, became even more cordial, "addressing us as . . . 'comrades-in-arms.' " . . . This was repeated the next day, when we reported to regimental headquarters . . . "But the Russians are leaving!" "Well, we have arrived." '

The commanding officer, 'without any comment on the supreme leadership's decision to banish all the Soviets to the USSR, declared that he was delighted to see Soviet specialists in his unit again.' Returning to Soviet HQ in Cairo later in August, Smirnov was told that transport flights to Russia had ended 'as all the nonessentials had already been sent home,' and he was reassigned to a radar plant, where their superior 'was not surprised at our appearance. He said that after the first feverish days of evacuation had passed, the command decided to delay whomever they could . . . so as not to transport people unnecessarily back and forth.' They were henceforth taken to work by a civilian bus. 'Morale was not bad . . . and billeting was much improved, as many apartments had been vacated.'[103]

The initial, conspicuous display was further amplified by adding the Soviet civilian advisers. 'The Spanish MA [military attaché] . . . says he has reliable information that the Soviet engineers helping to run the generating plant etc. at Aswan have left. The head of the attaches

branch, Col. Ezzy, also said that all the Russians, including civilian technicians, were leaving.'[104]

Another high-profile gesture made the day before Sadat's announcement was the cessation of reconnaissance flights by Soviet-piloted MiG-25 aircraft based in Egypt over Sinai and Israel proper. While one Soviet account states that 'MiG-25 flights continued till June 1972',[105] there are more precise testimonies that they ceased, and the planes were returned to the USSR, on 17 or 16 July.[106] This change would certainly have been marked immediately by Israel, which was 'painfully' aware of the MiG-25 intrusions as it had nothing to match their speed and altitude.[107] In a discussion with Ivliev after Sadat's announcement, Urwick referred to the cessation of flights by 'the very high-performance aircraft used for reconaisance over Sinai.' The Soviet attaché replied that their sale to Egypt 'was under consideration and he did not yet know . . . but added that he privately thought the aircraft would be returned to the USSR.'[108]

However, the small MiG-25 detachment was actually the *last* of the regular Soviet Air Force formations to be withdrawn from Egypt. The larger MiG-21 fighter squadrons, which had not gone into action against Israel since the ceasefire of August 1970, were gradually and quietly withdrawn well before. A pilot and political commissar of the Soviet Air Force group in Egypt, probably reflecting the line he was instructed to propagate, wrote that 'in June 1972, our units became unnecessary, and they returned to the USSR.'[109] The same time is given in memoirs of other Soviet airmen;[110] one of them names the exact date of 3 June.[111] At least part of the planes were transferred to the Egyptian Air Force[112] (some were said to have been tranferred to Syria,) and the training of Egyptian pilots by Soviet instructors continued.[113] As the aircraft had always borne Egyptian markings and there was no combat test for the pilots, this change would have been much less readily detectable.

Contrary to the conventional narrative, the supply of increasingly advanced Soviet aircraft continued, with the appropriate instruction by Soviet advisers. Andrei Yena, the deputy commander of a fighter battalion, was abruptly sent to Egypt on a six-month assignment in June 1972, as the head of an 11-man delegation. Their mission was to oversee the assembly of Su-20 planes (the stripped-down export version of the swing-winged Su-17,) which were already en route to Egypt, and to train Egyptian pilots in their operation. Yena submitted his training plan directly to the newly appointed EAF commander, the Soviet-trained Husni Mubarak. He relates that about six weeks into this programme, after being told of Sadat's 'agreement' with Vinogradov, his entire group was notified that they were to go home, with the exception of the flight instructors. But within two weeks, the Egyptians requested that the technical advisers remain too. Yena reports that while the Egyptian media trumpeted the 'expulsion', the attitude of his Egyptian counterparts was

only slightly more reserved than before, and his trainees politely sidestepped the subject. His programme not only went on to its planned conclusion in November, but he was even delayed for another two months in order to assist in the introduction of the fully equipped Su-17s, which began arriving in Egypt in November.

However, Yena too reports a distinct lowering of the Soviets' visible profile, particularly in Cairo, where they could easily be observed. 'Our multi-story hotel in Nasser City was emptied. The Soviet headquarters was transferred to a private villa. Now we lived in a three-floor villa not far away from the headquarters.'[114]

As his assignment in Egypt was for less than one year, Yena was not entitled to bring his family along. Vinogradov states that one of the main purposes achieved in July 1972 was to reduce these dependents' ostentatious presence in Cairo, after flaunting their departure:

> Soviet military men were seldom seen on Egyptian streets . . . Moreover, they all wore Egyptian uniforms with no insignia. Only the advisers' wives, the *oboz* [baggage train and camp followers] as we called them, filled the Egyptian bazaars. . . . the presence of a big Russian *oboz* in the streets [was one of the reasons that] led the embassy to consider how essential the continued stationing of so many military men, with their wives, in Egypt really was.

A similar problem of off-duty behaviour by the advisers themelves was confirmed by Ivliev to Urwick:

> When I suggested to him that whatever he thought about the decision officially, privately he was probably quite glad to be relieved of . . . sorting out the problem of advisers who got drunk or who had car accidents, he laughed and nodded.[115]

Indeed, upon returning at the end of August 1972 to Cairo from his new assignment in Alexandria, Smirnov found that 'no toddlers played any longer in the sand under the eyes of their mothers, officers' wives; no off-duty men sat in the shade smoking their favorite Nefertiti cigarettes and turning the pages of week-old Soviet newspapers.'[116] But however dramatic this change may have seemed, enough dependents remained (or arrived with newly posted advisers) for their evacuation in October 1973 to be a massive operation. The advisers themselves were ordered during the war – for the first time – to don Soviet dress uniforms and parade them through Cairo.[117]

The *oboz* issue was irrelevant to the Soviet integral units. The aerial defense division was withdrawn, but – contrary to the accepted version – gradually, *without* much of its hardware (particularly the SAMs.) Vsevolod Veligosha, a cook and paramedic, was posted with his SAM detachment

in Alexandria. While he does not give the precise date when, 'after Nasser's death ... we were asked to leave,' he relates that the Soviet personnel 'left all their equipment to Arabs whom we had urgently taught; every one of us prepared a replacement for himself'.[118] This process took longer than the time ostensibly specified by Sadat. However, in this case too, the visibility factor was taken into consideration: 'the Soviet forces deployed arround Cairo were withdrawn in 24 hours.'[119] But for units in the Canal zone, two former servicemen in this division state their departure dates as 2 August and 12 September.[120]

General Sa'ad al-Din al-Shazly, Egypt's chief of staff, testified in 1990, 'by the end of 1972, we were able to replace the Soviet military specialists on 15 SAM missiles. Most of the Soviet advisers didn't leave till October 1972'.[121] This process continued at least until March 1973, when – according to a technical specialist for SAM radar equipment, whose service in Egypt was unbroken by the events of July 1972 – 'everyone who had a suitable military specialization was sent 'into the field' to break in [Egyptian] AA men, who arrived after having finished their training in the [Soviet] Union'.[122]

An official Russian history also describes the personnel who returned from Egypt to the USSR in July – August 1972 as officers and enlisted men, or 'soldiers' – that is, integral units. 'The Soviet servicemen were shipped out by planes ... and cruise ships to Sevastopol and Odessa. The soldiers and officers expected a festive reception.... But ... the ports were surrounded by a chain of armed men in civilian clothes. It was forbidden to make telephone calls, to go to the toilet without a guard, or to share any impression from the foreign tour of duty with the local personnel. Only on the fourth day, after appropriate instruction was conducted by officers of the special department [KGB], was a start made at sending the internationalist soldiers to their permanent stations.'[123]

This account is confirmed by the veterans themselves. 'For 40 days we were kept in quarantine, after which all kinds of bizarre occurrences began. We were given our military papers ... but nothing was written in them. Where were we all that time? Unknown. When we said in the recruitment office that we had been in Alexandria, we were laughed at: "Is that near Kiev?" ... We also signed a commitment not to talk [about our service in Egypt] for 25 years. I kept my word.'[124] The 'expulsion' was thus used to end the mass Soviet deployment in Egypt without ever admitting it took place.

It was precisely this obliteration of the service record of the 'internationalists' in Egypt that ultimately led to its exposure. In the late 1980s they began a campaign for recognition as combat veterans, which included the extensive publication of memoirs and other literature. But even after their service was officially recognized and awarded with some material benefits, they had difficulty in obtaining from the Ministry of Defense in Moscow a confirmation of their posting to Egypt. This

blackout may have been designed also to prevent Israel from taking advantage of the transitional period until Egyptian units completed their takeover of the anti-aircraft array; but it also probably helped to cement the perception that the thousands of 'expelled' Soviets were mainly advisers.

However, it was estimated even by Western intelligence at the time – though later disregarded – that a significant part of the genuine advisers remained. A British assessment 'as of 0600 hours, Thursday 5 October,' states that 'only about 1,000 [Soviet military personnel] are left . . . It is believed that the latter are mainly technicians and military advisers.'[125] As Asher quotes exactly the same figure for the remaining Soviet advisers, without indicating his source, this appears to have been generally accepted among Western and Israeli observers.[126] As the British document gives the surprisingly high figure of 20,000 Soviet personnel 'as at 29 July,' the remaining number appeared small, but given the figures quoted above for the total of Soviet advisers, as distinct from other servicemen, it is quite significant – and definitely does not corroborate their purported expulsion.

The above evidence of an unbroken Soviet presence appears to militate against the widespread version that the Soviet force which was revealed by its evacuation in October 1973 was for the most part reestablished, after a complete or near-complete hiatus. This supposed restationing of Soviet advisers and other personnel is accounted for by hypothesizing that the expulsion forced Moscow to accede to Sadat's demands for weaponry in order to maintain a vestige of influence, or that the weakness and political unrest exposed in the Egyptian military by the expulsion compelled Sadat to mitigate his sweeping decree in order to regain Soviet support. The origin of this version was apparently a *Daily Telegraph* report from Cairo on 30 October[127] – precisely the time when Sadat was officially reformulating Egyptian war aims and bringing them into line with Soviet policy.

But this report, and a similar item in the *Financial Times*, was soon discredited,[128] and there are numerous accounts indicating that the advisers' service in Egypt was consecutive. For instance, Mikhail Ryabov, an interpreter, was sent to Egypt in 1971 for a second tour of duty and 'returned home' only in August 1973.[129] In August 1972, Kapitanets 'received an order to come to Alexandria for a meeting with the new commander of the Egyptian Navy . . . the Admiral stated [that] relations between our fleets remained without any change.'[130]

Whether or not the reports of a Soviet return were intentionally floated by the Egyptians and/or Soviets in order to shoot them down, their result was to further reinforce the perception that the expulsion had been irreversibly completed, and that Egypt was consequently incapable of a military offensive. After the 1973 war, however, these reports of a Soviet return to Egypt were accepted in retrospect, and

attributed to a renewed round of Soviet-Egyptian contacts – including another visit to Moscow by Sidqi – or to a mutual adjustment of war plans.[131] Even at face value, this assessment drastically reduces the significance of the original 'expulsion;' but as demonstrated above, the actual movements of the advisers hardly confirm such a radical about-face.

Kissinger, at any rate, kept on purveying the claim that the 'expulsion' was final, that it applied mainly to the advisers, that it was an outcome of détente, and that he had given no Middle Eastern concession in return. By Nixon's next meeting with Brezhnev, on 14 June 1973, Kissinger was already proudly advising the president: 'the one area where Soviet policy seems most confused and uncertain is the Middle East. The abrupt dismissal of Soviet *advisers* from the UAR last summer may well have been the high-water mark for the Soviet offensive . . . Their influence with Sadat has declined.'[132]

But as a Soviet diplomat concluded recently, 'Sadat's rift with the Soviet Union was more of a theatrical gesture than a serious policy turnaround: the flow of Soviet arms and military equipment to Egypt never stopped.'[133]

Notes

1 R. M. Nixon, *The Real War*, New York: Warner Books, 1981, p. 327.
2 H. Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994, p. 739.
3 Interview with Elena Suponina (Russian), *Vremya Novostei* (Moscow) 6 October 2003 www.vremya.ru/print/81683.html [Russian].
4 *Egyptian Gazette*, 19 July 1972, cited in A. Z. Rubinstein*: Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet–Egyptian Influence Relationship Since the June War*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p.189.
5 For example, W. B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab–Israeli conflict since 1967*, Washington: The Brookings Institution and University of California Press, 1993, p. 136.
6 Quandt, loc. cit.; G. Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East: From World War II to Gorbachev,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 78; Rubinstein, Op.cit., p. 190.
7 K. W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 65.
8 Quandt, Op. cit., p. 135.
9 D. Asher, *Breaking the Concept* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 2003, pp. 93–101.
10 For example, the role of Soviet personnel in launching Scud missiles at Israeli forces, on orders from Moscow, V. Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995, pp.143–45; raids against Israeli armored forces across the Suez Canal by Soviet *spetznaz* units, I. Ginor: 'Exposing the Turret: How Soviet Army Officers Stole IDF Tanks in the Yom Kippur War' (Hebrew), *Ha'aretz* (Tel Aviv), 10 June 1999, quoting Sergei Prokopenko and Viktor Baranets: 'The Abduction of the Centurions' (Russian), *Komsomolsakaya Pravda* (Moscow), 27 May 1999. According to the Soviet defence attaché in Cairo at the time, Nikolai Ivliev, a dozen senior Soviet officers arrived in Egypt on

the morrow of the war's outbreak and crossed the canal to tour the battlefield: A. Pochtaryov, 'A Medal for the "Americans"' (Russian), *Krasnaya Zvezda* (Moscow), 28 February 2002, www.redstar.ru/2002/02/28_02/2_02.html.

11 Rubinstein, Op.cit., pp. 192–93. For contemporary sources on the continuing supply of Soviet arms to Egypt, see U. Raanan, 'The Soviet-Egyptian "Rift"', *Commentary*, June 1976, p. 33n.

12 Stein, Op. cit., p. 65, citing M. Heikal, *Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1983, p. 46, 'despite the expulsion of the Soviet advisers, Sadat succeeded in obtaining Soviet weapons necessary for a Sinai operation.'

13 H. A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982 (henceforth: *YoU*,) p. 467.

14 For example [KGB Col.] Stanislav N. Leshchuk, interviewed in Igor Sofronov 'Counterintelligence Operative Leshchuk: From Syria to Afghanistan' (Russian,) *Bolshaya Volga*, No. 41, 22 November 2002, www.volgaflot.com/gazeta/4104.html

15 The authors thank Brook Lapping Productions for permission to quote from material relating to 'The 50 Years War: Israel and the Arabs,' a six–part television documentary made by Brian Lapping Associates, 1998; and the Trustees of the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London for granting of access to, and permission to quote, interview transcripts from this material (henceforth referred to as 'transcripts'; spelling and grammar reflect the text of the original English translation). Pavel Akopov, transcript, pp. 27–31; emphasis added.

16 W. Z. Laqueur, *Confrontation*, London: Abacus, 1974, p. 19. He does, however describe the 'exodus' as 'unexpected and startling.'

17 For example, Rubinstein, Op. cit.; C. Herzog: *The War of Atonement*, London: Greenhill Books, 1998 (first published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), *passim;* U. Bar Joseph: *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources* (Hebrew), Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 2001, p. 91, n. 89.

18 For example, Nadav Safran, *Israel: The Embattled Ally,* Cambridge: Belknap, 1978; Golan, Op. cit.

19 David Kimche, *The Last Option*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1991, pp. 18–26; quotation on p. 22.

20 The relevant parts of *Roz al-Yussef* war correspondent al-Tawila's book *The Six-Hour War According to a Military Correspondent's Diary*, as well as extracts printed in the magazine on the war's first anniversary and Sadat's interview, were apparently first brought to wide Western attention by Uri Ra'anan in testimony before a congressional committee in March 1976 and in the *Commentary* article, pp. 30–32. They were extensively reproduced, and Ra'anan's interpretation echoed, both by scholars, for example, Samuel Katz, *Battleground,* updated Steimatzky edition [Tel Aviv] 1985, Chapter 9 pp. 217–21, http://www.ourjerusalem.com/series/story/battleground040.html (Katz still holds this position, see Shmuel Katz: 'The Man with a Plan,' *The Jerusalem Post,* 24 October 2003, http://www.saveisraelcampaign.com/atad/Articles.asp? article_id=1630); and by journalists, e.g., NBC and *Washington Post* correspondent Alvin Rosenfeld (*The Plot To Destroy Israel*, New York: Putnam, 1977, pp. 111–14).

21 D. Adamsky, '"Zero-Hour for the Bears": Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969–70', *Cold War History,* 6/1, 2006, pp. 113–36 (quote on p. 129).

22 Rubinstein, Op. cit., p. 187, n. 57; Golan, Op. cit., p. 79.

23 Rubinstein, Op. cit., pp. 186–87, n. 56.

24 Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, London: Collins, 1975, pp. 170–75 (in paperback edition) and *The Sphinx and the Commissar*, New York: Harper and Row, 1978, pp. 241–44.
25 A. Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, London: Collins, 1978, pp. 228–31.
26 I. Zvyagelskaya *et al.*, *The State of Israel* (Russian), Moscow: Institute of Oriental Studies, 2005, p. 197.
27 S. Krakhmalov: *Notes of a Military Attache: Iran-Egypt-Iran-Afghanistan* (Russian). Moscow: Russian Intelligence, 2000, p. 128.
28 Rubinstein, Op. cit., p. 165.
29 V. M. Vinogradov, *Diplomacy: People and Events. From an Ambassador's Notes* (Russian). Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998, pp. 207–8.
30 Rubinstein, Op. cit., pp. 187–88.
31 Reuters: Second Lead Sadat, Cairo, 18 July 1972, take 3, quoting 'informed sources.' Copy in FCO39/1265, UK National Archives (TNA), London. All TNA documents cited henceforth are from this file.
32 [Alan B.] Urwick to MOD, UK; unnumbered FCO telegram, 21 July 1972, 1230 GMT, TNA. Urwick has been identified as later heading the MI6 station in Jordan (Nigel West: Obituary for Sir David Spedding, *The Independent* [London] 15 June 2001) and (as Sir Alan) served as ambassador in Cairo from 1985 to 1987.
33 Telegram 1065, Cairo Embassy to FCO, 22 July 1972, TNA.
34 Golan, Op. cit., p.79.
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9 The ‘Big Lie’ and the ‘Great Betrayal’

Explaining the British collapse in Aden

Spencer Mawby

The controversy over the British defeat in Aden

Not all Arabs were eager for an Egyptian victory in the war which broke out on 5 June 1967. Nasser had numerous Arab opponents and none were more bitter than the leaders of the federation of South Arabia. The federation had been established under British auspices by a number of tribal leaders from the Western Aden Protectorate in 1959. From the outset it was condemned by the Egyptians as a typical British contrivance designed to perpetuate imperial influence in the Arab world. Two events in September 1962 further animated the hostility between Egypt and the federation: at British prompting the Aden Legislative Council voted to join the federation despite resistance from the local population, while across the federation’s northern border a Republican revolution brought Egyptian troops to Arabia to fight the counter-revolutionary forces mustered by the Imam of Yemen. During the next five years the British and the federal rulers encouraged anti-Republican forces in Yemen and even conducted their own attacks on Egyptian forces. For their part, the Egyptians trained and armed National Liberation Front (NLF) insurgents in Yemen, who were then dispatched south to continue the campaign against British and federal authority. Consequently, when the Foreign Office invited the British High Commissioner to offer an opinion on the attitudes of the federal leadership following Israel’s attack on Egypt, Trevelyan explained that, although they were obliged to offer public support for the Arab cause, they were ‘wholly cynical in their support for Nasser, whom they would like to see battered, but if he came out on top against Israel . . . they would probably compete to see who could get to Cairo first.’[1] Despite getting the result they wanted from the war, the federal leaders endured a series of catastrophes in its aftermath: the police force in Aden mutinied, the insurgents took over the district of Crater for two weeks and then, one by one, the rulers themselves were expelled from their patrimonies. On 29 November 1967 the last British forces withdrew and the NLF established the People’s Republic of South Yemen (PRSY). The purpose of

this chapter is to examine the collapse of British and federal authority in Aden and the Protectorates, including the significance of the June 1967 war to this outcome.

Both the British and their opponents have suggested that the June 1967 war contributed to the defeat of the federation and the triumph of the NLF. The nationalists in Aden purportedly interpreted the war as a signal to intensify their efforts to liberate the region from British control. Although the federal rulers were delighted by Nasser's humiliation, the wider population were angered both by Israel's victory and Egyptian propaganda implicating the British. The so-called 'Big Lie' that the British and Americans had participated in the Israeli attack, was transmitted to Aden where it was widely heard and widely believed. A population that was already receptive to nationalist sentiments was quite ready to accept that British treachery had contributed to the defeat of the Arab armies in the Sinai. Many thought that the British would continue their subterfuge in Aden and this disposition contributed towards the mutiny in the police force on 20 June 1967 and the overrunning of Crater by the NLF. Jonathan Walker's account of these events notes, 'it was clear many Arabs saw the Crater occupation as retribution for the crushing defeat of Arab armies in the Six Day War only two weeks before. Nasser had famously linked Britain to the Israeli cause and the NLF duly capitalized on Arab desires to see face restored.'[2] Prior to the mutiny Trevelyan had been sufficiently concerned about the post-war intensification in anti-British feeling to withdraw civilians from isolated posts in the federal states and the nationalist stronghold of Crater.[3]

The federal rulers were so dismayed by the tepid British response to these events that many decided that their position was untenable and did little to resist the new NLF offensive after the war. The decision to leave Crater in NLF hands for two weeks was regarded as a glaring example of British weakness, which opened the way for a nationalist victory. Critics have argued that a more robust response, which exploited nationalist disunity in the aftermath of Nasser's defeat, might have offered the British an opportunity to stay in Aden had not Harold Wilson's government already decided on capitulation.[4] These critiques of Labour timidity extend to the policies adopted before the 1967 war and adduce as their key piece of evidence the Defence White Paper of 1966 which, it is argued, amounted to a document of surrender. In presenting the White Paper to Parliament on 22 February the Defence Secretary, Denis Healey, explained, 'from 1968 we shall give up the Aden base and confine our presence in the Middle East to the Persian Gulf.'[5] By refusing to retain the base and abide by commitments to defend the federation after independence, Labour's critics suggest that the British government betrayed their local allies and gave Nasser an opportunity to revive his wavering fortunes in Yemen. After the announcement, confidence in the federation among the Arab population collapsed and Nasser initiated

a new 'Long Breath' strategy in Yemen designed to perpetuate Egyptian influence until after the date set for British withdrawal. Both Nasser's declaration that the Egyptians would remain in Yemen until after 1968 and 'Amr's reported remarks that they would stay for twenty years appear as a direct response to Healey's announcement.[6] On this account, had Wilson's government maintained the Aden commitment for a mere 16 months the British would have been able to reap the collateral benefits of Nasser's defeat in June 1967.

The sense that this amounted to a 'Great Betrayal' has been given expression by numerous writers but most explicitly by J. B. Kelly, who declared the Defence White Paper was 'a betrayal of all past undertakings, a betrayal of the trust placed in British steadfastness, a renunciation of an imperial power's recognised responsibilities to its subjects.'[7] On the issue of the mistiming of Healey's statement, Michael Crouch, who served in Aden, has suggested it 'could not have been worse. Colonel Nasser had been on the verge of pulling his forces out of Yemen . . . it was seen as the weak climax to a series of disastrous political posturings on the part of our British masters. It gave quite the wrong signal to those who were all too ready to believe the worst of a faded imperial power. It was at the least embarrassing to Britain's supporters and at worst death to those friends of ours who were caught in South Arabia.' He attributes Nasser's survival in Yemen to 'the supine British cynical and pro-Egyptian policy of the time.'[8]

Not surprisingly, the accounts of Labour ministers take a different view and connect the disappointing outcome of events in Aden to an inheritance which was poisoned by the previous Conservative administration. They assert that they had inherited a set of toxic policies, including intervention in the Yemen Civil War and support for an unstable federation, for which it was impossible to find a remedy. Seven months before Labour's electoral victory, Wilson's predecessor, Alec Douglas-Home authorised an RAF attack on Harib inside Republican Yemen which caused approximately a dozen fatalities. Wilson's Paymaster-General and close ally, George Wigg, denounced Conservative policy in typically trenchant terms: on his account the Harib incident was 'a foolish expression of the British Prime Minister's long outdated idea of showing the flag and teaching the wogs a lesson.' Wigg also noted the admission of the High Commissioner of Aden, Kennedy Trevaskis, that the attack was 'our biggest mistake.'[9] For Healey, the more burdensome inheritance was the merger into a single political unit of the different cultures of Aden and the Protectorates which the Conservative government had effected in January 1963. He criticised this arrangement on the grounds that it was 'like expecting Glasgow City Council to work smoothly with seventeenth century Highland Chiefs.'[10] Lastly, Wilson thought the federal idea itself was flawed: 'We had one difficulty

after another arising out of Mr. Sandys's ministerial obsession with federations'.[11]

Much of what follows will be concerned with these competing explanations for the collapse of British authority. It will be suggested that the Arab–Israeli war of June 1967 and the Defence White Paper of 1966 did not have the defining influence upon later events in Aden which some writers have ascribed to them. There had been a proxy war between the British and the Egyptians in the region for over a decade but the collapse of British authority there was principally a consequence of local trends which Nasser exploited rather than caused; the British would have been unable to maintain their influence in the region whatever the outcome had been at the other end of the Red Sea in June 1967. Even in Yemen, where Nasser was forced by his crushing defeat to order a precipitate withdrawal, the Republicans eventually won the Civil War without Egyptian assistance. In tracing connections between these events a reverse chronology has been adopted in order to consider separately the impact of Nasser's 'Big Lie', Labour's 'Great Betrayal' and, more mundanely, the earlier policies of the Conservative government, in explaining the outcome of events in Aden.

The 'Big Lie' and the aftermath of the 1967 war in Aden

British officials in Aden were impressed by the immediate effects of the June war: in the north the Egyptians withdrew from Yemen and the Republicans were besieged in Sana'a, while in the south the armed forces mutinied, the federation collapsed and the NLF took over. The Egyptian evacuation was clearly motivated by military defeat in the Sinai; the connections between that defeat and the disturbances in the South Arabian Army (SAA) and the Aden armed police a fortnight later are more complex. The mutiny was regarded by some as a product of Nasser's 'Big Lie'. In the midst of the rout of the Egyptian armed forces in early June 1967, Radio Cairo asserted that Britain and the United States were actively supporting Israel. After the war, the generic title the 'Big Lie' was coined as part of a propaganda counter-offensive with the explicit aim of contesting Egyptian propaganda.[12] It was a lie because the United States and Britain did not assist Israel during the course of the war; it was a big lie because there had never been any substantive evidence on which to base such a claim and because it was constantly repeated. There were hopes in London and Washington that the exposure of Nasser's mendacity alongside his military defeat would remove his destabilising influence entirely. George Brown confidently predicted the Egyptian President was 'a dead duck' and was evidently eager to inter the corpse.[13] The concept of a 'Big Lie' proved a useful slogan when attempting to sustain an image of Nasser as duplicitous and untrustworthy. Although Nasser privately admitted his mistake,

Washington insisted that he publicly retract the allegation as a condition for the resumption of diplomatic relations and in March 1968 he did so in an interview with *Look* magazine.[14]

Despite its significance to the story of Nasser's long and complex relations with the Western powers, the precise nature of the 'Big Lie' has not always been clearly elucidated. In the broadest sense it referred to the assertions of Radio Cairo that Anglo-American forces assisted Israel during its war with the Arab states. Egyptian claims actually comprised three separate more specific accusations. The first was that on 5 June American and British planes flew from aircraft carriers to participate in Israel's attack against Jordan and provide an 'air umbrella' in defence of Israeli territory. These initial charges were made in the early hours of 6 June. The provision of the vaguely defined 'air umbrella' became a persistent theme in subsequent reiterations of these accusations and was the justification for the decision to suspend navigation of the Suez Canal.[15] Other accusations followed but were directed solely against the United States. On 7 June new evidence of American duplicity was broadcast based on testimony from Libyan supporters of Nasser that 75 American aircraft had flown from the Wheelus base to provide 'air support for Israeli aggression'.[16] The following day Radio Cairo alerted its listeners to a continuing American campaign conducted from aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean: 'America is throwing itself into the Sinai and we are fighting it without hesitation.'[17]

Although this was a vigorous propaganda campaign, it was hardly a well-coordinated or economical one and seemed to reflect the chaotic conditions in Cairo following the Israeli destruction of the Egyptian air force. It was King Husayn rather than Nasser who was responsible for initial reports that aircraft flying from carriers in the Mediterranean were participating in the Israeli offensive.[18] The Egyptian President appears to have acquired this idea from a garbled telephone conversation with the King which took place in the midst of the attacks and was later publicised by the Israelis.[19] In the absence of any opportunity to examine the evidence independently and despite the unsophisticated nature of Egyptian propaganda, most Arabs were left with an impression of American and British culpability. Radio Cairo had a particularly convincing response to the denials of Wilson and Johnson, which was to point to Eden's longstanding disavowal of collusion with Israel prior to the Suez war. The parallel between the second and third Arab–Israeli wars could not have been made more explicit in these broadcasts: 'Britain stood by and in front of the Zionist enemy in the 1956 aggression: America and Britain stand by its side and above it in the air in 1967. Eden in 1956 and Johnson in 1967.'[20] Wilson denounced 'this monstrous story' to the House of Commons on 6 June but British denials were not regarded as credible.[21] Radio Cairo responded by noting the precedent set by Wilson's predecessor, Anthony Eden, who

was 'still after 10 years denying the plot in spite of the appearance of all facts . . . The plotters do not admit easily.'[22]

These broadcasts had a potentially incendiary effect in Aden, which was already in the midst of an urban insurrection against the British and where Radio Cairo was a constant presence. At the outset of the war the British carrier *HMS Hermes* was anchored in Aden harbour and, despite British insistence that such a feat was impossible, there was a widespread belief amongst the Arab population of the town that the rumours of British participation in the attack were confirmed by the evidence of their own eyes.[23] On 6 June *Hermes* left harbour and aircraft could be seen flying from its decks during the course of the war. British insistence that the planes did not fly to the Sinai are confirmed by the ship's logs which were eventually placed in the House of Commons library as proof of innocence.[24] The exculpatory message of the logs was muffled because, during the course of denouncing the Egyptian version of events as nonsense, the Rear Admiral in charge of the carrier admitted that, despite earlier denials, flights to the Sinai from *Hermes* were technically feasible.[25] It is unlikely that the course of this debate was followed with any great earnestness in Aden but the combination of the memory of Eden's mendacity, the rapidity of Egypt's defeat, the presence of the carrier and the broadcasts from Cairo were quite sufficient for the majority of the population to agree a verdict of guilty against Britain. From their perspective the British had twice conspired to attack the Arab cause: on 1 November 1956 and 5 June 1967.

The only available nationalist accounts of the subsequent mutiny place it squarely in the context of these continuing British assaults against the Arab world. In 1974 one of the leaders of the NLF insurgency in Aden, Abdul Fattah Isma'il, provided his perspective on events: 'The Crater occupation took place within the context of the Arab world as a whole at the time: Israel had just defeated the armies of the Arab states . . . the British thought they could use the situation to strike a blow at the revolution; in this they were encouraged by the fact that the population had been demoralised by defeat and had been cowed as a result.'[26] British sources suggest that the 'Big Lie' had a more direct effect on subsequent events. Isma'il's opposite number was the chief of staff of British forces in Aden, Charles Dunbar. A year later he recalled, 'when the Arab–Israeli war began from being stagnant things began to move fast. Tempers and emotions ran to fever pitch. Nasser's lie to the effect that the British had helped the Israelites was widely believed and caused intense anti-British feeling.'[27] A journalist who visited Aden on a number of occasions confirmed that the Arab–Israeli war 'further inflamed the anti-British factions in Aden.'[28]

Arab members of the armed forces quartered around Aden were not immune from the atmosphere of suspicion and disharmony which prevailed in the town. On the morning of 20 June new recruits to the South

Arabian Army (SAA) began a demonstration in the frontier district of Shaykh Uthman. Early reports of the extent of the disturbances were magnified as news of events passed around the vicinities of Aden. Rumours spread to Crater that British troops were attacking Arab units outside the town. This fitted nicely the image of British perfidy propagated by Nasser's accounts of the recent war. In order to prepare themselves for a potential onslaught by British soldiers, members of the Aden armed police prepared makeshift defences for their barracks which were situated at the entrance to Crater. When members of the Royal Corps of Transport travelling back from rifle practice passed the barracks they were taken as the vanguard of a major assault and fired upon by the police. Attempts to rescue the men by British units deployed from the main base at Khormaksar only caused an escalation in the mayhem around the barracks. By the end of the day, 22 British soldiers and an unknown number of the Adenese police were dead.[29] The NLF and a rival organisation the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY) took advantage of the chaos to declare Crater liberated. British forces did not re-enter until Colin Mitchell marched back in to much publicity on 3 July. He later recalled the population of Crater were 'nervous and on edge' as a consequence of the recent war between Israel and the Arab states.[30]

Despite this testimony from the distance of 44 years the 1967 mutiny would seem more accurately conceptualised as a symptom of the decrepitude of the local political system than as a catalyst administered by external actors which dramatically accelerated the dissolution of the old political order. Most accounts acknowledge the importance of both external and local factors in the collapse of British authority but the latter seem of greater significance. The concern of the local forces with their own political differences rather than with suppressing dissent, the penetration of all levels of Aden society by the nationalist opposition groups and the collapsing morale of the federal rulers all pre-dated Nasser's defeat and provide the necessary context for the mutiny.

The fighting around the police barracks was sparked by news of disturbances in SAA lines. These demonstrations were less about the Arab–Israeli conflict than the internal organisation of the new force. The creation of the SAA under British direction on 1 June 1967 had been accompanied by much rancour and intrigue. What were regarded as the more reliable elements of the Federal Guard were integrated into the old Federal Regular Army (FRA) in order to form the new force. The FRA had, under the name of the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL), been responsible for suppressing dissidence in the interior since 1928. In later years its training was conducted by British officers who aimed to replicate the strict codes which promoted regimental allegiance in the British armed forces. The Federal Guard was a much looser organisation with a portfolio of diverse duties including internal security in

Aden, policing the frontier, garrisoning outlying posts and guarding supply columns. They worked in collaboration with political officers from the Colonial Office rather than conforming to the strict hierarchies of the British regular army.[31] The British had limited trust in the Guard and were less assiduous in eliminating tribal allegiances amongst them than they had been in case of the FRA. Only what were regarded as the more responsible units of the Guard were allowed to join the SAA; the remainder formed an armed police force for the Colony.[32] This new dispensation proved highly unstable.

Most of the trouble inside the SAA was caused by tribal rivalries between 'Awlaqi and non-'Awlaqi officers. The 'Awlaqis had long been regarded with special favour by the British as tough, reliable troops and they dominated the senior ranks of the new force.[33] The selection of Nasir Burayq as commander-designate of the SAA at the behest of the 'Awlaqi Minister of the Interior focused attention on the tribal balance amongst the senior officers. It inspired the initial unrest among SAA troops: the first demonstrations were a protest at the suspension of 12 officers who had questioned the decision to appoint 'Awlaqis to senior positions. All but two of the twelve were non-'Awlaqis.[34] Thus the immediate cause of the mutiny was not the Arab–Israeli conflict but long-standing tribal rivalries, and even these could have been easily contained had not the disorder spread to the police inside Crater.

News of the disturbances in SAA lines provided the inspiration for the uprising by the armed police, who shot at British troops from their barracks. Their actions reflected the earlier success of the NLF and FLOSY in infiltrating the various Arab armed forces. By June 1967 practically all sectors of Adeni society, including trade unions, literary, social and sports clubs, schools and newspapers had come under the influence of the nationalist organisations. The armed forces were a particular target for the NLF, who established an organisation loyal to them amongst Arab officers and men.[35] NLF and FLOSY penetration was sufficiently widely known that the British were reluctant to pass intelligence to the SAA because they feared it would immediately be transmitted to their opponents.[36] Even before the creation of the SAA, tensions between NLF elements in the FRA and British regular troops were evident to visiting journalists.[37] If the army were treated with suspicion, the Aden police were regarded as thoroughly unreliable. One of the leaders of the police mutiny, al-Hadi was a known NLF supporter and the British found themselves negotiating with him to secure re-entry to the town.[38] After the mutiny it became evident that the NLF had won the battle for the allegiance of the armed forces and it was this which secured them the final victory in the tripartite conflict with FLOSY and the federal rulers.

The position of the federal rulers in this contest was undermined by a collapse in their morale; by the end of August many of them had opted

to leave rather then continue the fruitless struggle with the nationalist organisations. The principal source of their disillusionment was British refusal to grant them military assistance after independence. British recalcitrance on this point had a greater impact on the federal leaders than the crisis in the armed forces. Although they were disturbed by the events of 20 June, they had always believed that their only hope of survival lay not in the reorganisation of local armed forces but in the extension of British guarantees after independence. The continuing refusal of the Wilson government to offer a defence agreement covering the post-independence period was an overwhelming preoccupation for the rulers of the states of the interior. The Sharif of Bayhan, who was perhaps the most astute of the federal leaders, withdrew from federal affairs in protest at British inconstancy. Other rulers considered their options. At the start of 1967 these seemed to number only three: to declare for the nationalists, to retreat to their states and await events or to carry on with federal business in the hope that the British would offer new assurances for the post-independence period. A decision on whether the third of these was prudent depended on any final offer of assistance. On 11 May the Minister without Portfolio, Lord Shackleton, presented the new deal arranged by the Foreign Secretary, George Brown, to the federal leaders. The latest package still did not extend the British defence guarantee after the date set for independence which was 1 January 1968. The principal new concession to federal opinion was an offer to maintain a carrier task force in the Indian Ocean which would provide sea-based air support until 30 June 1968. This was regarded by Labour ministers as a generous offer but federal rulers were adamant that it was a completely inadequate substitute for a treaty guaranteeing military assistance to the federation over the long term. The most reliable and moderate of the rulers, Sultan Saleh, explained, 'the policy as they had heard it outlined by Lord Shackleton meant that South Arabia would begin its independence with massacres and in an atmosphere of continued unrest...Independence without a defence agreement was of no use to South Arabia.'[39] Although they had constantly grumbled about British policy since the founding of the federation, this, rather than the mutiny, may be adjudged the point at which the rulers' will to resist the nationalists collapsed.

The mutiny was more a symbol than a cause of the federation's political decay and in its aftermath the rulers made their final choices. The remaining constitutional manoeuvering was treated as a farce by all concerned. Attendance at federal meetings was increasingly poor and those who did turn up apparently did so only to taunt the new Prime Minister, Husayn Bayumi, who marked the last days of the federation with a series of abortive resignations. Back in their home states the rulers responded to the dilemma set for them by the British in different ways. In August the rulers of Lahj, Dali and Dathinah engaged in a form

of semi-abdication by reluctantly handing over the running of their states to the SAA, which by this stage was transparently under NLF control.[40] The 'Awdhali ruling family decided to evacuate to Aden.[41] The Ahl Muhsin in the Upper 'Awlaqi Shaykhdom proved more determined to cling on to their patrimony and initially resisted the revolutionary tide. However, they chose the wrong horse in opting to declare for FLOSY amidst a pro-NLF upsurge and were eventually overwhelmed.[42] The most unfortunate of all was the Upper Yafi Sultan, who offered to cooperate with the new NLF government. After the successful completion of the revolution he was arrested and shot with a number of members of his family.[43]

The impact of the 1966 White Paper

There are strikingly different views about the extent to which the actions of Wilson and his ministers were responsible for the collapse of British and federal authority in Aden. For many the Labour government's refusal to offer effective military support after independence constituted both a betrayal of past commitments to the rulers of the region and a miscalculation of the measures needed to defeat Nasser and his allies. It was these moral and political failures which led to military defeat. J. B. Kelly argues that 'it is impossible to avoid the numbing conclusion that Britain betrayed her trust and ran away from her responsibilities in South Arabia . . . in a contest of wills it proved spineless.' By contrast, the two historians who have examined Britain's military strategy in some detail have cast doubt on Kelly's case. Thomas Mockaitis suggests that the absence of a 'hearts and minds' campaign had undermined British efforts even before Labour came to power.[44] John Newsinger insists 'there is absolutely no doubt that if the British had tried to prop up the Federation, they would have confronted an insurgency throughout the interior on a scale that it is most unlikely they would have had resources to withstand.' On his account, Kelly's arguments are 'prejudiced nonsense' designed to propagate 'a right wing fantasy'. The critique of Labour policy 'neglects the complete absence of any popular support for the Federation either in Aden or in the interior.'[45]

The particular focus of this controversy concerns the impact of Labour's Defence White Paper of 1966, which made public Britain's determination to relinquish its defence commitments in Aden and the Protectorates at independence. This caused a brief but lively Parliamentary controversy and a more prolonged debate about Labour's culpability for the failure of the federation.[46] The case against Labour rests on the argument that the White Paper crippled efforts to consolidate the federation prior to independence while bolstering their nationalist opponents. An examination of the period either side of the issuing of the White Paper gives a different impression of the confrontation between

Britain and Nasser in southwest Arabia and suggests that Kelly and others have exaggerated its significance in explaining the outcome. The internal security situation did become more difficult after February 1966 but this was the continuation of a long downward trend in British fortunes. Even after the White Paper, the gloomy atmosphere was occasionally lightened by short-term successes. On the nationalist side Nasser's Arabian adventure appeared ever-more perilous during 1966 as the nationalist groups in Arabia fell to fighting with one another. The latter aspect is particularly interesting given claims that the White Paper provided a major boost for Nasser and will be examined first before its local impact in Aden is considered.

One journalist, who subscribed to the betrayal thesis, recalled a conversation with a British official in Aden after the announcement of the White Paper: 'The timing is tragic. Nasser was on his back and on the point of retreat from Yemen. This saves his bacon and we hand him Aden on a platter.'[47] Although this purported contemporary observation has a certain retrospective tinge, this is a judgement which has received some posthumous endorsement from academic commentators, one of whom has commented with regard to the White Paper: 'it was to be British policy that saved Nasser. At a stroke, the rationale for removing all troops from Yemen was gone.'[48] Critics of the Wilson government are correct in suggesting that Nasser's contemporaneous decision to stay on in Yemen did not coincide randomly with the news that Britain was withdrawing from Aden. On 22 February, the same day as Healey was presenting the White Paper to Parliament, Nasser told a rally in Cairo that the British had been compelled to evacuate the 'occupied south' and Egyptian forces would stay until the British left.[49] He evidently calculated that if he could cling on until 1968 he would be able to dictate affairs across southwest Arabia. The new Egyptian 'Long Breath' strategy was designed to achieve this by consolidating Republican control in those areas of Yemen they already held in the hope of exhausting the Royalists over the long term.[50] Nevertheless there were other considerations at work in Nasser's decision, including his long-standing commitment to the Republican cause, the necessity to exercise some control over insurgent groups in Aden and his rivalry with the Saudis.

In October1961 Nasser had announced that confrontation with the old reactionary classes in the Arab states was a priority for Egyptian foreign policy. In nationalist terms Imam Ahmad of Yemen could fairly be regarded as the embodiment of reaction and Nasser's relations with him became increasingly frosty following this new turn in Egyptian politics.[51] His death and replacement by his fragile son, Badr, offered an opportunity to Egyptian intelligence. On the night of 26 September 1962 army officers in Sana'a launched a coup which forced Badr to flee and initiated a Civil War between Royalists and Republicans. Reports that Egyptian troops arrived on the day of the revolution have never

been substantiated but a large military force did begin deploying within three days, marking the beginning of a five-year campaign to suppress the Imamate.[52] The Egyptians were not the only external actor to intervene in the Civil War: the Saudis to the east and federal rulers to the south offered assistance of various kinds to the Imam. Nasser responded by making aerial incursions across both frontiers. Tensions on the southern front peaked on 28 March 1964 when British aircraft completely destroyed a Republican fort at Harib inside Yemen in retaliation for infringements into the federation by Egyptian planes.[53] Casualties were disproportionately high and the attack was condemned by the Arab League and the United Nations. Nasser increased both his rhetorical and material support for the Republicans in its aftermath. On a visit to Yemen shortly after the Harib attack he declared that the British 'must get out of Aden and the Arab south. We vow to God on this Holy soil that we will drive Britain away from every part of the Arab homeland.'[54] Despite this bellicose rhetoric, campaigning in Yemen was frequently desultory. The Royalists were unable to make much progress in rolling back the revolution; the Republicans could not defeat Royalist forces in the north and east of the country. Nasser's declaration of continued support for the Republic in February 1966 was consistent with his previous determination to protect the revolution. The 'Long Breath' was a conservative military strategy predicated on the assumption that the ambitious objective of destroying the Royalists remained a distant prospect and that the consolidation of Republican control would have to suffice in the interim.

Nasser's Arabian commitments were not solely comprehended by the military assistance he offered to the Republicans: he also invested his prestige in assisting the insurgent groups inside the federation. The suggestion that the White Paper offered Nasser Aden on a plate loses much of its force when one considers the history of the Egyptian efforts to control the local nationalist opposition, the difficulties of which continued to escalate after February 1966. The National Liberation Front had been established under the auspices of Egyptian intelligence and Nasser played a directorial role in its campaign against the British and federal rulers. The front's key activists were members of the pro-Nasser Movement of Arab Nationalists (MAN) or *al-Qawmiyyun al-'Arab*. In July 1963 Radio Sana'a publicly announced the creation of the NLF and three months later the armed struggle was initiated in the form of support for tribal insurgents in the Radfan.[55] It was as difficult to contain persistent internecine feuding amongst NLF operatives in Aden as it was to maintain unity in the Republican movement in Yemen. In both cases Nasser's difficulties increased during 1966–67. The establishment of the Front for the Liberation of South Yemen (FLOSY), incorporating NLF cadres, in January 1966 was part of a sustained but fruitless campaign by Nasser to maintain nationalist unity. Elements in the NLF favoured an

independent course based on the practical experience of other Marxist liberation movements rather than on Nasserist Arab socialism. Preventing the Marxists from gaining control of the insurgency in Aden and consolidating the position of the newly established FLOSY organisation were key motives in Nasser's announcement that Egypt was staying on in Yemen. However, maintaining unity amongst the opposition proved an impossible task. At the Khamr conference in November 1966 those NLF cadres who remained unreconciled to Nasser regained control of the organisation. This led to conflict between the NLF and FLOSY on the streets of Aden during early 1967.[56] Despite further efforts by Nasser to put the movement back together again, 12 months later the NLF finally triumphed over FLOSY in a bloody confrontation on the streets of Shaykh Uthman. Although its critics claimed the White Paper smoothed Nasser's path to domination of southwest Arabia, the historical record shows that the road to such a triumph remained strewn with sufficient impediments to constitute an insurmountable barrier to its achievement.

In addition to his determination to assist the Republicans in Yemen and FLOSY in Aden, Nasser's rivalry with King Faysal of Saudi Arabia was a further factor encouraging Nasser to stay on in Yemen. The drawing of a 'Long Breath' can be at least partially explained as a response to Faysal's championing of an Islamic summit which Nasser interpreted as a direct challenge to his advocacy of secular nationalism.[57] Saudi support for the Yemeni Royalists and Egyptian incursions into Saudi territory provoked a series of confrontations after 1962. Various attempts to resolve the dispute foundered on the ill will between the parties. The most significant of these was the prolonged Haradh conference of November 1965, which was attended by Royalists, Republicans and their external sponsors. By February 1966 the Haradh talks had been abandoned following Royalist refusal to accept that the Hamid al-Din could not participate in any future Yemeni government.[58] In the absence of a peace settlement, Nasser and Faysal continued to regard Yemen as a key front in their confrontation. A defeat for Nasser's surrogates in Yemen would constitute a setback for nationalism and bolster support for Faysal's championing of pan-Islamic politics. His rivalry with Faysal may not have been sufficient to persuade Nasser to continue the Yemeni campaign had it not been for the White Paper but it is clear that the Saudi relationship remained a factor in his constant calculation and recalculation of Egyptian foreign policy requirements. Intermittent peace talks between Egypt and Saudi Arabia continued after February 1966. Later in the year Nasser accepted Kuwaiti mediation in an effort to resolve the Civil War. The Kuwaitis suggested replacing Egyptian units with a pan-Arab force; the failure of this initiative apparently owed more to Republican than Egyptian intransigence.[59] Even before the Arab–Israeli war, Nasser tired of his obligations in Yemen and it has

been estimated that Egyptian forces in Yemen had been reduced to 20,000 men by the end of May 1967.[60] Nasser's commitment to Yemen was, like the British pledges to the federation, subject to change: the 'Long Breath' that he drew after the Defence White Paper was the product of a number of other imperatives and, in any event, his respiratory resources proved insufficient to sustain him until the British withdrawal.

In addition to the encouragement it offered Nasser, the announcement of Labour's Defence White Paper has also been held directly responsible for the intensification of the nationalist insurgency in Aden and the eventual collapse of the federation. This thesis has been presented in unvarnished terms by a number of commentators. In his memoir of the conflict, Julian Paget noted that the White Paper was a 'welcome surprise' for the nationalist rebels and 'a disastrous move from the point of view of the Security Forces . . . from then onwards they inevitably lost all hope of any local support.'[61] Tom Little supports this determinist thesis in unequivocal terms: the decision to withdraw from Aden at independence 'made it certain that there could not be an orderly settlement of the problem of South Arabia.'[62] Just as the monocausal explanation of Nasser's initiation of the 'Long Breath' strategy as a reaction to the withdrawal of the British defence guarantee needs to be placed in context, so the idea that this decision caused a sharp downward turn in attempts to counter the insurgency in Aden needs qualifying.

The extent of critical comment by those acquainted with the Aden case reflects the resentment which the decision generated at the time but takes less account of the quandary which the British found themselves in long before Healey's announcement. Anger was the predominant emotion from the moment at which the federal rulers were informed of the contents of the White Paper by Lord Beswick on 16 February. This was Beswick's second visit in six months and the rulers believed he had repudiated the promises of assistance offered on his previous trip. One account by an Adeni insider records that they all 'gasped with shock' when they heard there was to be no defence treaty.[63] Beswick's reports to the Colonial Office were less colourful but acknowledged that the reaction of the rulers was 'calm though deeply and bitterly resentful.' Officials who had closer contacts with the federal leaders reported that a number of them wanted to immediately defect to Cairo. This was not an attractive expedient and they turned instead to persistent and unavailing efforts to persuade the British government to extend a defence guarantee into the post-independence period.[64] Labour ministers were generally dismissive of the importuning of the rulers. The Colonial Secretary, Lord Longford, acknowledged that the various treaties prescribing Britain's obligations to the federation 'did not contain any provision for abrogation'. However, he insisted that if the rulers would not

accommodate the government's desire to revoke its obligations 'there are precedents for unilateral abrogation.' Wilson approved Longford's line and believed that the rulers should be content with the fait accompli which Beswick had presented: 'Surely this is right. We offered to convene a conference. They have turned it down – even after the No. 10 lunch.'[65]

It is more difficult to discern the long-term effects of the Beswick announcement than it is to record the shock of the rulers and the complacency of Labour ministers which constituted their immediate reaction. The White Paper certainly damaged the morale of the federal rulers but the notion that it radically transformed the attitude of local and international opposition to the British or intensified the insurgency should be treated with caution. The decision to terminate defence commitments in Aden reflected the deterioration of the security situation during the previous 12 months. British fortunes had been at such a low ebb for such a long period of time that either a dramatic recovery or a further downward spiral was unlikely. An intelligence report dated 9 May 1965 reported that there had been eight incidents in the previous week and declared: 'Terrorist activities and apprehension regarding the future is causing a lowering of public morale . . . In the absence of effective leadership by the British authorities and of successful measures in dealing with terrorism there is a tendency amongst the working population to become more and more susceptible to NLF directions and intimidations.'[66] British efforts to contain the insurgency were crippled by the shrewd tactics of the NLF and in particular the decision to target Arab members of the Aden Special Branch, the last of whom was assassinated in July 1965.[67] The NLF further adapted its approach during 1966 and 1967: as the campaign continued, they made greater use of targetted assassinations and sophisticated explosives rather than haphazard grenade attacks.[68] Official casualty statistics cannot be regarded as anything more than broadly indicative of the state of the insurgency. If we do grant them some credence, they suggest little change between 1965 and 1966. In the states of the interior the number of civilian and military casualties actually decreased in 1966, while the number of fatalities in Aden was broadly similar.[69]

Measuring the political impact is an even more perilous task than analysing these crude figures but there was no very dramatic collapse after February 1966. Rather than a series of abdications, the period after the White Paper saw the return to the federal fold of some previous defectors. Although the circumstances which accompanied negotiations with the opposition groups were often peculiar, each of them, at various times, proved willing to engage with the British or the federal government. A long series of talks with the South Arabian League (SAL) were held during the course of 1966; although the SAL leaders remained reluctant to join the federal government, two key figures, Na'ib Jaabil of 'Awdhali

and the ex-Sultan Ahmad of Fadli, decided in July 1966 that their defection to Cairo had been a mistake and returned to the federation.[70] Intermittent successes such as these even prompted occasional if fleeting bursts of optimism from British officials on the ground, one of whom, Tony Ashworth, noted in October 1966, 'with luck and a good sustained push, we may yet be successful in leaving behind a well disposed and reasonably stable government.'[71] This proved unduly optimistic. Negotiations with SAL, the NLF and FLOSY dissidents were intended to broaden the federal government but these groups wanted a complete reordering of local politics. Opposition politicians feared that any public recognition of the British would weaken their claims to act as avatars of nationalist anti-colonial sentiment. It was not evidence of British weakness which hindered the negotiations so much as widespread hostility to continued imperial control. This conflict between the British and large segments of Adeni opinion had become entrenched long before Beswick spoke to the rulers and can be traced back to the period of the Conservative government.

Labour's inheritance and the roots of Britain's Adeni problems

Labour's predecessors have also been subject to criticism by those with experience of the Aden episode. Glenn Balfour-Paul is one of the few critics of the 1966 Defence White Paper to trace the origins of the dilemmas which faced the British in the 1960s. While condemning the very late decision of the Labour government to abrogate its treaty commitments, he suggests that the imperial project in Aden was 'mismanaged from the start'. His principal thesis is that the Colonial Office fell between the two stools of dirigiste and non-interventionist policies and was too late in granting Aden a form of self-government. The refusal to accept proposals for independence advanced by the Governor, William Luce, in March 1959 is characterised as a missed opportunity.[72] A later High Commissioner who served under Luce, Kennedy Trevaskis, criticised the Labour Defence White Paper in a letter to the *Times* published on 28 February 1966, which warned, 'To launch South Arabia into independence without assuring it of any adequate means of defence against external aggression would be an act of bad faith and cynical irresponsibility.'[73] However, the memoir he published two years later, while criticising the Labour government, also provides a critique of the previous Conservative administration's failure to grant self-government to the region in a timely manner, including their rejection of the Luce proposals.[74]

Trevaskis's journals are even more frank and reveal the trying circumstances in which the British were placed before Labour's election victory of October 1964. An entry covering early January 1964 states, 'We have been given a task which many people would say is impossible. After all it is not a simple matter to try and safeguard a military base in

Arabia with Nasser on our doorstep at a time when there is an international witch hunt in full cry after colonialism.' The specific source of Trevaskis's gloom was the success of the radical parties in Aden in mobilising a coalition of local and international forces to oppose British rule and the failure of the government to back his own countermeasures.[75] His despondence intensified following further rebellions and he stated bluntly in April, 'I doubt our ability to hang on.'[76] In these circumstances, what had previously appeared to be Trevaskis's unbending hostility to Nasser and Arab nationalism began to buckle and he contemplated some form of appeasement. As an alternative to a policy of 'severe repression' inside the federation, which was still his favoured option but was unpalatable in Whitehall, he indicated that 'a radical change of policy' encompassing a compromise with the Egyptians and Yemeni Republicans might be necessary.[77]

Ideas such as these did not attract the admiration of Conservative ministers, who were eager to continue their campaign against Nasser in Yemen. They urged Trevaskis to press on and offered him greater licence to conduct a local war against Arab nationalism through subversion of Republican rule in Yemen, proscription of rebel strongholds inside the federal states and clandestine operations against the nationalists of Aden.[78] Trevaskis's journal provides a useful guide to the factors which were undermining British authority, namely the emergence of an armed, radical opposition in Aden and an upsurge in tribal insurrection with Egyptian support. These in turn were connected to two policies adopted by the British: a vigorous offensive against the Trade Union movement in Aden and the suppression of opposition in the interior as part of a forward policy which will be recognisable to those who have studied other examples of British decolonization.

The origins of the forward policy in the interior can be traced to the 1930s. It was initially motivated by a mixture of altruism and self-interest. As the years passed, the altruistic element receded: very little money was put into development in contrast to the diligence and enthusiasm with which the great game of power politics was conducted, first with the Yemeni Imams and then from 1962 with the Republican government. The authorities in Aden and Sana'a fought hard for the allegiance of the tribes and their leaders using the traditional inducements of rifles and Maria Theresa silver thalers. However, the coercive element in British policy was more prominent than the propitiatory. The policy of proscribing regions of tribal insurrection involved bombing the interior and continued until the end of British rule. This was not a game which a declining imperial power was very likely to win for the straightforward reason that incursions into previously unexplored areas of the interior automatically incurred the wrath of the local tribes who immediately turned towards Yemen for assistance. Imam Ahmad was a reliable supporter of tribal insurgency in the south. From 1954 he assisted major

tribal revolts by the Dammani in 'Audhali and the Rabizi in Upper 'Awlaqi. For the next five years, the British engaged in a wearying conflict across the Protected states. The most resilient of the rebels was Muhammad Aydarus, who maintained an insurgency in Upper Yafi from 1958 to 1962. Although the British were unable to establish a presence in the Upper Yafi territory they did manage to expel Aydarus.[79] In common with other exiled notables from the Protectorates, Aydarus took up the Nasserite cause. The Egyptians proved even more effective sponsors of tribal insurgency inside the federation which, beginning with the Radfan campaign in 1963, was conducted under NLF auspices. By the end of 1964 all the elements which led to the sudden collapse of the federation were in place, most notably the fusion of local tribal rebellion with Egyptian anti-imperialism.

The British were engaged in an entirely different campaign against a different kind of opposition in Aden but it proved to be equally sapping and it too had deep roots. William Luce recorded in 1956 that a watershed had been passed: 'Aden colony is going through a period of rapid and violent transition . . . The face of Aden must have changed astonishingly in these last few years . . . the only thing that surprises me is that Aden was able to escape for so long the sort of difficulties which have been part of life in most of these territories for a number of years.'[80] The expansion of business at the port after the Second World War, the building and running of the oil refinery at Little Aden and the increase in British service personnel created a demand for labour within the Colony which could only be filled by migrant workers. These workers were the constituency of the first independent trade union, the Aden Union of Workers and Employees which was founded in 1952.[81] In March 1956, employees at the port went on strike and precipitated a wave of further strikes at the power station, on public transport and at the refinery.[82] Although the cause of this trouble was the industrial situation in the town, the newly formed Aden Trade Union Congress (ATUC), which acted as an umbrella organisation on the British model, linked its demands for improved conditions to political change.[83] It called a widely supported general strike on 25 April 1958 to protest against efforts by employers to hire new immigrant labourers, which produced unemployment, price rises and the lack of employment and social insurance.[84] It has been estimated that during 1958 there were 84 separate strikes in Aden.[85]

Increasing industrial conflict encouraged the ATUC leadership to adopt a nationalist political agenda and their espousal of Arab unity was regarded as intolerable by the British authorities. It was not the general strike of 1958 but the issuing of 'demagogy of a political character' and, in particular, their complaints about the slow pace of constitutional change which led Luce to adopt a self-conscious policy of confrontation with ATUC and its leader, Abdullah al-Asnaj.[86] The culmination of this

policy was the Industrial Relations Ordinance of 1960, which effectively banned strike action. As well as hampering ATUC, this legislation was expressive of the British rejection of the political role which local unions regarded as fundamental. The unions themselves were influenced by the anti-imperialism and nationalism of the Ba'th and the MAN.[87] In 1962 they formed the PSP in order to campaign against the incorporation of Aden into the federation. When the union leadership called a general strike for 19 November 1962, the British responded by arresting key figures including al-Asnaj and deporting those suspected of union sympathies. These measures proved counter-productive. At the end of 1962 the Governor admitted that 'Aden TUC has succeeded in consolidating its organisation and is now a strong political power which commands the respect and support of an increasing number of even the moderate Adenis.' The extent of the divide between the unions and the government is evident from the long list of grievances al-Asnaj presented the following year: it began with the postponement of elections and continued with the breaches of human rights entailed by the laws against sedition, the inhumane policy of deportation, the enacting of legislation by decree, the failure to publicise federal law, the spending of 40% of the budget on police and defence rather than on development and the delay in passing the budget.[88] From this point, the discontent of al-Asnaj and moderate unionists was exploited in an increasingly successful manner by those who had always favoured a more radical course.

Differences over tactics and in particular the utility of armed struggle were one of the numerous sources of dissension within opposition ranks, which eventually produced the decisive split between the NLF and FLOSY. Most union leaders, and in particular al-Asnaj, opposed the use of violence but their more radical opponents turned out to be correct in calculating that an insurgency in Aden would undermine British authority. Governor Tom Hickinbotham predicted widespread disturbances as early as May 1956.[89] In March 1958 the calm of the Colony was broken by a series of grenade attacks which led to the declaration of a state of emergency.[90] The violence soon abated but it constituted a prevision of the urban insurgency of the 1960s. The immediate impetus behind this was the revolution in Yemen and the merger of Aden and the federation. The Republican coup of 1962 and the vote on merger in the Aden Legislative Council took place almost simultaneously. On the streets, support for the Republicans and opposition to the merger was overwhelming. On 27 January 1963, shortly after the merger actually took effect, a 'very amateurish bomb' exploded in a barracks at the British base in Khormaksar.[91] The decision to target the British base inaugurated a five-year urban insurrection which culminated with the revolt in Crater and the British handover to the NLF. It was a conflict which saw the insurgents make use of home-made bombs, grenades, mortars and sniper fire to harass British forces and suspected Arab

collaborators. The British responded with detentions, deportations, random searches and, in some cases, the use of torture. Aden had a become an urban battlefield long before the introduction of the 1966 Defence White Paper and Labour ministers were convinced the situation was slipping out of their control when they made the decision to withdraw. In practical terms, the retention of the Aden base appeared to be causing insecurity in the Middle East rather than contributing to stability and this made it vulnerable in an era of defence retrenchment.

The eventual collapse of British authority in 1967 was the culmination of a process which had been under way for at least two decades. Changing circumstances in Aden and the Protectorates exacerbated the problem of maintaining imperial authority. The local tribes reacted to British efforts to bring the imperial government into their lives by seeking external assistance and they became consumers of Egyptian arms and propaganda. Once isolated and autarchic communities were brought into contact with the anti-imperial currents of the Arab world by the British forward policy, the task of maintaining order inside the federal states became too onerous for a retreating imperial power. In Aden the commercial success of the port and the refinery and the expansion of the base resulted in significant immigration into the town. The material conditions in which these immigrants lived encouraged them to unionise, while their moral environment was dominated by Egyptian propaganda, including the broadcast of the 'Big Lie' in 1967.

Conclusions

It is obviously reductive to ascribe the collapse of British authority in Aden either to Nasser's 'Big Lie' or to the Wilson government's 'Great Betrayal', and only slightly less so to include as a third alternative the previous policies of the Conservative government. The establishment of the federation and its forced merger with Aden, the attack on Harib, the Industrial Relations Ordinance, the launch of the NLF campaign in the Radfan, the 1962 revolution and ensuing Civil War in Yemen, the 1966 White Paper and the June 1967 war were all of sufficient significance that any account of the last years of British rule which omitted them would be incomplete. If one were to single out any of these events it would only be worth doing so as representative of a trend or tendency with a wider compass or effect. While the 'Big Lie' might be said to symbolise Arab nationalism's refusal to compromise with the Western powers and the 'Great Betrayal' to embody a lack of will inside the British government, it seems unlikely that these were the influences which finally brought about an NLF victory. This was the product of local conditions in Aden and the Protectorates which by the mid-1960s had left the British government without any popular support outside a very narrow circle of federal notables. The rise in nationalist, anti-imperial

sentiment was the consequence of local developments, including the industrial relations conflict in Aden and resistance to Britain's forward policy in the outlying states. Nasser was able to exploit these problems but he did not cause them.

On the matter of the 'Great Betrayal', there was a certain shabbiness in the manner with which Britain's former allies were dropped. However, in broader strategic and political terms, the Labour government had little room for manoeuvre: the nationalists were already firmly in the ascendant when Wilson came to power in October 1964 and the Defence White Paper was an acknowledgement that the British could not hang on indefinitely. Healey's announcement of Britain's refusal to offer defence assistance to the federation after independence may have provided the pretext for Nasser's contrasting announcement that he would stay on in Yemen, but the belief that Cairo would abandon its military commitment to the Republicans ignores other elements in Egyptian calculations. The Royalist refusal to capitulate to Republican demands at the Haradh conference, the recent establishment of the FLOSY organisation and the intensification of Saudi–Egyptian tensions provided compelling reasons for Nasser to announce his 'Long Breath' strategy in February 1966. This commitment did not survive Egypt's defeat by Israel the following year, but the Republicans won the Civil War despite this setback, while their fellow revolutionaries in the south took advantage of events in the Sinai to launch their final offensive against the British and the federation. The revolution which established the People's Republic of South Yemen is best understood not as a response to immediate contingencies such as the June war but as a consequence of long-standing resistance to British efforts to reorder the affairs of the region before granting independence. The collapse of British influence was the product of local conditions in Aden and the Protectorates rather than any particular policy manoeuvre dreamed up in Cairo or Whitehall.

Notes

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17 SWB: 10 June 1967, Text of Radio Cairo Broadcasts (17–30 GMT, 19–49 GMT, 8 June 1967).
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10 Cold War, hot war and civil war

King Hussein and Jordan's regional role, 1967–73

Nigel J. Ashton

On 3 October 1960, before the United Nations General Assembly, one Arab leader staked out an unequivocal Cold War position. 'In the great struggle between communism and freedom', he proclaimed 'there can be no neutrality.'[1] With his tough anti-communist rhetoric, the young King Hussein of Jordan secured himself a position as America's favourite Arab leader. Indeed Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev helped his cause still further by staging a symbolic walkout just before Hussein spoke. Although the king could not quite muster the dry wit of British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan, who responded to Khrushchev's famous shoe-banging interruption to his own speech by asking, 'can I have a translation please?', he did express his deep concern about the Soviet attempt to wreck the United Nations through Khrushchev's attack on the office of the Secretary-General. Explaining the purpose of his address to the Assembly, Hussein emphasised, 'I wanted to be sure that there was no mistake about where Jordan stands in the conflict of ideologies that is endangering the peace of the world.'

While one might be tempted to dismiss Hussein's anti-communist rhetoric as no more than a product of his client relationship with the United States, in his autobiography written the following year, Hussein developed a coherent ideological case as to why communism was incompatible with the Hashemite brand of Arab nationalism. This encompassed both an opposition to communist atheism and the aspiration for Arab independence from any form of imperialist influence. From Hussein's own perspective, therefore, there was an ideological as well as a practical justification for his Cold War relationship with the United States. Nevertheless, it is on the practical side of this relationship that most commentators have focused. To some extent this is understandable. Two considerations predominated in Jordanian foreign policy under Hussein. The first was the attempt to deter enemies, whether in the form of neighbouring states, or non-state actors such as the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The second was the search for money to remedy Jordan's chronic budget deficit.[2] In both respects, the alliance with the United States was crucial to Hussein. But did this mean that the King was in effect no more than a

lackey of the United States, a convenient Arab agent to whom the waging of the Cold War in the Middle East might be partly sub-contracted? Douglas Little floated this view of Hussein when he asked whether the King amounted to no more than a 'puppet in search of a puppeteer' in an article analysing the Hashemite monarchy's relations with the United States between 1953 and 1970.[3] Further evidence in support of this thesis might seem to be provided both by the regular payments made to Hussein by the CIA across the years from 1957 onwards, and by his covert contacts with the US's other key regional ally, Israel, from 1963 onwards. These contacts have led Moshe Zak to go so far as to argue that Israel in fact acted as the unspoken 'guardian of Jordan', even though this relationship did not become openly apparent until the signature of the Israeli–Jordanian Peace Treaty in 1994.[4]

In fact, this interpretation of Hussein's statecraft is open to challenge. As this chapter will show, it only partially explains his actions during the pivotal years between 1967 and 1973. Crucially, it offers no satisfactory explanation of Hussein's role during the crisis leading up to the outbreak of war in 1967. Nor does it help us understand the failure of the King's covert diplomacy in the aftermath of war, or his suspicions of Israeli intentions during the 1970 crisis. Perhaps the only crisis during this period to which this thesis has a measure of applicability is that of October 1973, but even then, it does little to account for the suppleness and dexterity which characterised the King's handling of Jordan's strictly limited military involvement.

The key decision taken by Hussein during the crisis leading up to the outbreak of the Arab–Israeli War in June 1967 was Jordan's accession to the Egyptian–Syrian alliance during his trip to Cairo on 30 May. Far from acting as the lackey of the US and the covert ally of Israel, then, Hussein joined the camp of the Arab confrontation states during the final days of the crisis and the ensuing war. The King's decision was very much a personal initiative, undertaken against the advice of certain key individuals within his inner decision-making circle, such as former Prime Minister Wasfi al-Tall.[5] It has typically been rationalised by most commentators, including by Hussein himself, as an unavoidable choice in view of the state of domestic opinion in Jordan. As Hussein put it in a later interview,

> The atmosphere that I found in Jordan, particularly in the West Bank, was one where, frankly, we had the following choice: either to act at the right time with no illusion of what the results might be but with a chance to do better than we would otherwise, or not to act and to have an eruption occur . . . which would cause us to collapse and which would obviously immediately result in an Israeli occupation of probably the West Bank or even more than the West Bank. . . . That was really the reason why I went to Egypt to meet Nasser to his surprise.[6]

This explanation also offers a clue, in the form of his estimate of likely Israeli intentions, as to another key factor in the King's thinking. Evidently, Hussein believed by the summer of 1967 that whatever he did, Israel would try to seize the West Bank. In these circumstances, he had nothing further to lose by fighting, and, if the battle went well, possibly something to gain. The root of Hussein's firm belief in May 1967 that Israel intended to take the West Bank lies in the events of 13 November 1966.[7] The Israeli raid on the village of Samu' near Hebron seems to have had a dramatic effect on Hussein personally. It also presents a significant problem of interpretation for those historians who argue that from 1963 onwards, a strategic partnership had emerged between Israel and the Hashemite regime.[8] The problem is simple. If the Israeli government wanted to see Hussein survive and regarded him as a strategic partner, why did it launch a major, brigade-strength raid into the West Bank, which served to highlight the King's inability to protect its Palestinian population, and made him the central target of the Arab radicals?

The conventional explanation of this is that the Samu' raid was a miscalculation on the part of an Israeli Government which was itself divided as to the best course of action to take to protect the security of its citizens.[9] Most sources argue that the planning undertaken by Yitzhak Rabin, the architect of the operation, was founded on the expectation that there would be no significant resistance and no direct engagement with the Jordanian army.[10] But it is difficult to believe that the Israeli cabinet, which authorised the operation, could have been convinced by the argument that Hussein's forces would stand idly by in the face of such a large-scale incursion.[11] In any event, although the arrival of a Jordanian army column in Samu' as the Israeli forces began dynamiting the villagers' houses seems to have come about by chance, an engagement of some kind, whether in land or air was surely to be expected. As it was, the battle escalated into a full-scale confrontation, with the Israeli air force, deployed in support of the army, being engaged by Jordan's own small air contingent.[12]

Aside from the reaction in the Arab world, the Israeli operation provoked consternation in Washington, where Johnson Administration officials were sceptical of Israeli explanations for the attack. In a 15 November memorandum to President Johnson, National Security Adviser Walt Rostow provided a prescient summary of the likely effects of Israel's action. Not only had they undercut the tacit system of cooperation which had developed over the West Bank frontier, they had undercut Hussein's personal position. He was now likely to be subjected to pressure to take a strong anti-Israeli stance, not only from Syria and his own Palestinian subjects, but also from within the Jordanian army.[13] Certainly, the Administration did not pull its punches in expressing its disapproval of the Israeli action. The State Department refused to pass on a conciliatory message from Prime Minister Eshkol to Hussein and

American officials privately threatened that if Israel repeated its action the US 'military pipeline would begin to dry up'.[14] As Rostow saw things, Israel

> For some machiavellian reason, wanted a leftist regime on the Left [sic] bank so that it could then have a polarized situation in which the Russians would be backing the Arabs and the U.S. would be backing Israel, and that Israel would not be in an embarrassing position where one of its friends among the Great Powers would also be a friend of an Arab country.[15]

Rostow's view was shared by Hussein himself, who argued that the Israeli strategy involved the 'toppling of [the] Hashemite throne'. The succession of a left-wing regime would polarise the region, leaving Washington 'little alternative but to support Israel'.[16] Hussein's view in the wake of Samu' was that the Israelis now intended to escalate the conflict to the point where they would be able to seize the West Bank.[17] As he told one American official, he considered the unwritten agreement which had neutralised the Jordanian–Israeli border to have 'now been permanently shattered'.[18] As far as the king was concerned, the attack had 'completely changed his outlook on trying to live with Israel. . . . I no longer have a shred of faith in Israeli intentions', he commented bitterly.[19] Hussein's bitterness was heightened still further by what he regarded as the particular duplicity of Israeli actions leading up to the raid. In what Rostow characterised to President Johnson as an 'extraordinary revelation', Hussein, in conversation with US Ambassador Findley Burns and CIA Station Chief Jack O'Connell, set the raid in the context of his hitherto undisclosed clandestine dealings with Israeli leaders over the course of the preceding three years.[20] In an emotional exchange, Hussein, confided to Burns and O'Connell that there was one element affecting the whole picture which no one in his country, except himself, knew about:

> 'For the past three years,' the King said, 'I have been meeting secretly with Golda Meir, Eban and others. We have discussed these problems at length and agreed on all aspects of them. I told them, among other things, that I could not absorb or tolerate a serious retaliatory raid. They accepted the logic of this and promised that there would never be one. Moreover, in addition to these secret personal meetings, I have maintained a personal and confidential correspondence with the Israeli leaders. These exchanges have served to underscore and reinforce our understandings'.
>
> 'The last message I received from the Israelis was further to reassure me that they had no intention of attacking Jordan. I received the message on Nov. 13, the very day the Israeli troops attacked

> Samu.' The King added that the message was unsolicited, and had been despatched presumably between 24 to 48 hours before he received it.
>
> 'As far as I am concerned this attack was a complete betrayal by them of everything I had tried to do for the past three years in the interests of peace, stability and moderation at high personal political risk.'

Back in Washington, Rostow's view of the king's startling revelation was that:

> it could be that the contacts existed in a very narrow circle and were not known to the whole government or to the Israeli military. In that case, as they faced heavy pressure to retaliate, those who had the contacts would have been in a most difficult bind.

Hussein's own reading of the Samu' raid was evidently much simpler and more direct: he saw it as an act of deliberate betrayal.

Hussein's view of Israeli intentions also affected his relations with the Western powers during the 1967 crisis. He saw British and American policy, which focused initially on reducing tensions, and thereafter on maintaining secure passage through the Straits of Tiran in the face of Nasser's blockade, as biased towards Israel.[21] Once he had taken his decision to join the Egyptian–Syrian alliance, Hussein was ostentatious in his public attempts to distance himself from the American and British governments. The king's public hostility to Britain and the United States was, for the British ambassador in Amman, a 'remarkable and depressing feature' of the crisis.[22]

As if to underline his disillusionment with the Western powers, during the June war itself, Hussein, alongside Nasser, was one of the two authors of the so-called 'Big Lie' – the claim that Israel had been assisted in defeating the Arabs by British and American air forces. Although by the end of June 1967, the king had to admit on American television that there was 'no evidence whatsoever' that the British and Americans had been involved in the Israeli attack, blaming the misunderstanding on 'some radar sightings of aircraft that were appearing from the sea', the damage in terms of Arab public opinion had already been done.[23] The legacy of the 'Big Lie' contributed to the strain which characterised Hussein's relations with Washington for the rest of the Johnson Administration's term in office. This strain manifested itself in two main ways. The first was the arms supply relationship or, more properly put, the lack of an arms supply relationship between the US and Jordan for the first nine months after the war. This was particularly important for two reasons. First, because the June war had resulted in the destruction of Jordan's armoured and air forces. Second, because Hussein's political survival was

dependent on the loyalty of the armed forces, which could be maintained only if the King could demonstrate that Jordan's basic equipment needs were being met. During this period of informal embargo on Jordan by the US, Hussein gave serious consideration to the purchase of arms from the Soviet Union as a substitute. Ultimately, even though the Soviets offered generous terms to Hussein during and after his October 1967 visit to Moscow, the King did not turn East for his arms supplies. No doubt part of the explanation for this decision was his ideological hostility to communism. In terms of the survival of his dynasty, though, Hussein was no doubt right to judge that the Cold War offered no significant example of a monarchy which had prospered under Soviet protection.

The second main area of strain in Hussein's relations with the US in the aftermath of the June war concerned the peace process. For all his criticism of the Johnson Administration's handling of the Middle East crisis, the king believed that the US was the only power in a position to deliver Israeli concessions in the post-war diplomatic process. Hussein's own motivation in entering into this process was in one sense the same as that which had propelled him into his 1963–66 dialogue with Israeli leaders. He did not believe in war as the means for resolving the Arab–Israeli conflict. There had to be a negotiated settlement. This belief had only been reinforced both by the dislocation caused by the 1967 war, and by the demonstrable failure of the Arab armies in battle. Hussein saw himself as personally responsible for the loss of the West Bank and, in exchange for its full recovery, he was now prepared to pay the price of full and open peace with Israel. His initial bargaining position was thus in essence simple. There should be a return to the 4 June 1967 lines in exchange for peace. He was prepared to be flexible in countenancing *reciprocal* territorial rectifications with Israel at points where the 1949 armistice agreements had left behind anomalies. What he could not do was agree to any settlement which left Israel in possession of substantial tracts of Arab land conquered in the June war, especially in and around Jerusalem.[24]

Hussein's first post-war contact with members of the Israeli government seems to have taken place during the first week of July 1967 when he was on his way back to Jordan from a visit to the emergency UN General Assembly meeting. He later told the CIA station chief in Amman that this contact had taken place through a 'channel' in Europe. The king warned that 'very few people in the Israeli Govt. knew of this channel and therefore we should hold this information very tightly.' He was urged by the Israelis through this channel to open up a 'direct secret dialogue'. Hussein's reply had been that he would be prepared to do so 'if and when such action appeared [that] it might lead to an acceptable agreement.'[25]

Hussein's next port of call after his return from the US and Europe in July was Cairo. Paradoxically in view of the state of his pre-war relations

with Nasser, Hussein's relationship with the Egyptian President now came to form one of the essential props for his post-war diplomacy. Nasser too had learnt lessons from the conflict, not the least of which was that division had been one of the key causes of the Arab defeat. Despite his rapid rearmament, Nasser was also realistic about the prospects of regaining lost Arab territory by force. Although he himself remained reluctant to enter into any negotiating process with Israel, Nasser agreed, during a summit in Cairo during the second week of July, to give his backing to Hussein's covert diplomacy, with two provisos: There should be no direct negotiations with Israel and no peace treaty.[26] The king should instead work through the US as an intermediary to see what terms could be secured from Israel. After his return to Amman, Hussein put out his first peace feeler via the Americans on 13 July 1967.[27] In a conversation with US Ambassador Burns he stated unequivocally that he was now prepared to make a unilateral settlement with Israel.[28]

Hussein's démarche was immediately relayed on by Secretary of State Dean Rusk to Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban.[29] Rusk argued that it represented

> a major act of courage on the part of King Hussein and offers the first important breakthrough toward peace in the current period following active hostilities. It is an opportunity in our judgment that must not be lost, offering as it does a chance to embark on a course in the Arab world which could lead to an acceptance of Israel by its neighbors and to steps which could well change the whole course of history in the Middle East.

Unfortunately from Hussein's point of view, the time was not ripe for such revolutionary change. The Israeli reception for his initiative was cautious and defensive. Three main factors seem to have conditioned the Israeli government's approach at this juncture. First, there were suspicions of Hussein himself engendered by the war. Abba Eban subsequently told the British Foreign Secretary George Brown that

> the Israelis' current disillusionment with Hussein derived partly from the too high hopes they had had of him before the summer. No one in Israel had wanted a war with Jordan but when Hussein threw in his lot with Nasser on 30 May the Israelis had been shocked. It was also an important psychological factor that the Israelis had suffered more casualties on the Jordan front than elsewhere.[30]

Second, there had as yet been no coherent attempt on the part of the Israeli government to work out the details of an acceptable peace settlement on the Jordanian front. This was in part because of the third and

final obstacle to peacemaking at this juncture from the Israeli perspective: domestic political divisions over what peace terms could be offered to Hussein. Specifically, there was no agreement as to how far Israel should be prepared to go in returning land conquered on the West Bank to Jordan in order to secure peace.[31] For all of these reasons, the Israeli preference at this juncture was to prevaricate and to limit any discussion to generalities. The strategy of prevarication was appealing not only because it avoided domestic political problems, but also because Israel, as the victorious power in the 1967 war, was in no hurry to sacrifice its territorial gains.

Back in Washington, the reserved Israeli response, together with concerns about the sincerity of Nasser's backing for Hussein's position, dictated a cautious approach. Ambassador Burns was instructed to warn Hussein that he should be wary of Nasser. While telling the king that the Israelis wanted direct negotiations, Ambassador Burns was also told to warn Hussein that the Administration did not know whether there was any flexibility in the Israeli position on Jerusalem or whether an overall settlement was feasible at this point. In the event, on 28 July, Hussein informed Burns that 'taking all considerations into account, he had concluded his own position was too weak to try to undertake bilateral negotiations with the Israelis at this moment.'[32] The king was evidently disappointed with the level of US support for his position over the return of the West Bank to Jordan, which he claimed had been on a 'descending curve' ever since his visit to Washington a month earlier.

With bilateral negotiations ruled out in the short term, the focus of diplomatic activity during the ensuing months shifted back to the possibility of multilateral action through the UN. In terms of inter-Arab politics, the summit of Arab leaders which met in Khartoum at the end of August provided crucial reinforcement for Hussein's moderate negotiating position. On the face of things, the famous 'three noes' of Khartoum: no to recognition, no to negotiations and no to peace with Israel might have been expected to undercut Hussein. In private, the course of discussion between the Arab leaders assembled at Khartoum was very different. The Director of the CIA, Richard Helms, forwarded an upbeat report of the conference to President Johnson, based on a discussion between the Amman station chief and Hussein.[33] In it, Hussein claimed that 'the conference was a complete victory for the moderates, exceeding all expectations.... The road for peace definitely was open.' Moreover, Nasser was 'a changed man, even within the past six weeks.' Hussein's conclusion from Khartoum was that 'if Israel gives evidence she really wants peace, the mood of the Arabs is to meet her half way, but there is much skepticism (based on recent Israeli behaviour) whether she would not prefer [the] occupied territories to peace.'

Despite what he regarded as the success of Khartoum, Hussein's frustration rose during October and November 1967. The diplomatic

dance at the UN in New York seemed to move in circles rather than forwards towards the kind of 'land-for-peace' resolution which Hussein believed he needed to provide cover for subsequent negotiations with Israel. In a personal letter to President Johnson on 7 October, the King expressed his deep sense of grievance at what he considered to be the US's increasingly pro-Israeli stance. 'Double standards seem to exist in the treatment of people in our area', he observed bitterly.[34] 'The United States would appear at present to have chosen to forsake her friendships and friends amongst us Arabs and to mainly concern herself with attempting to enforce on them what Israel might or might not wish.' To the extent that the US now placed much more emphasis on the need to secure a resolution to which all parties, including Israel, could subscribe, the King was right. The principle of securing territorial integrity for all now took second place to the pragmatic desire to secure Israeli acquiescence. This meant that it was essential from Washington's point of view to fudge as far as possible the question of the extent of Israeli withdrawal, at the same as ensuring that any draft resolution did not lay down a timetable which might require such withdrawal to precede the conclusion of full peace. Thus, by October, the US supported the use of the ambiguous phrase 'withdrawal of armed forces from occupied territories', rather than the direct call on Israel to 'withdraw all its forces from all territories occupied by it as a result of the recent conflict', which had been incorporated in a Latin American draft resolution, supported by the US in July.

Arriving in New York for a further round of negotiations at the UN during early November, Hussein's frustration with the American position grew still further. A briefing paper prepared for his visit by the State Department acknowledged that 'Hussein comes here worried, and with a sense of grievance.'[35] He was convinced that the US was 'upping the ante in New York and backing off, as the Israeli position has become harder.' Despite this, the State Department assessment was that Hussein remained 'valuable' and 'possibly indispensable' to the US because of the 'role he can play in starting and sustaining negotiations for a general political settlement between Israel and its neighbours.' The paper acknowledged candidly that

> the Israeli evaluation of Hussein does not jibe with ours. Israeli representatives have gone out of their way to give us the impression Israel is writing Hussein down, and maybe off. Their motive may be to make sure Hussein comes to the bargaining table alone; or their view may reflect a diminished interest in negotiations. Manifestly they do not want continued close US/Jordan relations. We shall have to have this out with the Israelis.

In the event, the log jam in New York was finally broken by the device of a compromise resolution first advanced by the British delegation

during the second week of November. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, adopted unanimously on 22 November, coupled the principles of withdrawal from occupied territories with the negotiation of peace in a fashion which was sufficiently ambiguous, or, at least open to interpretation, to satisfy most parties. The resolution also required the UN Secretary General to appoint a special representative to carry forward the peace-making process under the terms of the resolution. Gunnar Jarring, a Swedish diplomat with limited experience of the Middle East, was appointed by U Thant to carry out this demanding mission.

In the wake of the passing of UNSC Resolution 242, Hussein pursued the prospect of peace through two channels. The public channel was the Jarring mission, which proceeded tortuously, with little sign of progress, through the early months of 1968. The private channel consisted both of the King's continuing direct meetings with Israeli officials, and messages conveyed between the two sides, often by means of intermediaries such as the West Bank notable, Hikmat al-Masri.[36] Hussein was accompanied to the private meetings by his close friend and trusted confidante Zeid Rifai. Rifai, whose command of English is perfect, took the notes of the discussions for the Jordanian side.[37] What transpired, though, proved a disappointment to both men. 'At no point during the 1967–68 meetings were the Israelis prepared to countenance complete withdrawal,' Rifai recollects.[38] Moreover, all of the ideas put forward during the course of the meetings, including the famous Allon Plan,[39] were, as Rifai puts it, no more than 'trial balloons'. Had the King shown an interest in any of these schemes they would have had to be referred back to the full Israeli cabinet for further discussion.[40] Rifai's characterisation of the Israeli approach to negotiations at this juncture chimes in with what we know of the process from Israeli sources. Indeed, Eban himself in private described the secret negotiating track as the 'Jordanian flirtation'.[41] During meetings with Hussein in London in December 1967 and May 1968,[42] Eban had not been authorised by the cabinet to put forward formal peace proposals, only to sound out the king as to what his reaction would be to 'a peace treaty in which the indivisibility of Jerusalem as Israel's capital would be preserved' and 'some territorial changes' in Israel's favour would be made along the River Jordan. Eban, unlike Rifai, judged the King's initial response to these ideas to be 'one of interest'.[43]

Nevertheless, the king was impatient at the Israeli failure to present a formal peace plan. It was partly to assuage this impatience that, during a further meeting on 27 September 1968, attended by Allon, Eban and Herzog on the Israeli side, and the king and Rifai on the Jordanian side, the Allon Plan was presented to Hussein 'in an official and detailed manner as the basis for a political settlement'.[44] The king showed no enthusiasm for the plan.[45] His rejection was confirmed by Zeid Rifai in a

meeting the following day with Herzog in which he presented Hussein's written response. The principle underlying the Allon Plan was unacceptable. The only way forward was to 'exchange territory on the basis of reciprocity'.[46]

Thus, while on a personal basis both Rifai and the king formed positive impressions of the individuals with whom they dealt on the Israeli side during the post-1967 meetings, including Abba Eban and Yigal Allon, Rifai's overall conclusion that 'their hands were tied' seems an astute judgement of the domestic politics of the Jordanian option in Israel at this point. Since the king's Israeli interlocutors were not mandated to discuss full withdrawal, and since the king would not compromise on this principle, the talks in the end were unsuccessful.[47]

With the process effectively over by December 1968, Hussein offered his own summary of the reasons for its failure to US Ambassador Harrison Symmes. In spite of all the contacts, there had been no discernible give in any specific aspect of the Israeli position. 'In effect, the Israelis keep giving us their general position and we keep giving them ours', he told Symmes. Hussein discussed some of the specific proposals that the Israelis had thrown out in the secret contacts. With regard to territory, the Israelis had said they wanted a 12-kilometer-wide strip running along the Jordan River from the north (Tiberias) to a point a few miles north of Jericho. Jordan would be allowed to have corridors across this strip. The Israelis had noted also that they expected boundary changes in the west. Far from giving any ground on Jerusalem the Israelis had taken a very hard line. Hussein told Symmes that he could see that all Jordan would get was 'access to the Holy Places'. On refugees, the king said the Israelis had proposed that Jordan and Israel should form a sort of bilateral committee to discuss their status and disposition. The king had responded that this was unacceptable to Jordan and Jordan's position was that the existing UN resolutions on refugees must be applied. Although the channel to the Israelis remained open in principle, Hussein's view was that he could do nothing more unless they became more forthcoming.[48] Symmes' own judgement was that 'the Israeli 'clarification process' with Jordan . . . has been singularly unrealistic, unspecific, and unproductive'.[49]

By 1969, with the diplomatic process effectively stalled, Hussein was forced to focus his attention more and more on Jordan's domestic political predicament. Since the June war, Jordan had remained trapped in a spiral of Palestinian guerrilla or *fedayeen* action and Israeli reaction, the effects of which threatened fatally to undermine Hussein's political authority. Hussein had tried a number of different approaches to break out of this spiral. These included his covert negotiations with the Israelis, and covert contacts with leaders of the guerrilla groups including Yasser Arafat, the Fatah leader.[50] All of these efforts were to no avail. Both conciliation and repression of the fedayeen seemed to hold out equal

dangers for the king, with Jordanian chief of staff Amer Khammash privately likening him to a 'the man who swallowed a razor blade – upward and downward movements are equally dangerous.'[51] During 1969, under the weight of Israeli attacks the fedayeen were driven back from their forward bases in the Jordan Valley to the main East Bank towns and cities, particularly Amman. Here they increasingly acted as a state within a state, ignoring the authority of the local police and frequently antagonising the army. By the beginning of 1970, it was clear that the king's repeated pleas for unity were redundant. On 10 February 1970 the government instead attempted to enforce law and order, issuing a list of twelve points by which the fedayeen had to abide.[52] The results were huge demonstrations in the streets of Amman, and a hasty decision by the king the following day to instruct the government to suspend its decision.

As 1970 progressed, the king's authority diminished still further. A series of dramatic hijackings carried out by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in early September brought matters to a head. Hussein decided that the only way to preserve his regime was to defeat the guerrilla groups. After first appointing a new military cabinet, the king ordered the army into action on the morning of 17 September. As the operation unfolded, Hussein's concerns focused not only on the battle with the fedayeen, but also on the reactions of his neighbours. The danger from his perspective was that if the Hashemite regime looked like it was on the point of collapsing, the vultures, in the form of the Iraqis, Syrians and Israelis, might descend to pick over the carcass. In practice, this might mean a carve-up of Jordan, with the creation of a rump Palestinian state from what remained. This fear became even more pressing when, on the morning of 20 September, a Syrian armoured brigade crossed the Jordanian northern border.

Hussein's warnings about the danger of Syrian intervention, which had been largely ignored in Washington, are already a familiar aspect of the crisis. His fears about the potential results of Israeli action are much less widely known, simply because the view of Israel as the 'guardian of Jordan' has been so readily applied to the September 1970 crisis. In one sense this is no surprise. The Israeli military build-up on the Syrian front which took place after the Syrian incursion can be interpreted as a move intended to deter Syria and to save Hussein's regime. Similarly, Hussein's calls for Israeli military intervention against Syria, seem to dovetail perfectly with the 'guardian of Jordan' thesis. But, new evidence suggests that Hussein's own perception of Israel during the crisis was different. He saw Israel as an additional potential threat to the survival of his regime. Hussein's perception was of course coloured by the background in bilateral relations which included the legacy of the Samu' raid, the 1967 war, and of his attempts to negotiate with Israel in its aftermath. According to Zeid Rifai, his closest adviser at the time, the

king's contacts with Israeli officials in the wake of the 1967 war had served to reinforce his caution about Israeli intentions. Indeed, as far as Rifai is concerned, one of the purposes of this dialogue had been to gain Jordan a breathing space by warding off further potential Israeli expansionist designs.[53] Henry Kissinger too believes that one of the reasons for the king's reluctance to communicate directly with the Israelis during the crisis, using the secure, scrambler link installed early in 1970 by MI6's agent in Amman, Bill Speirs, and his resort instead to British and American intermediaries, was that the king was very suspicious of Israeli intentions and wanted official Anglo-American witnesses to the exchanges.[54] In the days running up to the 17 September showdown with the fedayeen, the king's concerns focused on Israeli reconnaissance activity in the Jordan Valley. Zeid Rifai had approached US Ambassador Dean Brown on his behalf on 15 September warning of escalating Israeli scouting expeditions 'using maps which implied to [the] Jordanians that [the] exercise was a possible prelude to military invasion of this area.' Rifai urged the US government to take whatever measures were necessary to ensure that the Israelis took no military action.[55]

The king's handling of the question of Israeli intervention in the wake of the Syrian incursion into northern Jordan lends further substance to this line of argument. While Hussein was prepared to countenance Israeli air strikes against the Syrian forces in Jordan as a last resort, he drew a red line on the question of Israeli ground forces crossing on to Jordanian soil.[56] The reasons for this refusal included: a fear that if Israeli forces entered Jordan they would not readily leave; concerns as to whether his own armed forces would seek to block such an Israeli incursion; and worries about the effect on the legitimacy of his own regime if the Israelis were seen to be intervening to save him. Of all of these concerns though, it was the doubt about Israeli intentions which predominated.[57]

In fact, Hussein was right to entertain such doubts. The debate about whether or not it would be in Israel's interests to intervene to save Hussein seems to have been finely balanced during the September 1970 crisis. The most prominent of the doubters was Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, who stated publicly on Israeli television on 23 September that 'we will not mourn if Hussein is replaced by someone willing to make peace with us.'[58] If action were to be taken, Dayan believed, its goal should in fact be to take and hold a large slice of Jordanian territory. 'If we go into Irbid', Dayan argued, 'it will be difficult for us just to return it.'[59] The divisions within the Israeli leadership as to what action to take were summarised as follows by General Mordechai Gur, the commander responsible for the Syrian–Lebanese front during the crisis:

> One opinion backed the strengthening of Hussein's position and the continuation of his rule. They felt that Israel's bond with the

> Hashemite Kingdom was better than that with any other Arab country and that the Six Day War was a tactical error on the part of Hussein. It was impermissible to damage the positive relationship between the two countries, and in the future Hussein would be Israel's best peace partner.
>
> The opposing opinion supported the transformation of Jordan into a Palestinian state. The extremists in this perspective recommended that Israel offer practical assistance, in different ways, to realize the ambitions of the Palestinians in Jordan. Yasser Arafat's declaration of independence in Irbid strengthened the hands of those who held this opinion. They suggested allowing the guerrillas to achieve their aims and to take control over all of Jordan. In this they saw the ideal solution to the issue of the Palestinians.[60]

The redeployment of Israeli forces to the north which took place in the wake of the Syrian intervention, then, might serve either goal. On the one hand, it might help to deter Syria from escalating its operations in Jordan, and so help save the Hashemite regime. On the other, it might also position Israel 'to ensure that if Jordan is carved up, Israel gets a slice.'[61] Were a rump Palestinian successor state to be formed, then Israel would want the extra security provided by the seizure of a further territorial buffer on its north-eastern front and along the Jordan Valley.[62]

What the Israeli reaction might have been if the Syrians had broken through towards Amman remains an imponderable because, during the course of 22 and 23 September, Jordanian air and ground forces succeeded in driving back the Syrian armoured incursion. Israeli forces played no direct role in this process, although Hussein does appear to have received some IDF intelligence information confirming the Syrian retreat. Whether this was passed directly via the 'Speirs line' as well as indirectly through British and Americans intermediaries is unclear from the available sources. There are, however, hints that all of these channels were used.[63]

Hussein's relations with Israel during the September 1970 crisis, then, were much more ambivalent, from the perspective of both parties, than the 'guardian of Jordan' thesis might lead us to believe. Nor was the crisis the simple Cold War confrontation portrayed by Henry Kissinger in his memoirs. Kissinger himself now believes that the Syrian intervention was 'tolerated but not sponsored' by Moscow.[64] In these circumstances, Hussein played a skilful game, both in balancing off his regional adversaries, and in drawing in his Cold War patron's support, to help ensure his regime's survival during what in essence was a local conflict.

In the wake of his successful expulsion of the fedayeen during 1970–71, Hussein found himself largely isolated in the Arab world. This isolation forms the essential backdrop to his position during the October 1973

Arab–Israeli war. The two central points of debate over Hussein's role at this juncture concern how far he went in warning Israel about Egyptian and Syrian intentions, and whether he should have opened up a further Jordanian front, particularly when the tide of battle turned against the Egyptians and Syrians. In view of the danger of being portrayed as a traitor to the Arab cause, Hussein himself was very sensitive to both charges, but particularly to that of betraying Arab plans to Israel in advance. In one sense, the king's defence against this charge was straightforward: he was not privy to Sadat and Asad's plans, so he could not have betrayed them to Israel.

> I can only say that, as far as I was concerned, I was caught completely off guard. I was riding a motorbike with my late wife behind me in the suburbs of Amman when a security car behind started flashing us to stop and then I was told that a war had started. I had no idea that anything of that nature would happen and certainly not at that time.[65]

This denial of any foreknowledge, though, does not appear to have been completely candid. Certainly, Hussein took every opportunity in his talks with a succession of Western leaders during 1973 to warn both about the dangers posed by a renewal of war and its imminence in the absence of diplomatic progress. 'In such circumstances', he told British Prime Minister Edward Heath during a 12 July 1973 meeting, 'there was a strange logic which led President Sadat to believe that a disastrous war would be preferable to a continuing stalemate.' Hussein went on to warn that 'he had heard dates mentioned (sometimes for this month, and also for a more distant date) at which hostilities could commence. . . . Action might occur quite soon, and would be very dangerous.'[66] 'Something spectacular was being planned', the king predicted ominously.[67]

Indeed, during the final weeks before the war, both Sadat and Asad evidently saw some merit in pursuing a limited thaw in relations with Hussein, a process which culminated in a summit meeting between the three leaders held in Cairo between 10–12 September 1973. How much Hussein learnt of Egyptian and Syrian plans during this meeting is uncertain. The summit communiqué not surprisingly gave little away, stating blandly that 'all undecided issues among the three countries and all issues and estimates connected with the battle of destiny were discussed.' Certainly, Hussein made no significant concessions himself, either on the issue of the return of the fedayeen to Jordan, or that of putting Jordanian forces under joint command.[68] According to his own account, though, he did guarantee that he would fight any flanking movement Israel might make against Syria through Jordanian territory. 'We were told that they were afraid of an Israeli attack through Jordan

and I said that if that ever happened we will fight it. We are not going to leave our territory open for anyone.'[69]

It is probable, though, that the more specific information Hussein had about the Arab war plans came not from these talks, but from his own intelligence sources, which included an individual highly placed in the Syrian army, who appears to have given the King a detailed insight into Syrian planning.[70] Hussein passed on the essence of this intelligence to Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir in a covert meeting on 25 September 1973.[71] His warning about Syrian preparations for battle, though, ultimately made no difference to the Israeli posture. Because the basic political calculation in Israel was that Syria and Egypt would not cooperate in waging a war they could not hope to win, Hussein's warning was effectively dismissed. Of course from the king's point of view, the issue was not whether his actions changed the course of history, but whether they might be construed as an act of treachery to the Arab cause. Here, what matters most is the king's purpose, which seems to have been to avoid the outbreak of war by restarting the diplomatic process and persuading the Israelis to offer genuine concessions for the sake of peace. His goal was most certainly not to enable them better to prepare for war and preserve the status quo. As Hussein himself put it, 'I had embarked on a course of trying to achieve peace and I could not be double faced about it. . . .'[72] The difficulty of explaining this posture subsequently no doubt forms a large part of the explanation for the king's sensitivity when questioned about this subject.

In terms of the second issue, that of Jordan's failure to open an additional front, Hussein had to tread a delicate line. He was under no illusions about the likely fate of Jordan's armed forces should he be foolish enough to launch an attack similar to that of 1967. On the other hand, as the tide of battle began to turn against the Syrians and Egyptians, he came under increasing pressure to take some form of military action which might relieve their deteriorating position. His solution was to respond to Syrian requests for support on the Golan front, but to do so as slowly as possible, all the while ensuring that the Israeli government was appraised of his intentions. The critical juncture of the war from Hussein's perspective was reached on 15 October. Early that morning, the US State Department received a message from the Israeli Embassy in Washington warning that the Jordanian brigade which had moved up to the Syrian flank was now less than ten miles from Israeli forces. The embassy asked that a message be passed to the Jordanian government from the Israeli government conveying the precise coordinates of a line beyond which the Jordanian brigade should not move to avoid its engagement in hostilities.[73] As the day progressed, however, it became clear to Hussein that the non-combatant status of the Jordanian brigade was no longer tenable. In view of the pressing nature of the situation, the king contacted Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir directly.[74] The

upshot of the conversation, as reported by Israeli Ambassador Dinitz to Kissinger was that 'King Hussein has informed PM Meir that after examining [the] location of various forces, Israel should consider the Jordanian expeditionary force of the 40th armored brigade as hostile as of yesterday morning.'[75] The king had explained to Meir that he had been 'under pressure directly from Assad to either withdraw the brigade or have it carry out its military duties at what was then the 8th day of the war.' Hussein told Meir that the 'brigade will inevitably be in action'.

Hussein's action in committing limited Jordanian forces to battle on the Syrian front shored up his position in the Arab world, but without risking the catastrophic losses of his previous engagement against Israel. As US Ambassador in Amman Dean Brown put it, 'he has played the game beautifully. . . .'[76] Viewed in isolation, then, the events of October 1973 seem to some extent to bear out the thesis of Jordan under Hussein as a strategic partner, both of Israel and the United States. But, when the period 1967–73 is viewed overall, the picture is much more complex. From Hussein's own perspective, as well as from that of London and Washington, Jordan's Cold War alignment with the West sometimes looked more like a problem than an asset for the Israeli government. So long as Jordan held fast to its alignment with the West, the Arab–Israeli conflict could not be neatly dovetailed with the Cold War. Hussein's alignment with the confrontation states in June 1967 showed how much simpler Israel's position could be, at least in terms of relations with the West, when she could portray herself as being threatened by a united Arab block.

Of course, there are dangers in pushing this line of argument too far. For one thing, it interprets Israeli strategy as it was perceived from the outside, rather than made from the inside, and it runs the significant risk of falling into the 'rational actor' trap. If Israel succeeded so spectacularly in war, even after initial setbacks in the 1973 campaign, then surely her strategy could not have been the conditional outcome of a series of domestic political compromises between warring factions and individuals? In fact, there do appear to have been both some individuals on the Israeli side, including Eban, Allon, and Meir, who favoured building closer working relations with Hussein and others, including Dayan, who were much more sceptical as to his utility. But Hussein's relations with Israel from the Samu' raid, through the 1967 war, the 1970 crisis to the 1973 war were much more complex and ambiguous than the 'guardian of Jordan' thesis suggests.

Similarly, in terms of Hussein's relations with Washington, the 'puppet in search of a puppeteer' thesis is much too limited a portrayal of a complex relationship. During 1967–68, Hussein fell out spectacularly with the Johnson Administration, and came close to purchasing Soviet weaponry, and, in the process, perfecting the Soviet–Arab versus American–Israeli divide. Ultimately, his decision to remain in the Western

camp seems to have been due to a combination of ideology and self-interest. If regime survival was his central goal, then the Cold War offered no precedent of a monarchy which had prospered under Soviet protection. Moreover, even during the period of his greatest frustration with US policy between June 1967 and February 1968, Hussein still recognised the strategic imperative which necessitated engagement with Washington. In the wake of the Arab defeat in 1967, he reasoned, there was simply no other power in a position to help deliver Israeli concessions in the peace process to which he had now committed himself. Moreover, to focus exclusively on the high politics of his relations with successive US administrations would be to miss the underlying dynamics of the relationship at a bureaucratic level. Successive CIA station chiefs in Amman, but particularly Jack O'Connell, who held the post for the bulk of the period surveyed here, acted as Hussein's close confidantes. The fact that, in civilian life, O'Connell went on the act as Hussein's attorney-at-law in the US says much about the personal nature of the relationship the two men established.

Hussein's central foreign policy goal, that of regime survival, transcended the Cold War. But how he pursued this goal against the backdrop of hot war in the region and civil war at home is a study in complex political manoeuvring and ambivalent relations which does not lend itself to his caricature as either an American puppet or an Israeli agent. Yasser Arafat was fond of referring to the PLO as *al-raqam al-sa'b* 'the hard figure' in Middle East politics. Perhaps, though, in terms of the relationship between the Cold War and the Arab–Israeli conflict during these years of confrontation, it was really Hussein who proved to be the harder figure.

Notes

1 For the full text of Hussein's speech see his autobiography, *Uneasy Lies the Head*, London: Heinemann, 1962, pp. 200–207.
2 For this dimension see L. Brand, *Jordan's Inter-Arab Relations: The Political Economy of Alliance Making*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
3 D. Little, 'A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer? The United States, King Hussein, and Jordan, 1953–70', *International History Review*, XVII/3, 1995, 512–44.
4 M. Zak, 'Israel and Jordan: Strategically Bound', *Israel Affairs*, 3/1, 1996.
5 L. Tal, *Politics, the Military and National Security in Jordan, 1955–1967*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002, pp. 111–15.
6 S. Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 103.
7 M. Shemesh, 'The IDF Raid on Samu': the Turning-Point in Jordan's Relations with Israel and the West Bank Palestinians', *Israel Studies*, 7/1, 2002, 139–67, argues a similar case about the significance of the Samu' raid for Hussein's action in 1967.
8 In addition to Moshe Zak, Alexander Bligh also argues this case in *The Political Legacy of King Hussein*, Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2002, pp. 27–46.

9 For accounts of Samu' which rely largely on this explanation see, Bligh, Op. cit., pp. 27–46; M. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pp. 31–35; A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, London: Allen Lane, 2000, pp. 233–34. U. Dann, *King Hussein and the Challenge of Arab Radicalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 154–55 offers the best overview of the motives behind the attack.
10 Shlaim, Op. cit., pp. 233–34; Oren, Op. cit., p. 33.
11 The Director General of the Israeli Foreign Office, Levavi, subsequently claimed in conversation with US Ambassador Barbour that it was only at a Cabinet meeting on 20 November, a week after Samu', that the Cabinet had been informed of the actual size of the raid. Rabin, in the same conversation, claimed that 'he could hardly believe that 'those stupid people' would deliberately take on an armoured column. . . . '(Tel Aviv to State, telegram no.1742, Folder POL 32–1, 11/1/66, ISR-JORDAN, Box 2352, CFPF, 1964–66, RG59, United States National Archives, hereafter 'USNA'.)
12 For different estimates of the casualty figures and material losses on both sides see, Mutawi, Op. cit., p. 77; Oren, Op. cit., p. 34; Shlaim, Op. cit., p. 233.
13 Rostow to Johnson, 15 November 1966, Document 333, *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XVIII. See also, Amman to State, telegram no.1104, 14 November 1966, Folder POL 32–1, 11/1/66, ISR-JORDAN, Box 2352, CFPF, 1964–66, RG59, USNA.
14 Memorandum for the Record, 15 November 1966, Document 334, *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XVIII.
15 Quoted in Oren, Op. cit., p. 34.
16 Amman to State, telegram no.1226, 23 November 1966, Folder POL 32–1, 11/1/66, ISR-JORDAN, Box 2352, CFPF, 1964–66, RG59, USNA
17 Amman to State, telegram no.1105, 14 November 1966, Folder POL 32–1, 11/1/66, ISR-JORDAN, Box 2352, CFPF, 1964–66, RG59, USNA. See also Bligh, Op. cit., p. 44; Oren, Op. cit., p. 36; Dann, Op. cit., p. 155; J. Lunt, *Hussein of Jordan*, New York: Macmillan, 1989, p. 81.
18 Memorandum from W. Howard Wriggins and Harold H. Saunders of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow), 16 November 1966, Document 337, *FRUS*, *1964–68*, XVIII.
19 Amman to State, telegram no.1105, 14 November 1966, Folder POL 32–1, 11/1/66, ISR-JORDAN, Box 2352, CFPF, 1964–66, RG59, USNA.
20 Memo, Rostow to Johnson, 12 December 1966, Document 364, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XVIII; telegram no. 1457, Amman to State, 11 December 1966, Folder Jordan Memos Vol. III 12/66 – 5/67, box 146, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
21 For the British role, see R. McNamara, 'Britain, Nasser and the Outbreak of the Six Day War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 35/4, 2000, 619–39.
22 Amman to Foreign Office, telegram no.525, 4 June 1967, TNA, PREM13/1619; Adams to Brown, 29 June 1967, TNA PREM13/2742.
23 Text of Hussein interview on NBC's 'Today Show' on 27 June 1967 in FCO to Certain Missions, 28 June 1967, TNA PREM13/1622.
24 These were the terms Hussein put to US Ambassador Burns in his first peace feeler on 13 July 1967 (Amman to State, telegram 4941, 13 July 1967, Folder Jordan: Filed by LBJ Library, Box 148, NSF: Country File, LBJL).
25 Amman to State, telegram 732, 16 August 1967, Folder Jordan Cables [3 of 3] Vol. V 3/68 – 1/69, box 147, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
26 Memorandum of Meeting, 15 July 1967, 'Sandstorm: First Special Meeting', Document 368, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XIX.
27 State to USUN, 13 July 1967, Document 360, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XIX.

28 Amman to State, telegram no. 4941, 13 July 1967, Folder Jordan: Filed by LBJ Library, box 148, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
29 Eban was in New York participating in discussions at the UN (State to USUN, 13 July 1967, Document 360, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XIX).
30 Record of a meeting between the Foreign Secretary (George Brown) and the Israeli Foreign Minister (Abba Eban), 21 October 1967, TNA PREM13/1623.
31 For more detail on the respective positions adopted by different members of the Israeli Cabinet over this issue see Shlaim, Op. cit., pp. 254–56.
32 Amman to State, 28 July 1967, Document 393, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XIX.
33 Rostow to Johnson, 5 September 1967, Folder Jordan Memos and Misc. Vol. IV 5/67 – 2/68, Box 147, NSF: Country File, LBJL; Helms to Johnson, 5 September 1967, enc Khartoum report, ibid.
34 Hussein to Johnson, 7 October 1967, Folder Jordan 8/1/67 – 7/31/68, Box 31, NSF: Special Head of State Correspondence File, LBJL.
35 Battle to Rusk, 5 November 1967, Folder Jordan: Informal Working Visit of Hussein 11/6–9/67 [1 of 2], Box 148, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
36 For Hikmat's activities see, for example, Amman to State, 8 April 1968, Folder Jordan Cables [3 of 3] Vol. V 3/68 – 1/69, Box 147, NSF: Country File, LBJL. For the broader use of West Bank notables see Memcon, 26 April 1968, Document 152, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XIX.
37 Author's interview with Zeid Rifai, Amman, 5 June 2002 (hereafter '*Rifai interview*').
38 Ibid.
39 The Allon Plan called for the incorporation into Israel of the following areas: a strip of land 10–15 kilometres wide along the Jordan River; most of the Judean Desert along the Dead Sea, and a substantial area around Jerusalem. Israel would build settlements and army bases to protect these areas. The plan was designed to incorporate as few as possible of the Arab population centres in the West Bank into Israel. Initially Allon envisaged negotiating with local Palestinian leaders for the creation of an autonomous region that would be linked to Israel economically. Only in April 1968, by which point it was clear that no local leadership could be found which would cooperate in the implementation of the plan, did he turn his attention to the possibility of negotiating with King Hussein instead. (Shlaim, op. cit., pp. 256, 262; R. Pedatzur, 'Coming Back Full Circle: The Palestinian Option in 1967', *Middle East Journal*, 49/2, 269–91.)
40 *Rifai interview.*
41 State to Amman, 17 August 1968, Folder Jordan Cables [3 of 3] Vol. V 3/68 – 1/69, box 147, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
42 The May 1968 meetings extended across a two–week period from 4 through 16 May (Helms to Johnson, 4 June 1968, Document 187, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XX).
43 A. Eban, *An Autobiography*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1977, p. 446.
44 Pedatzur, Op. cit., p. 283.
45 Eban, Op. cit., p. 446.
46 Pedatzur, Op. cit., p. 285; Shlaim, Op. cit., p. 263.
47 *Rifai interview.*
48 Amman to State, 30 December 1968, Document 373, *FRUS, 1964–68*, XX.
49 Amman to State, 19 December 1968, Document 353, ibid.
50 Amman to State, 20 March 1968, Folder Jordan Cables [3 of 3] Vol. V 3/68 – 1/69, Box 147, NSF: Country File, LBJL.
51 Adams (Amman) to Moore, 19 February 1968, TNA, FCO17/221.
52 According to Yigal Allon, the Israeli Government signalled to the king at this juncture that if he wanted to bring troops into Amman to deal with the 'ter-

rorists', 'they would not take advantage of the situation'. (Record of the Prime Minister's Meeting with Yigal Allon, 26 February 1970, TNA, PREM13/3331.)

53 *Rifai interview*.

54 Author's interview with Henry Kissinger, New York, 2 June 2003 (hereafter '*Kissinger interview*').

55 Amman to State, no. 4766, 12.11 p.m., 15 September 1970, Folder Jordan V, box 615, NSC, Country Files, Middle East, Richard Nixon Presidential Papers (hereafter 'RNPP'), USNA.

56 Amman to State, no. 5008, 1.45 p.m., 21 September 1970, Folder Jordan Crisis, Box 619, NSC, Country Files, Middle East, RNPP, USNA.

57 *Rifai interview*.

58 Quoted in Zak, Op. cit., p. 48.

59 Ibid., p. 59.

60 Ibid., pp. 48–49. Kissinger asserts that he knew nothing of this debate at the time. But he argues that the Israelis would have been aware that any move to undermine Hussein would have provoked a crisis in their relations with Washington (*Kissinger interview*).

61 This was the British estimate. See Middle East Sitrep, 7.00 a.m., 23 September 1970, TNA, PREM15/124.

62 This was one contingency suggested to British Prime Minister Edward Heath at the time ('Jordan', undated, TNA, PREM15/124). It was also considered likely by the US Administration. See Kissinger to Nixon, 'Options in Jordan', undated, Folder Jordan V, Box 615, NSC, Country Files, Middle East, RNPP, USNA.

63 Amman to Tel Aviv, 10am, 23 September 1970, TNA, FCO17/1044; Teleprinter Conference with Amman, 1400Z, 23 September 1970, TNA, PREM15/124; Moon to Heath, 23 September 1970, ibid.

64 *Kissinger interview*.

65 Avi Shlaim's interview with King Hussein, 3 December 1996, published as 'His Royal Shyness: King Hussein and Israel', *The New York Review of Books*, 15 July 1999 (hereafter '*Shlaim interview*'). Shlaim notes that this was the one question in the interview which caused the King 'some discomfort'.

66 Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and His Majesty King Hussein bin Talal, 12 July 1973, TNA, FCO93/97.

67 Record of a Conversation between the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and King Hussein of Jordan, 11 July 1973, ibid.

68 Pickering to Scowcroft, 'Hussein's Meeting in Cairo with Sadat and Assad', 19 September 1973, NSC, Country File, Middle East, Box 618, Folder, Jordan, Vol. IX, Jan–Oct 1973, RNPP, USNA.

69 *Shlaim interview*.

70 Evidence of this comes from a subsequent telegram from US Ambassador Pickering in Amman, reporting absolutely sensitive intelligence Hussein passed on in the summer of 1974 about a Syrian military build–up on the Golan Heights. 'This comes from the same source', the ambassador noted 'which so accurately predicted [the] October War.' (Amman to State, 28 August 1974, National Security Adviser, Country File, Middle East and South Asia, Box 22, Folder Jordan – State Department Telegrams, To SECSTATE NODIS (1), Gerald R. Ford Library.)

71 U. Bar Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. 90–91. See also E. Kahana, 'Early Warning versus Concept: The Case of the Yom Kippur War 1973', *Intelligence and National Security*, 17/2, 2002, 88–89.

72 *Shlaim interview*.

73 State to Amman, 0149Z, 15 October 1973, NSC, Country File, Middle East, box 618, Folder, Jordan, Vol. IX, Jan–Oct. 1973, RNPP, USNA.
74 The original scrambler phone line provided by the British agent Bill Speirs in 1970 seems by this stage to have been upgraded or replaced by American equipment (A. Garfinkle, *Israel and Jordan in the Shadow of War: Functional Ties and Futile Diplomacy in a Small Place*, New York: St Martin's Press, 1992, p. 72).
75 State to Amman, 1815Z, 15 October 1973, NSC, Country File, Middle East, box 618, Folder, Jordan, Vol. IX, Jan–Oct. 1973, RNPP, USNA.
76 Amman to State, 27 October 1973, NSC, Country File, Middle East, box 618, Folder, Jordan, Vol. IX, Jan–Oct. 1973, RNPP, USNA.

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