

ELENI MAKRYNIKA – THE U.S AND THE ARAB – ISRAELI CONFLICT FROM THE SIX-DAY WAR TO THE OSLO ACCORDS: 1967-1993

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**THE UNITED STATES AND THE ARAB – ISRAELI CONFLICT FROM  
THE SIX-DAY WAR TO THE OSLO ACCORDS: 1967 – 1993**

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## Introduction

The Arab – Israeli conflict has been described as "*a war without end*".<sup>1</sup> The tensions had already begun and remained unsolved since the armistice agreements of 1949. These agreements had provided an impression of stability from 1949 to 1967, when the Six – Day War broke out. For the Israelis, there was the vital question of land and the complete recognition as a state. From the Arab perspective, there were the prevailing regimes and the stakes of the Palestinians, such as retrieval of the Palestinian land. In the heart of the disputes stands the fight for legitimate authority over the area of Palestine, even since the late nineteenth century. At the same time, the Palestinians developed a more nationalistic ideology, which Arab neighbors like Egypt sought to influence.

Concerning the United States, it has been essentially engaged from the early stages of the conflict. The increasing support for Zionism and Israeli statehood was evident among the Johnson and Nixon presidencies but not without its own consequences for the U.S, such as the oil embargo in the 1970s. The U.S primary aim had been the limitation of the Soviet influence on the Middle East amidst the Cold War and the maintenance of a strong Israeli state as its strategic ally in the region. Diverse peace plans and agreements have been developed throughout the years in line with U.N Resolution 242, which ended the Six –Day war. The essential negotiating line was "*land for peace*" and ultimately, the U.S promoted and encouraged the negotiations between the conflicting parties.

This dissertation attempts to provide an analysis on U.S foreign policy and the steps it took to handle the Arab – Israeli conflict over a span of almost thirty years, from the Six – Day war in 1967 to the Oslo Accords in 1993. During this time span, serious conflicts, landmark decisions and agreements have taken place in the Middle East region. The paper is divided into parts in a chronological and historical account of the events and the seven U.S presidencies that were engaged in the Middle Eastern conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> Gresh, Alain, and Dominique Vidal, 1988. *The Middle East: War Without End?* London: Lawrence and Wishart in Shannon, Vaughn P., 2003. *Balancing Act: US Foreign Policy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*. Ashgate publications

## 1. The Johnson Presidency and the Six- Day War in 1967

### I. Events leading up to the war

The Six- Day War -or the June War or Third Arab-Israeli War- is regarded as a watershed in the Arab-Israeli relations and a moment which changed the Middle East region. It was not the first nor the last conflict between these two nations. After the Suez crisis in 1956, there was a chain of events and the June 1967 crisis had been the culmination of these events.

Israel had shown successful military performance in the Suez Crisis, in 1956, and had been granted affirmation by the then President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the shipping rights to move freely through the Straits of Tiran, considered an "*international waterway, open for ships of all nations*".<sup>2</sup> However, by the mid-sixties the ideology of pan-Arab nationalism, personified in the face of Egyptian leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, had reached its peak. He spoke "*of liberation of Palestinian lands and the elimination of the alien Israeli state*".<sup>3</sup> This pan – Arab nationalism created a fertile ground for the USSR to provide military and economic aid to the Arab states.

Ten years after the Suez Crisis, tension was increasing in the region again. Almost a year and a half before the Six-Day War, fedayeen (Palestinian nationalist militants) launched attempted acts of sabotage on Israel close to the borders with Syria and Jordan. They placed landmines, bombarded water pumps and engaged in highway small battles. Eleven Israelis were killed in these operations and more than sixty were injured.<sup>4</sup> In November 1966, in a landmine incident near the border town of Arad, three Israeli paratroopers on patrol were killed. Israel responded two days later with a strike on the West-Bank village of Samu, under Jordanian control, with the allegation that Jordan was behind the attack and had provided assistance to the Palestinian fighters. This incident and the counterattack by Israel is considered a primary factor to the Six-Day War. Furthermore, in

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<sup>2</sup> Quandt, William B., 2005. *Peace Process. American Diplomacy and the Arab- Israeli Conflict Since 1967*. 3rd ed. Washington: Brookings Institution Press, p.26.

<sup>3</sup> Remnick, David. "*The Seventh Day. Why The Six-Day War Is Still Being Fought*". *The New Yorker*, 2007, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2007/05/28/the-seventh-day>

<sup>4</sup> Segev, Tom. *1967: Israel, The War, And The Year That Transformed The Middle East*. Metropolitan Books, 2007, p.144.

April 1967 the tensions on the Syrian - Israeli border were escalating. Israeli forces responded to Syrian attacks in an air battle in which six Syrian aircraft were shot down by Israel.

What ignited the crisis on May 13 were the erroneous Soviet reports to Egypt about Israeli troop mobilization on the borders with Syria. Nasser ordered the Egyptian armed forces to move to Sinai Peninsula, which had been demilitarized since the Suez crisis, posing an explicit threat to Israel. On May 16, Nasser also sent an ultimatum for the removal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) from the Sinai (Sharm – al Sheikh post). UNEF had been stationed there since 1957. U Thant, the Secretary-General, unable to persuade the Egyptian government to let the troops remain, without consulting the Security Council, acquiesced to the removal.<sup>5</sup>

The third incident reaching the crisis occurred on May 22 when Nasser announced the closure of Straits of Tiran and port of Eilat to Israeli shipping. This action would not be hindered by the UNEF forces, since they had already been removed. The closure was considered a *casus belli* for the Israelis, since they had been granted the right of free passage in 1957 and 90% of Israeli oil passed through the Straits. On May 30 King Hussein of Jordan, signed a defence pact with Egypt and flew back to Jordan accompanied by an Egyptian general to be in command of the joint military.<sup>6</sup> This was an indication that war was inevitable. Other Arab nations came to Egypt's aid and finally, Israel was surrounded by a hostile Arab force from Syria, Jordan, Egypt (UAR). Kuwait and Iraq were also on their way to help. For Israel it was not only about the closing of the Straits and the free passage anymore but (in Ariel Sharon's remarks) "*the existence of people of Israel*".<sup>7</sup>

In the context of these serious incidents and after being on hold for almost two weeks, as instructed by the U.S. President Johnson in search of a diplomatic solution, on June 5, 1967, Israel initiates a massive preemptive attack, destroying the air forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria and continued to the destruction of the ground forces. After six days, Israel had captured the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank of the Jordan River, the Golan Heights and Jerusalem.

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<sup>5</sup> Remnick, *The Seventh Day*.

<sup>6</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*. p.37

<sup>7</sup> Oren, Michael B., 2002. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.134.

## II. The United States' response to the crisis

Comparing to the mid - 1950s (the Suez crisis incident), the early 1960s were mostly quiet for the new U.S administration. In the region, however, the disputes never stopped and one central point was the creation of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964. *Fatah*, under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, became known in January 1965, when its operatives attempted to sabotage the national water supply system<sup>8</sup> in the Jordan River. President Johnson was sympathetic towards Israel and had established a connection in multiple levels: economic, military, intelligence. He was willing to continue in line with Kennedy's attempt and strengthen this relationship. His closest advisers were Jewish with ties to Israel's political elite and his administration was also supported by the American Jewish community. However, the American involvement in Vietnam caused a lot of criticism against U.S administration, since American Jews were anti-war supporters. The administration's relationship with Egypt had also deteriorated since 1964, partly because the Yemen war and partly because of Nasser's resentment on Congress restrictions on food to Egypt. Agreements were not renewed and Nasser believed that the U.S aimed to overturn his regime.

Johnson's administration, mostly preoccupied with the war in Vietnam and the coup of colonels in Greece, did not focus on Syrian – Israeli clashes in the spring of 1967. There was also no sign of immediate approach to the Egyptian troops mobilization in Sinai, however, when the UNEF withdrew, Johnson was surprised by U Thant's consent to the removal of the UN forces. Johnson sent letters both to Nasser warning him not to take actions that might lead to war and to the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol suggesting restraint and cautioned not to initiate an attack. Eshkol was pressing for public declaration of American commitment to Israel but it did not happen. Johnson also sent a letter to Soviet Premier Aleksei Kosygin, explaining the U.S position in support of Israel but proposed a joint initiative of the two powers, in order to prevent a war that could possible lead to a greater nuclear war if the two superpowers intervened. In the midst of Cold War, Johnson's concern was to keep the Soviet Union from interfering in the crisis, which would have greater consequences. For that reason, from the first minute of the crisis, the channels between the two superpowers were open.

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<sup>8</sup> Segev, 1967, p. 144



A unilateral attack on behalf of the United States was out of the question (Congress was also in agreement) and Johnson requested Israel not to take action for 48 hours. In that time, he endorsed the idea of a multinational naval force, the Red Sea Regatta, in which as many countries as possible would participate. The initial reactions to the Regatta were encouraging. However, only the Australians, Dutch, and British were willing to join.<sup>9</sup> The 48 hour- delay came to be a waiting period of two weeks (thus it was called "*waiting period*"), because there was a constant change of operational plans.<sup>10</sup> These two weeks were not wasted, however. They were used to prepare the ground for the action that followed, the administration had to exhaust all efforts by the international organization to find a peaceful solution.<sup>11</sup> Johnson would not jeopardize the United States into the use of force unless there was congressional support. Hence, he sought for cautious diplomatic efforts through the UN Security Council and the multinational naval armada.

In a meeting with the President, U.S Secretary of State Dean Rusk proposed that the U.S. could either "*unleash*" Israel and let it fend for itself or "*take a positive position, but without commitment*", on the convoy idea. The secretary opted for the latter, which would enable the U.S. to delay an Israeli preemptive strike. The UN discussions could then run their course and the U.S. could then seek alternative measures, such as the stationing of UNEF in Israel.<sup>12</sup>

President Johnson met with Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban on May 26. Eban had come to ask for reaffirmation of its commitments on Israel's security and support. Johnson used a phrase coined by the U.S Secretary of State Dean Rusk "*Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone*"<sup>13</sup>, a phrase still ambiguous today. If Israel decided to act alone, the US would not be responsible for any consequences to follow and would not do much in case of trouble. He also stressed to Eban that any action should have the support from Congress and be multilateral. When Eban left, Johnson was certain that Israel would go to war. "*I've failed.*

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<sup>9</sup> Spiegel, Steven L., 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.145.

<sup>10</sup> Shlaim, Avi, 2012. *Israel: Poor Little Samson*. In: W. Louis and A. Shlaim, ed., *The 1967 Arab- Israeli War. Origins and Consequences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.32.

<sup>11</sup> Oren, *Six Days of War*, p.113

<sup>12</sup> Oren, *Six Days of War*, p.109

<sup>13</sup> Quandt, William B. "*Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was the Light?*" *Middle East Journal*, vol. 46, no. 2, 1992, pp. 213.

*They'll go*".<sup>14</sup> On the plane back home, Minister Eban was contemplating on this phrase and came to the conclusion that Johnson was giving them an amber light to proceed to war. However, this "*yellow light*" advised caution and "*don't count on the United States if you get into trouble*". But, as for most motorists, the yellow light was tantamount to a green one.<sup>15</sup>

On May 30, Meir Amit, chief of Mossad, met with US Secretary of Defence Robert McNamara and CIA directors to assess American support. Surveying the military and intelligence services in Washington, Amit realized that the Red Sea Regatta was unsuccessful. This implied that the United States could accept Israel's taking matters into its own hands. His conclusions were conveyed to his government and reinforced their inclination to take unilateral action<sup>16</sup>. In his last letter before the war, Johnson remained firm in the position to preserve peace and added "*Our leadership is unanimous, the United States should not move in isolation*"<sup>17</sup>. There was no chance of a unilateral nor a multilateral action. Israel was on its own.

June 2 was the last day for diplomatic efforts before Israel decided to go to war. Time was working against Israel, everything was already in place, the Israeli Generals and the armed forces could not wait any longer, especially now that Moshe Dayan, a Suez military hero, was appointed Minister of Defence and the military cost was increasing every day. Israel wanted to make sure, though, that the U.S would not object fervently if Israel decided to act on its own. A few hours before the war Johnson took no further action. Given his inhibitions, he felt there was nothing more to do and all options had been exhausted. With sadness more than surprise, he received the information whispered to him during dinner "*Mr. President, it can't be held any longer. It's going to happen within the next twenty-four hours*".<sup>18</sup> On Sunday, June 4, the Israeli Cabinet met in the morning and decided to go to war.

### III. War breaks out

The Six – Day War broke out in the morning of June 5. The Israeli Defence Force initiated the attack with an air strike on the Egyptian air fields on June 5. Prime Minister

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<sup>14</sup> Quandt, *Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War*, p.214

<sup>15</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*. p.41

<sup>16</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab – Israeli conflict*, p. 146

<sup>17</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab – Israeli conflict*, p. 148

<sup>18</sup> Oren, *Six Days of War*, p.166

Eshkol announced on a radio broadcast that "*Israel had no territorial ambitions... and that was a defensive war*".<sup>19</sup> The primary aim was to destroy the Egyptian army and open the Straits of Tiran.

However, the expansion of the areas captured happened during the war. On the southern front, Israel was fighting Egypt and on the eastern front Jordan, which had started bombarding Israeli neighbourhoods in West Jerusalem and others along the border. This shelling gave Israelis the opportunity to enter the Old City and on June 8, it fell into their hands. On 9 June, they attacked Syria and captured the Golan Heights.

President Johnson expressed his disappointment on the outbreak of the war and that Israelis had disregarded his advice. Even so, he supported Israel once the war began knowing that had not given them a green light per se nor did he vetoed their actions. The most important point for Johnson was to convey the message that the U.S was not involved in the war, something to keep the Soviet Union from intervening as well. Now that Israel was prevailing, there was some relief on behalf of the U.S.

Yet, to prove that the U.S was not involved in hostilities, an embargo on new arms agreements for all Middle East countries was imposed, Israel as well. Its attention now turned to efforts to facilitate a cease fire and a cooperation with the Soviet Union was of utmost importance, the two superpowers should refrain from the conflict and encourage a cease-fire.<sup>20</sup> The Egyptians turned down the proposal and accused the U.S of directly participating in the attacks. Consequently, six Arab states ceased diplomatic relations with Washington.

There was another incident on June 8 that alarmed Washington. The American intelligence ship *USS Liberty* was operating off Sinai coast when it was accidentally attacked by Israelis. At first, it was thought to be a Soviet strike but identity of attackers was soon clarified. Johnson sent personal message to Kosygin that "*naval movements in the Eastern Mediterranean dealt with the Liberty and its crew and did not signal U.S. military involvement in the war*".<sup>21</sup> Finally, on June 10, after Israel seized the Golan Heights, Premier Kosygin sent an urgent message to Johnson to take action, even military if needed, if Israel did not stop pressing on. A little later, the war was over with Israel having predominated in the area.

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<sup>19</sup> Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab- Israeli War*, p. 41

<sup>20</sup> Quandt, *Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War*, p. 224

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Charles D, 2012. *The United States and the 1967 War*. In: W. Louis and A. Shlaim, ed., *The 1967 Arab- Israeli War. Origins and Consequences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.180.

#### IV. Diplomacy Towards an Agreement

The next day of the war found Israel as three and a half times its original size<sup>22</sup>, with 42,000 square miles of conquered land. The state's capital, Jerusalem had been united. Yet, among the casualties, prisoners of war and the material losses, the problem of the refugees was now apparent.

Johnson and his administration were cautious not to assume a strategy of compelling Israel to withdraw from occupied territories in exchange for little on behalf of the Arab states. However, it became apparent that Israel was not willing to withdraw from conquered territories, such as Jerusalem or the West Bank and the Arabs did not accept any negotiations with Israel. The U.S stance on *territorial integrity* of all states – "*political independence and territorial integrity of all the nations of the area. The United States strongly opposes aggression by anyone in the area, in any form, overt or clandestine*"<sup>23</sup> now shifted to the new facts. The U.S was in favour of a negotiated settlement, namely the territories would be exchanged for a peace agreement, something of vital importance for the Middle East. A framework for a peace settlement should be on the way for the time being, which would give time to the Arabs to negotiate to recover their territories. The implementation would clearly depend on the Middle East counties involved.

So, on June 19, Johnson proposed a general framework of a settlement, becoming the core of the "*UN Resolution 242*". Five principles essential to peace were announced: First, "*every nation in the area has a fundamental right to live, and to have this right respected by its neighbors... Second, justice for the refugees. A new conflict has brought new homelessness. The nations of the Middle East must at last address themselves to the plight of those who have been displaced by wars... Third, free maritime passage through international waterways... Fourth, we believe that scarce resources could be used much better for technical and economic development. We have always opposed this arms race, and our own military shipments to the area have consequently been severely limited... Fifth, the crisis underlines the importance of respect for political independence and territorial integrity of all the states of the area. We reaffirmed that principle at the height of this crisis. We reaffirm it again today*

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<sup>22</sup> Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 307

<sup>23</sup> Smith, *The 1967 Arab- Israeli War*, p. 171

*on behalf of all. This principle can be effective in the Middle East only on the basis of peace between the parties... What they now need are recognized boundaries and other arrangements that will give them security against terror, destruction, and war".*<sup>24</sup> The fifth element was linked to the territorial integrity predicament, namely the conditions would not be as on June 4. Finally, the two conflicting sides would be mainly responsible for the fulfilment of peace.

In the next months, diplomatic efforts attempted to establish a UN Security Council agreement on the basis of these five points however, disagreement between Israel and Arabs started to surface. The Arabs, on one side, insisted on full Israeli withdrawal from newly seized territories prior to the end of belligerency. Israel, on the other side, supported direct negotiations and a "*package settlement*" in which withdrawal was linked to the conclusion of a peace agreement. The Soviet Union, in general, stood behind the Arab position, whereas the United States was in accordance with Israel approach, although it did not press on direct negotiations. The Arab stance stiffened further at the Khartoum Arab League conference in late August 1967. The Arab states rejected the Israeli state totally and stated that there would be no recognition, no negotiation and no peace agreement with Israel. For Nasser, any diplomatic arrangement meant cooperation with the United States. He wanted to restore his army and for that he had to turn to the Soviet Union.

Finally, *UN Resolution 242* was passed on 22 November 1967. It incorporated Johnson's five points, along with a deliberately balanced call for "*withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict*" and "*termination of all claims of belligerency and 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*".<sup>25</sup> The document's language provided great gaps and vagueness leading to misinterpretations on both sides.

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson, Lyndon B, 1967. *Address at the State Department's Foreign Policy Conference for Educators.* | *The American Presidency Project.* [online] Presidency.ucsb.edu. Available at: <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-the-state-departments-foreign-policy-conference-for-educators>> [Accessed 25 August 2022].

<sup>25</sup> "*Security Council Resolution 242: The Situation in the Middle East | UN Peacemaker.*" United Nations, United Nations, <https://peacemaker.un.org/middle-east-resolution242>.

From the position of the Arabs and the Soviets, withdrawal should be from *all or the* territories occupied. On behalf of Israel and the United States they remained *territories*, without the definite article, although Washington favoured, in private, a complete withdrawal to achieve a settlement. The resolution, in the end, was not successful, yet it indicated the level of U.S participation in the Middle East negotiations, although its actual role decreased because of Vietnam and the heavy load fell on a UN- appointed representative, Gunnar Jarring, the Swedish ambassador to Moscow.

The final point of the postwar policy was to keep Israel strong through arm shipments. President Johnson's actions ensured that the post-1967 status quo would not be disrupted by Soviet arms shipments to Syria and Egypt<sup>26</sup>. In January 1968, he lifted the embargo on new arms shipments to Middle East and Israel purchased Phantoms and F-4 aircraft as a Foreign Aid Bill, which would arrive at Israel in 1969 and 1970.

## **V. Conclusion**

The situation in Middle East in 1967 was complicating and challenging. In the middle of the Cold War the Middle East crisis served as a diversion from the greater war in Vietnam. Johnson, despite his frustration on Israeli pressure and pro- Israeli lobbying of American public opinion, facilitated Israeli requests. Around him, were also a few Israeli sympathizers, like Justice Fortas, Vice President Humphrey, Eugene and Walt Rostow. He himself sympathized and identified with Israel. Before the Six- Day War, the Johnson administration had to take into critical account not to engage its forces unilaterally because of Congress during the war to deter the Soviet Union, restrain its intervention and pursue a cease fire and after the war to attempt a peace agreement in return for a full Israeli withdrawal. Nonetheless, the U.S supported Israel's occupation of lands. The last thing was to maintain, at the same time Israel dynamic military presence through arms deals and shipments. The 1967 War has established the "*special relationship*" between the United States and Israel "*based on a commonality of political and strategic interests*" related to Cold War issues. Up to the war Israel's chief arms supplier had been France. During the war, it turned to the

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<sup>26</sup> Quandt, *Peace process*, p. 47

United States as its principal arms supplier.<sup>27</sup> The issues emerged in the aftermath of the war though, such as Israel's recognition and the Palestinian refugees, still remained.

The strengthening of this special partnership between the U.S and Israel could also be extended to the establishment of the U.S as a main player in the Eastern Mediterranean, where Greece and Turkey were becoming unstable, due to a potential Soviet Union infiltrating into the political situation of these countries and the establishment of communist regimes.

## **2. The Nixon Presidency in the War of Attrition and the October War**

### **I. New Presidency**

Towards the end of the Six – Day war, President Johnson had already announced that he would not rerun for the Presidency. In the 1969 January elections, Richard Nixon, a Republican, was elected President. Vietnam and Middle East hostilities were still unfinished business and the new administration's foreign policy was mostly preoccupied with these. Of course Vietnam was at the top of the foreign policy agenda. Middle East was regarded less urgent but too intricate. Like Johnson, Nixon believed in an active global foreign policy but that should be developed covertly, with minimal interference from Congress, the public opinion and the pro- Israeli lobby, Nixon, unlike Johnson, was not tied to it. The decisions came straight out of the White House.

Nixon's closest aides were William Rogers as Secretary of State, Joseph Sisco, assistant Secretary of State for the Near East and South Asia and Henry Kissinger as his National Security advisor. Nixon and Kissinger were most of the times on the same page regarding the global role of the United States. The basic goals at which Nixon and Kissinger aimed were: "*to reduce Soviet influence, weaken the position of the Arab radicals, encourage Arab moderates, and assure Israel's security*".<sup>28</sup> Nixon wanted to revive relations with the Arab countries but also to use Israel against the Soviet Union. He sought major diplomatic

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, *The 1967 Arab- Israeli War*, p. 189

<sup>28</sup> Spiegel, Steven L, 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.172

initiatives that involved appeals to the Arab states but did not want to alienate Israel or its supporters at home. When Nixon took office, American relations with the Arab world were diminished, so he aimed at improving them. Nixon used Israel to counter the Soviet Union. He sought Israeli diplomatic concessions to tighten relations with the Arab states and decrease Soviet influence throughout the region. "*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...*"<sup>29</sup> and "*What I was trying to do . . . was to construct a completely new set of power relationships in the Middle East—not only between Israel and the Arabs, but also among the United States, Western Europe and the Soviet Union*".<sup>30</sup>

Both Nixon and Kissinger were concerned with the threats of nuclear war and were interested in establishing a new relationship with the Soviet Union that would guarantee global stability with minimum risks of confrontation. They were also prepared to create ties with opponents that had mutual interests. Nixon's own understandings of the Middle East combined a strong inclination to confront the Soviets and a conveyed belief that the United States could best compete with Moscow by being "*impartial*" in the Arab- Israeli conflict.<sup>31</sup> Kissinger shared the same belief with Israel, that Jerusalem and Washington should remain strong enough and thus to keep their position in the area. One part of this would be to improve relations with other countries in the region (like Jordan<sup>32</sup> for instance), which would cooperate with the U.S against the Soviets. He also believed a diplomatic stalemate in which Israel was kept resilient would ultimately persuade the Arabs that there was no point in relying on Soviet support. Then they would turn to the United States for assistance, and eventually would cut ties with Moscow. The Arabs, in Kissinger's view, should not be given the impression they could count on both super powers to pressure Israel to make concessions unless they were prepared to make far-reaching concessions of their own. Kissinger had little patience with the view that the Arabs would show more moderation if the United States took

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<sup>29</sup> Nixon, Richard, 2013. *RN. The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p.482.

<sup>30</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs*, p. 482

<sup>31</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 59

<sup>32</sup> Kissinger, Henry, 1979. *White House Years*. Little, Brown and Co., p. 421



some distance from Israeli positions and acted with restraint on arms supplies to the Jewish state.<sup>33</sup>

As for the State Department, its first priority was the Middle East. The State Department strived to play a major role in the situation and produced initiatives. Joseph Sisco believed that the U.S should maintain a passive stance on the region's matters and urged the President for accepting the Soviet proposal for bilateral talks between the U.S and the Soviet Union and Four Power discussions between Britain, France, the U.S and the U.S.S.R. Generally, the State Department promoted an *"evenhanded"* approach, namely neither openly pro- Arab nor pro- Israeli. However, unresolved tensions and unbridgeable differences between Kissinger and Rogers were obvious and overshadowed the processes. The President agreed with the options of the two depending on the circumstances. Later, it appeared that he shared the same ideas and views with Kissinger, thus his appointment as Secretary of State eventually.

Nixon and Kissinger counted on three approaches to formulate foreign policy: power politics, linkage and detente. Power politics signified that now realpolitik and raison d'état became the background for the choices the administrations made. Secondly, linkage meant that all matters in conflict with the Soviet Union would be interwoven and not negotiated in isolation, namely the Russians would not be accommodated in one arena without settlement in another. *"...Kissinger and I developed a new policy for dealing with the Soviets. Since U.S.– Soviet interests as the world's two competing nuclear superpowers were so widespread and overlapping, it was unrealistic to separate or compartmentalize areas of concern... link progress in such areas of Soviet concern as strategic arms limitation and increased trade with progress in areas that were important to us..."*<sup>34</sup>. Thirdly, a vital point in its foreign policy was détente. Détente meant arms limitations, avoidance of nuclear warfare, scientific and cultural agreements, trade<sup>35</sup>. Negotiations with the Kremlin were the most productive way to *"containing"* the Soviet Union. Once the Russians began to play by American rules, then

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<sup>33</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*. p. 349-352

<sup>34</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs*, p. 351

<sup>35</sup> Daigle, Craig, 2012. *The limits of detente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli conflict, 1969--1973*. Yale University Press, p.23

detente would be possible.<sup>36</sup> In the Nixon Doctrine, negotiations meant that force and diplomacy were closely associated and military force could also be used. Also, America would no longer be the global policeman and the sole defender of freedom, while at the same time avoid isolationism, a situation of *restrained internationalism*<sup>37</sup>, namely "*only the materiel and the military and economic assistance to those nations willing to... defend themselves*".<sup>38</sup>

## II. The situation in the Middle East in 1969

The 1967 war, in which Israel had emerged victorious, had left a legacy of friction that triggered recurrent violence. Israel now occupied the West Bank of the Jordan River, Gaza, the Sinai Peninsula and Syria's Golan Heights. At the Khartoum conference, Nasser demanded the "*liberation*" of the occupied territories by force. Egypt declared that it would not be involved in negotiations, nor recognize or make peace with Israel (the three "*noes*"). Israel, on the other side, would be willing to return the Sinai to Egypt on condition that there would be a peace agreement and Egypt would recognize its existence within secure borders. Egypt's refusal stiffened Israel's position on the return of the occupied territories.

After the Six – Day War, Nasser proclaimed that the Egyptian army needed to be reinforced to break the status quo, as well as a strong refusal to surrender any Arab-occupied territory and come to terms with Israel. However, he was open to discuss a settlement, provided that the offer was in favour of Egypt, while at the same time he was building up his military forces. He knew that neither the U.S nor the international community needed a conflict between the superpowers and that they would not let a serious Middle Eastern crisis last for long. With this in mind, a change in American priorities in the Middle East became the foremost goal of the Egyptian leader. The strategy aimed initially at President Johnson, but his tenure was coming to a close, so the Egyptians intensified their efforts with his successor in the White House.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict*, p.172

<sup>37</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 60

<sup>38</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs*, p. 395

<sup>39</sup> Blanga, Yehuda U., 2012. '*Why are they shooting?': Washington's view of the onset of the War of Attrition*. *Israel Affairs*, 18(2), pp.155-176.

While the United States supplied Israel with weapons to counter the attacks, the Soviets armed Egypt and Syria, making the Middle East, as Nixon stated, "*an international powder keg, very explosive*"<sup>40</sup> that could provoke a crisis between the United States and the U.S.S.R.<sup>41</sup> The situation had been at an impasse and Nixon was unwilling to become actively involved in the negotiations. In January 1969, the United States had official relations with only one Arab state, Jordan. The other Arab states demanded the return of occupied territories from Israel and Israel refused to take such demands into account without guarantees of recognition and future security against renewed attempts to start a war against her. Nixon wanted to diminish Moscow's growing military broad expansion in Egypt and the Middle East after the 1967 war. He also attempted to link negotiations with Moscow about the problems in the Middle East to Vietnam and arms control.<sup>42</sup>

### III. The War of Attrition

In March and April, 1969, the situation along the Suez Canal was critically deteriorating. The Egyptians were gathering forces on Sinai and initiated hostilities against the Israelis through a combination of air strikes, artillery fires with Egyptian snipers shooting at Israeli soldiers. The goal was to military provoke Israel and as a consequence, draw her and the superpowers into a conflict of a greater scale that would eventually lead to a settlement. At first, Israel's reaction was restraint, sending out warning signals and searched for ways to protect the troops along the Canal. This led to the construction of a defence line along the canal, the "*Bar – Lev Line*", extending from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez<sup>43</sup>. In the first days of March, heavy gunfire broke out along the Suez Canal. The War of Attrition had formally begun.

In the initial stages of the conflict, Egypt was vague about its aims and did not make any official belligerent proclamations. It refused the responsibility for the artillery fire

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<sup>40</sup> Peters Gerhard. and Wooley John, n.d. *The President's News Conference | The American Presidency Project*. [online] Presidency.ucsb.edu. Available at: <<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/the-presidents-news-conference-152>> [Accessed 7 September 2022]

<sup>41</sup> Dallek, Robert, 2007. *Nixon and Kissinger. Partners in Power*. HarperCollins, p.113.

<sup>42</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p.169

<sup>43</sup> Sorby, Karol, 2017. *THE WAR OF ATTRITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1969 – 1970. Asian and African Studies*, 26(1), p.133.

claiming that hostilities were provoked by the tightening of the Israeli presence along the Canal. The friction in the region was necessary to draw the attention of the United States to the Middle East and that the use of force was required, when diplomatic efforts came to a stalemate. This impasse caused a lot domestic frustration in Egypt. The ceasefire could not continue to exist, because that meant Egypt accepted Israeli conditions. The public's reaction to the Egyptian President's inability to bring an actual solution was growing. Nasser's regime was under threat firstly since the army greatly influenced the public and could easily incite a coup and secondly the Fedayeen was also gaining popularity among the Egyptians.

In the second stage of the war, Egypt's amplified military strikes caused a great deal of Israeli casualties. Consequently, Israeli counter struck with deep penetration offensives. The IDF executed a massive aerial assault on Egyptian army positions along the canal would to prevent Egypt from launching an offensive across the canal to retrieve the Sinai and unleashed the Israel Aerial Force (IAF) on a large scale to destroy as many troops as possible. By the end of 1969, the IAF had destroyed the Egyptian artillery groups and inflicted a large amount of Egyptian casualties. In January 1970, the third stage of the fighting, Israel intensified bombings around Cairo. On January 28, Israeli fighter planes intentionally struck a main training center near Cairo full of Soviet personnel, killing and wounding a lot. The IAF launched about forty deep penetration bombings against Egyptian military targets, coming close to Cairo. The campaign proved to be successful, since no Israeli aircraft was destroyed. At that time, Nasser travelled secretly to Moscow to make deals with the Soviet Union about the shipping of large amounts of arms (air missiles) to Egypt and the dispatch of more than ten thousand of their own "*instructors*" and "*advisers*".<sup>44</sup> This was Soviet Union's opportunity to become actively engaged in the war.

Consequently, in spring 1970, the last stage of the fighting had passed to Soviet – Egyptian hands and Soviet involvement intensified. The Kremlin also reinforced its naval presence in the Mediterranean, rivalling the United States' Sixth Fleet. The Soviet interference to the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition, known as Operation Kavkaz, proved to be one of the most substantial military operations the Soviet Union had ever made and it was

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<sup>44</sup> Daigle, *The limits of detente*, p. 87

without doubt a serious sign of Soviet frustration to Israel's continued victory over its Arab client.

The Soviets made an effort to covertly deliver their military equipment to Egypt and simultaneously proposed a cease-fire between Egypt and Israel. Soviet soldiers and pilots were dressed in Egyptian uniforms and their aircraft painted with Egyptian designs to cover the nature of the mission. Most times, Soviet pilots did not cross over into Israeli controlled territory. The Kremlin expected to keep the stealthy military operation until its anti-aircraft systems and personnel were eventually in place, providing Egypt with leverage over Israel by the time the cease-fire was reached. Egypt could then breach the cease-fire if it desired, leaving Israel at a weak position. The Soviet plan would have been successful, if American intelligence had not located the missile systems. In April, two Israeli Phantom jets returning from a routine inspection mission inside Egypt were chased down by eight MiG-21s all manned by "*Russian-speaking pilots*".<sup>45</sup> By August 1970 ceasefire, which ended the War of Attrition, the IAF had lost air superiority over the Egyptian side of the Suez Canal<sup>46</sup>.

#### **IV. The U.S position towards the developments in Middle East**

In the aftermath of the Six – Day War, the United States had replaced France as the primary arms supplier to Israel. Before the outbreak of the War of Attrition, Washington had already committed to deliver Israel with military aircraft. However, few of them had been delivered and when the war erupted, the Israeli government rushed to ask for more aircraft supplies and the Nixon administration responded in March 1970.

Increased fighting along the Suez Canal, State Department arguments, proposals by the Soviet Union for Big Two talks and by France for Big Four talks (France, Britain, the U.S and the Soviet Union) and a Nixon campaign pledge to take a new approach resulted in the adoption of novel diplomatic steps in the area.<sup>47</sup> In this campaign, the "*era of confrontation*" between Moscow and Washington should end and "*there is no acceptable alternative to*

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<sup>45</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.107

<sup>46</sup> Rodman, David, 2019. *Arms and influence: The American–Israeli relationship and the 1969–1970 War of Attrition*. *Israel Affairs*, 25(1), p.30.

<sup>47</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict*, p.182

*peaceful negotiation*".<sup>48</sup> The primary goal of the Nixon's administration was détente and thus the Soviet presence and influence over the area should be restrained. By the late 1960s, the Soviet Union had almost the same nuclear might as the United States. So, the two superpowers should engage themselves into negotiations and avoid total confrontations.

In the first months of the war, Nixon's *"evenhanded policy"* prompted U.S – Soviet discussions towards an Arab – Israeli settlement and Kremlin's engagement in the discussions would also serve greater U.S foreign policy goals, such as Vietnam. *"What I was trying to do . . . was to construct a completely new set of power relationships in the Middle East—not only between Israel and the Arabs, but also among the United States, Western Europe and the Soviet Union"*.<sup>49</sup>

In February 1969, after the National Security Council meeting, a new approach was adopted on Middle East policy. By this approach, the U.S would assume a dynamic role, including U.S- Soviet talks and several principles that direct U.S. policy. Firstly, the conflicting parties should participate in the negotiations eventually. Any final agreements would be realized only with Israel's participation and consent. Secondly, the purpose of a settlement would be a binding agreement and, although not a peace treaty, would involve some predetermined commitments. The Israelis would relinquish territory and the Arabs would pledge to respect Israel's sovereignty. However, there was disparity to the concessions from each side. Thirdly, the withdrawal of Israeli forces should reach the international frontier between Israel and Egypt, with a special arrangement for Gaza. Israelis should evacuate the West Bank of Jordan, with simply minor border variations and some crucial areas would be demilitarized. Regarding Jordan, it would play a secular and religious role within the unified city of Jerusalem. Fifth, the refugee problem would be settled. The *"Two Power"* talks were to be directed between Secretary of State, W. Rogers, the Assistant Secretary J. Sisco and the Soviet Ambassador to the U.S Anatoly Dobrynin and between Dobrynin and Kissinger.

Kissinger questioned Soviet willingness to abandon regional interests for the sake of developed U.S.-Soviet relations. He argued that the Soviet Union had worked hard to build a

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<sup>48</sup> *"Richard Nixon 1968 Acceptance Speech."* 1988, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?4022-2%2Frichard-nixon-1968-acceptance-speech>. Accessed 9 Sept. 2022.

<sup>49</sup> Nixon, *The Memoirs*, p. 483

position of influence in the Middle East and to preserve that position, it depended essentially on providing arms to key clients. If peace was established, the large amount of these arms would be redundant. The Soviets, therefore, had an interest in preventing an actual peace agreement, preferring instead a state of "*controlled tension*". From this perspective, the U.S.-Soviet talks had one purpose, through the lens of Moscow and Cairo: to make the United States pressure Israel to withdraw from Arab ground in exchange for some minimal Arab concessions.<sup>50</sup> He objected to the idea of Two Power talks and reasoned that the U.S should proceed slowly in the Middle East to put pressure on the Soviets for Vietnam. Nixon, on the other side, believed that the State Department would be in the position to pressure things in Middle East more aggressively and the State Department itself wanted to produce early accomplishments for the administration. He realized that there should be a new tactic to deal with the Middle East. The new approach would not be adopted as a unilateral peace plan but as a step –by- step approach, namely specific components of a settlement would be progressively introduced into the negotiations. The State Department would oversee and lead the processes and at the same time, he instructed Kissinger to open backup channels of communication with the Soviet embassy, to avoid bureaucracy slowing down procedures. It was proved afterwards that Kissinger was the "*prime moving force*" for shaping foreign policy in the administration, Dobrynin argued<sup>51</sup>.

Still, the Two Power talks, after five months, came to a stalemate and eventually proved to be unsuccessful, because of the huge differences between the parties. The Israelis felt that the conditions of the settlement were imposed on them and the Arabs preferred another conflict to retrieve their land. Hence, the seventeen – month War of Attrition in spring 1969.

## **V. The Rogers Plan of 1969**

After the stalemate of the Two Power talks, Secretary Rogers made a public statement of a new plan for a peace settlement in negotiations with the Soviet Union. Rogers announced that the United States had assumed a "*balanced and fair*" strategy in the Middle East consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 242. In this plan, the Arabs had to accept

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<sup>50</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 65

<sup>51</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.36

a "*permanent peace*" with Israel based on a "*binding agreement*" and any settlement between Israel and the Arabs must involve a "*just settlement*" of the Palestinian refugee question. The Arabs were not ready to make concessions in the binding agreement. Most important, though, Rogers placed the U.S as a supporter of Israel's withdrawal from the Arab territories occupied in the 1967 Six-Day War.<sup>52</sup> Apart from Israel's withdrawal, two other important issues were raised: the issue of the Palestinian refugees and both Israel's and Jerusalem's engagement in the latter's "*civic, economic and religious life*"<sup>53</sup>. However, Jerusalem's position remained unresolved. It was acknowledged that withdrawal and the nature of the peace agreement would be the most critical subjects. There would be no Israeli withdrawal until all features of a peace agreement on all fronts had been formed. Priority would be given to establishing common ground in the U.S.-Soviet talks, aiming at producing a shared document that would be accepted by the four powers— the United States, the Soviet Union, Britain and France—and given to Ambassador Gunnar Jarring to present to the local parties.<sup>54</sup> The parties involved, did not take the plan with a positive note. Israel's Prime Minister, Golda Meir, referred to it as "*suicidal*", an "*appeasement of the Arabs*" and "*the gravest blows to Israel's most vital interests*". The Israeli cabinet declared that "*Israel will not be the victim of big power or interpower policy and will reject any attempt to impose a solution*".<sup>55</sup> Foreign Minister Abba Eban called it as "*one of the major errors of international diplomacy in the postwar era*". The Egyptians claimed the plan was an American move to divide the Arab world and the Soviets as an "*one-sided and pro- Israeli idea*"<sup>56</sup>. Kissinger strongly opposed it.

The plan also involved a parallel proposal for an Israel – Jordan settlement. Israel and Jordan would resolve the problem of Jerusalem, recognizing a unified city, with both countries partaking the civic and economic obligations of city government. Guidelines for a settlement of the refugee problem, that would allow either repatriation or relocation with remuneration, were proposed. The two parties would agree on an annual proportion of refugees.<sup>57</sup> The proposition had reportedly satisfied King Hussein. Nixon himself did not

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<sup>52</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.48

<sup>53</sup> Speigel, *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict*, p.186

<sup>54</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 64

<sup>55</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p. 179

<sup>56</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.49

<sup>57</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 68



endorse the plan and sent assurances to Prime Minister Meir that he would not pursue this policy. On the one hand, he agreed with Rogers that it was about time the United States took a more active position on borders and security arrangements and end the Two Power talks. He did not like that the Soviet government embraced a "*very hard-line position*" and being "*uncompromising*" in the discussions by insisting on Israel surrender everything it had attained in the 1967 war. At the same time, however, the president was hesitant to put pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied land. All in all, the proposed peace fell through to normalize Arab-Israeli relations and would entail major Israeli concessions on refugees and territories. The Rogers Plan put a halt to the Two Power talks with the Soviet Union and prepared the United States to acquire a unilateral role in the Arab-Israeli conflict in the years to come.

#### **VI. The events and the U.S handling of the rejection of the Roger's plan.**

The rejection of the Roger's plan early in 1970 was followed by an extension of Soviet engagement in Egypt and intensified Israeli bombardment near Cairo. Nasser's covertly travelling to Moscow and the shipping of Soviet missiles and personnel to Egypt, fired demands for the dispatch of U.S Phantoms and Skyhawks to Israel accordingly. In January 1970, Washington exchanged letters with Premier Kosygin through the Soviet ambassador Dobrynin and Kissinger. They discussed mostly Soviet-American trade, one element in Nixon's idea of "*linkage*". But on the letter in the end of January, Kosygin stated that if Israel continued this aggression, the Soviet Union would make sure that there would be means for the UAR and other Arab states to fend off Israel. Kissinger replied that this was the first Soviet threat to the administration and Nixon urged for the prompt restoration of the ninety-day cease-fire and the restrictions of arms shipments into the region. If a ceasefire would not be reached, a potential crisis between the two superpowers would emerge.

Due to a tough Soviet stance, Nixon seemed to be leaning towards an initially positive decision on Israel's arms requests.<sup>58</sup> Although Nixon's initial positive response to the appeal, French President Pompidou's harassment by Jewish War Veterans during his visit in the States, postponed this decision. However, assurances to Israel about the replacement of

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<sup>58</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 71

some of the aircraft lost were made in secret by Nixon through Kissinger. Preoccupied as he was with the events in Cambodia, Nixon did not respond to the appeals eventually, urged, however, the Israelis to be more flexible towards a ceasefire. The Soviets performed actions to encourage a ceasefire between the parties, but at the same time they continued sending equipment and personnel to build up Egypt's military. Operation Kavkaz (the "*cheap stunt*"<sup>59</sup> in Kissinger's words) was revealed and the pressure on Israel to accept the ceasefire stopped. The final stage of the operation occurred when Russian manned planes chased down Israeli planes above Egypt but did not shoot them.

Kissinger knew that even though Cambodia was the administration's top priority at that time, the Soviets had pushed forward in the general contest for preeminence in the Middle East that the United States could not overlook. In the beginning of May, while domestic protests against the Cambodian invasion were rising, he instructed his policymakers to prepare policy options to encounter the Soviet threat in the Middle East. If President Nixon was preparing for a straight US-Soviet military confrontation, the United States should reinforce its relationship with Israel and validate that the administration did not lack determination regardless of the consequences for its situations elsewhere. The problem, as the wave of anti-war protests across the country confirmed, was the difficulty to convince domestic America to defend military action in the Middle East when they would not support it in Southeast Asia<sup>60</sup>. Yet, due to the events in Southeast Asia, new policies against Soviet intervention would not be developed in time.

## **VII. The second Roger's plan: "Stop shooting, start talking"**

The National Security Council meetings in mid-June centered around the Middle East. The President assigned Rogers to request the parties to settle on a three – month ceasefire. Once the parties accepted the cease-fire, then negotiations between the two would begin under UN representative Gunnar Jarring<sup>61</sup>. Rogers explicated that the United States was interested in reaching a lasting peace in the region and was prepared to assist the two sides towards this goal. He mentioned the need for flexibility from both parties to endorse the

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<sup>59</sup> Kissinger, Henry, 2011. *Years of upheaval*. New York: Simon & Schuster, p.393

<sup>60</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.110

<sup>61</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.117

creation of a positive setting where progress could be made. In other words, the notion was to ease the tense atmosphere between Israel and the Arabs and to simplify their positions in order to reach "*some confidence that the outcome will preserve their essential interests*". Thus, the American position supported that the best way for an agreement was formulation of the required steps and principles for implementing Resolution 242 by the Arab and Israeli representatives, under Jarring's mediation.<sup>62</sup>

Israel's instant reaction was to turn down the appeal. During July, the White House made efforts to convince the Israelis to accept the new conditions. The first step to compliance was to support the Israelis on arms shipments. This was done in a letter from Nixon to Golda Meir and on July 10 the President also requested the remaining aircraft under the existing contract be shipped to Israel at an accelerated pace.<sup>63</sup>

On July 22, the Egyptians and the Soviets agreed to the ceasefire, provided that Israel accepted as well. On the 26 Jordan also accepted and only Israel remained. The United States provided the following commitments to Israel. Firstly, any Arab definition of Resolution 242 would be unacceptable, namely the term "*withdrawal*" to mean complete withdrawal of Israeli forces to the lines of June 4, 1967. Secondly, no acceptance of a settlement for refugees that would fundamentally modify the Jewish character of the state or expose its security. Third, the agreement stipulated that neither side would alter its military positions in an area ranging 50 kilometres east and west of the Canal. The two parties were not to install new positions in this area and any activity was to be limited to the maintenance of existing positions or to the change and provision of the troops already stationed there<sup>64</sup>. The fourth point, the most important for the Israelis, was non-withdrawal of any of its troops from the occupied areas "*until a binding contractual peace agreement satisfactory to you has been achieved*". In addition, Nixon promised to carry on with the distribution of arms to Israel. Meir finally consent to the three-month ceasefire in a sixty – mile zone east and west of the Suez Canal<sup>65</sup>, implemented on August 7. The War of Attrition had officially ended on August 7, 1970.

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<sup>62</sup> Blanga, Yehuda, 2020. *The US, Israel, and Egypt Diplomacy in the Shadow of Attrition, 1969-70*. Routledge, p.188.

<sup>63</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 73

<sup>64</sup> Sorby, *THE WAR OF ATTRITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1969 – 1970*, p. 144

<sup>65</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p. 221

Soon, however, Egyptian violations on the provisions started to emerge. The cease-fire, unleashed forces that quickly undermined the scenarios for peace talks and instead led to a predicament of unprecedented danger for the Nixon administration. The ceasefire would serve Egypt on finishing up the missile wall on the west bank of the Suez Canal, either for defensive or offensive operations. The Egyptians started transferring SAM missiles closer to the Canal to fend off potential Israeli attacks and as an advantage for amphibious forces in a possible canal crossing to regain control of the Sinai. On September 6, the Israelis announced their negation to participate in UN talks inasmuch the Egyptians violated the cease-fire and stand- still agreement.<sup>66</sup> Washington requested the sale of more Phantom jets to reimburse Israel for the violations.

### **VIII. The crisis in Jordan**

As the ceasefire between Egypt, Israel and Jordan was coming into effect, the Palestinian Fedayeen, specifically Fatah under the leadership of Yasser Arafat, was instigating a crisis in Jordan. Despite Jordan's negative stance against Israel (the three "noes") in the Khartoum Conference a little after the 1967 war, Hussein resumed his covert negotiations with Israel over the position of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In this way, relations with Israel were connected to the future of the Palestinians. Hussein sought the return of all lost territory but still recognized Israel in private and cooperated with it across a wide array of issues<sup>67</sup>. Since 1967, Palestinian guerrillas had been reinforcing in Jordan. By the spring of 1970, they had established themselves as a state within the state<sup>68</sup>. From February 1970, the Fedayeen had succeeded in restraining King Hussein's authority and openly challenged his authority in East Jordan. In September 1970, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a radical Marxist- inspired Palestinian group, hijacked four planes, one Swiss, one British and one American and detonated three of them in Dawson's Field, a deserted airfield in the Jordanian desert, east of Amman. Five days earlier, an assassination attempt was made against Hussein and the Jordanian civil war, known as the Black

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<sup>66</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p. 224

<sup>67</sup> "Jordan - From 1967 To Civil War". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jordan/From-1967-to-civil-war>.

<sup>68</sup> Korn, David A. *Stalemate: The War Of Attrition And Great Power Diplomacy In The Middle East, 1967-1970*. Routledge, 2019, p. 284.

September, broke out. The PFLP challenged Hussein in conflict, with Iraq and Syria assisting the Palestinians. When 250 Syrian tanks invaded northern Jordan to reinforce the PLO, Hussein was forced to call for military assistance from the U.S and Great Britain and allow overflights by Israel to attack the Syrian forces.<sup>69</sup>

At first, Washington was cautious against the hijackings. Nixon, however, wanted to bring the Fedayeen down and saw the need for a strong American presence in the eastern Mediterranean as a preventive for Soviets, Syrians and Iraqis. For Washington, it was crucial to preserve the Hashemite regime in Jordan, a moderate and pro- Western regime, the balances would be overturned and "*the entire Middle East would be revolutionized*", Kissinger argued<sup>70</sup>. Another radical regime in the region might provoke another Mideast war. If Hussein's forces could win the war with no external help from the U.S or Israel, the ceasefire would continue to exist. If, on the other side, the U.S or Israel assisted Hussein and move against the Fedayeen, the Soviets or Egyptians might be engaged as well, the ceasefire would collapse and a danger for a U.S – Soviet conflict might be imminent. Nixon did not want the Israelis to intervene in the war but he was determined to employ American troops, especially if Syria and Iran were to come to the Fedayeen's aid. Kissinger formulated a strategy in case of military disaster: on the one hand, American forces were to be employed in case of evacuation but, on the other hand, if Syria or Iraq intervened, Israeli forces would take action and the American role would be to keep the Soviets away from Israelis. Another important thing that Nixon would have to consider were the logistical difficulties of sending troops to a country with no easy access to the Mediterranean would exhaust the strategic reserve and make the U.S exposed to the Soviets. Also, other forces had been already fighting in Southeast Asia.

In mid- September, King Hussein, started bombarding the Fedayeen headquarters, inside refugee camps. For ten days, the civil war was heavy with many Palestinian casualties. The King seemed to be gaining the control of the war, but on September 19, Syrian troops were dispatched into northern Jordan and the next day, additional forces moved to the

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<sup>69</sup> "*Jordan - From 1967 To Civil War*". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Jordan/From-1967-to-civil-war>.

<sup>70</sup> Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 715

south, towards Amman and with clues of Iraqi participation. Fearful of the collapse of his kingdom, Hussein sent an urgent message to the President asking for intervention from land and air "to safeguard the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence of Jordan"<sup>71</sup>. Washington reinforced its decision for Israeli mobilization of air and ground forces and they were to begin at daybreak. On September 22, with Israel and the U.S ready to intervene on his side, Hussein ordered the attack on the Syrian forces. In the afternoon, the Syrian troops started to depart from Jordan and the crisis had passed. A peace agreement with Hussein's concessions to the PLO, was signed by Hussein and Arafat in Cairo on September 27, 1970. On September 28, Nasser suffered a heart attack and passed away.

The result of the Jordanian civil war was considered as a victory of American foreign policy during the administration's first term. The ceasefire along the Suez Canal had been preserved, without any physical military intervention. King Hussein's regime was maintained and the remnants of the Fedayeen were eventually expelled in 1971. The relationship between Washington and Tel – Aviv now was reinforced and U.S – Jordan relations also flourished. In Syria, General Hafiz al – Assad would soon take control of the government.

## **IX. Conclusion**

The War of Attrition was the longest of wars between Egypt and Israel, lasting for almost eighteen months, from March 1969 to August 1970, during which time land, naval, and air defence forces were deployed<sup>72</sup>.

Between January 1969 and August 1970 the Middle East policy of the Nixon administration passed through two stages. In the first stage the State Department took the lead in initiating negotiations with the Soviet Union to produce a set of principles that would provide the terms of an Arab-Israeli settlement. As part of this policy the administration adopted a restrained position on new arms agreements with Israel.

The second stage of policy toward the Middle East began with the failure of the Rogers Plan and the escalation of Soviet involvement in Egypt in early 1970. There was a need

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<sup>71</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.149

<sup>72</sup> Korby, *The War of Attrition In the Middle East, 1969 – 1970*, p. 145

for a new diplomatic initiative, less ambitious than the Rogers Plan and less dependent on the Soviet Union. The rejection of the Rogers Plan both from Israel and the Soviet Union and Egypt's non acceptance terminated early the first Middle East initiative of Nixon administration and urged for another political initiative on a settlement. The risk of a conflict between the two superpowers was greater in the Middle East than Vietnam. The United States opted for a compromise by pushing a temporary cease-fire agreement on the Arabs and Israelis. Although the cease-fire successfully terminated the War of Attrition and prevented an apparent U.S-Soviet crisis, remained in effect until the outbreak of the 1973 October War. Soviet military presence in Egypt remained intact and encouraged the leaders in both Moscow and Cairo to use the cover of cease-fire to reinforce their positions along the Canal.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.114

### **3. The Nixon Presidency in the Yom Kippur War (October War) in 1973**

#### **I. The "standstill diplomacy" (1970-1973)**

At the White House, the crisis was seen as a major diplomatic victory in a global and regional confrontation with the Soviet Union allowing the administration to be engaged in other parts of the world. Policymakers turned away from the Middle East to areas of greater urgency, such as the war in Vietnam.

On September 28, 1970 at the completion of the Cairo summit that had produced the cease-fire agreement between Hussein and Arafat, Nasser had a fatal heart attack. His successor, Anwar el-Sadat, moved Egypt in an entirely new direction, distancing it from the Soviet sphere of influence. Over the following years, he would steadily detach Egypt from the Soviet sphere, establish a new relationship with the United States and take steps to improve relations with Israel, too. These moves eased tensions in the Middle East, restored relations with Washington and allowed the U.S and the Soviet Union to pursue détente without heightened Arab-Israeli tensions. Sadat anticipated direct channels of communication with Washington, not through the Soviet Union. Yet Moscow was not about to offer anything to the U.S on the Middle East. With discussions at a standstill, the Egyptians and Soviets propelled a propaganda attack accusing the United States and Israel for the deadlock and warned that the cease-fire along the Suez Canal was in jeopardy.<sup>74</sup> Generally, the region appeared relatively stable and a significant factor was the military stability that undeniably leaned towards Israel.

In November and December, the Soviets amplified the supply of anti-aircraft weapons to Egypt. In response, Golda Meir asked Nixon to secure aircraft deliveries after 1970 and ensure a veto against any Security Council resolution imposing a territorial settlement on Israel. The Israelis also threatened to establish direct negotiations with Moscow, which would enhance Soviet presence in the region and destabilize U.S influence. After a number of tense arguments between Nixon and Meir, Israel returned to the Jarring talks. Sadat was also interested in the peace talks. Egypt was asked to enter into a peace agreement with Israel,

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<sup>74</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p.273



including an end to belligerency, recognise Israel's right to sovereignty within secure and recognized borders. In mid- February Egypt replied positively, accepting all of Jarring's points. Israel welcomed Egypt's willingness to enter into a peace agreement, but on the crucial issue of withdrawal the reply was no withdrawal to the pre-June 5, 1967 lines and Israel offered to negotiate without pre-existing conditions. Egypt, however, regarded Israel's refusal to accept full withdrawal as an unacceptable earlier condition. Under these circumstances the Jarring talks came to an abrupt end .<sup>75</sup>

Back to domestic situation, the Jewish vote was by and large against Nixon. He was aware that the majority of American voters favoured Israel and was caught between Israel's determination to guarantee its security and extensive American support for Tel Aviv, as well as domestic pressure to leave Vietnam. He was getting impatient with the impasse of the talks.

## II. The third Rogers Initiative

The deadlock in the talks continued as the Israelis insisted on total peace and the Egyptians on the complete withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Sinai. Jarring presented a memorandum to Egypt and Israel for "*parallel and simultaneous commitments*". Israel was asked to agree to withdraw to the former international border between Egypt and the British mandate of Palestine, subject to practical security arrangements and freedom of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Strait of Tiran. The failure to progress led the United States, Egypt, and Israel to seek an *interim settlement*. Rogers was sent to Cairo in May for direct talks with President Sadat with the hope that the two might conclude an interim agreement conforming to what Sadat had proposed back in February. During the diplomatic efforts for an interim agreement it was stated that Israeli troops would be removed from more than half of the Sinai in return for the reopening of the Suez Canal. Golda Meir specified that Israel was prepared to consider the idea of reopening the canal but Israeli troops would not quit the existing cease-fire lines without a consensus on an overall settlement.

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<sup>75</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 89

Sadat insisted that Egyptian military forces cross to the Israeli side of the canal to the evacuated territories but Meir was adamant that no Egyptian military forces be allowed to cross the Canal.

Sadat preferred now to communicate directly with the President and Kissinger through intermediaries, bypassing the State Department. The Soviet Union continued to influence situations since there was an Egypt – Soviet Union Treaty of Friendship signed in May with apparent objective the "*struggle against imperialism and colonialism*". The Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation reaffirmed the Egyptian-Soviet relationship and provided for constant Soviet military, economic and cultural aid.<sup>76</sup>

There was difficult to keep diplomacy rolling since Israel's statements of retaining Sharm al-Shaykh and access to it, Sinai demilitarization, border change around Eilat, no return to Gaza for the Egyptians, that the Golan Heights would stay under Israeli control, a united Jerusalem and border changes on the West Bank were not easily met by Egypt. On the other side, Egypt insisted on the control of the strategically central Mitla and Giddi passes, the establishment of demilitarized zones and that Israel could maintain Sharm al- Shaykh in the first stage, but within six months a full settlement had to be reached. If Israel was not prepared to give up the passes, Sadat said, the United States should end its initiative.<sup>77</sup>

Kissinger saw little progress toward a settlement and described the Soviets as reaching for "*hegemony in the region*" since they had already advanced their military presence in Egypt and the Mediterranean in general.<sup>78</sup> The Israeli government did not intend making an agreement with the Egyptians. As it seemed, the third initiative had failed.

The failure of the interim canal settlement effectively ended the prevalence of Rogers and Sisco as Middle East policymakers and Kissinger entered the stage. Kissinger's hope that the Soviet position in the Middle East might be weakened had been reinforced since the Jordanian civil war. First, Sadat had expelled his pro-Soviet advisors in May, then Jordan had eradicated the remainders of the PLO in the country. According to Kissinger, the United States had become involved too quickly in the negotiations and consequently, the role of an independent delegate was in jeopardy. When the parties were near agreement it was apt for

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<sup>76</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.183

<sup>77</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 91

<sup>78</sup> Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, p.275

the United States to make essential recommendations and negotiations should take place in secret. If Israel looked strong it would be rational in negotiations and only if the Arabs saw that Soviet arms were not the solution would they turn to diplomacy. Finally, Kissinger sensed the Israelis were at an advantage in denying to accommodate Egypt while the Soviet military presence there remained strong. When Sadat expelled the Soviets, peace talks could be realized.

Another aspect of a successful foreign policy in the Middle East for Nixon and Kissinger had been that détente between the superpowers would prove beneficial for American policy in other parts. Kissinger held behind the scenes discussions with the Russians and explored secret Egyptian contacts. Under the pretext of détente, the United States had persuaded the Soviets to moderate their support for the Arabs and thus were reluctant to provide advanced weaponry to Egypt. Kissinger's apparent goal was to reach agreement with the Soviet leadership on a set of principles that could function as a context for an Arab-Israeli peace settlement. By eliminating Soviet military presence was not only a way to avoid another Arab-Israeli war but also a way to align Egypt with the United States and change the equilibrium of power in the Middle East for years to come.

From their side, the U.S increased arms sales to Israel, which became a logical instrument of the Nixon Doctrine pursuing an active international role.<sup>79</sup> The next step in the process would be a step-by-step negotiating process based on those principles, but primary issues, such as final borders, would be eventually negotiated by the parties themselves.<sup>80</sup>

1972 was an election year and Nixon's status was at its peak, Kissinger's reputation was growing and it seemed they could shape a settlement in the Middle East. In March, Middle East problems were still there and Nixon feared that the outcome would be another war and a possible U.S. confrontation with the Soviets. Thus, the focus moved back to the Middle East.

Nixon's state visit in Moscow in May signified the leader's desires to "*start a process of détente*". Regarding the Middle East, there were no developments, merely an agreement on a "*meaningless paragraph*", which only confirmed their support for Security Council Resolution 242 and called for "*further steps to bring about a military relaxation in that area*".

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<sup>79</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab – Israeli conflict*, p.212

<sup>80</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 95

Without stating so specifically, the communiqué accepted de facto Israeli control of the seized territories and ensured that there would be no severe effort to bring about a political settlement between the Arabs and Israelis until the spring of 1973<sup>81</sup>.

Sadat's decision to expel Russian advisors in July was a direct outcome of détente. He wanted not only to approach the West but also to avoid another war with Israel, which he knew Egypt would lose. Instead preparing his country for war, Sadat sought new back channels of communication with the White House and launched a "*diplomatic offensive*" to draw Nixon's and Kissinger's attention for a negotiating process that would obligate Israel to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories and avoid another Middle East war that would have profound regional and global consequences.<sup>82</sup>

Not until 1973 and the end of the Vietnam war did Kissinger focused his attention to the Middle East. From this year on, he dealt with the issue in a more serious manner. One early goal was establishing a balance between "*sovereignty*" and "*security*". In spring 1973 in a meeting with Ismail, Kissinger described his strategy for a U.S.-Soviet agreement on principles, followed by secret negotiations between the parties. He introduced his idea of a settlement over an extended period, suggesting that Egyptian rule over Sinai could be recognized early but that special security arrangements might be required for a long time. Ismail agreed that a stabilization of relations with Israel might be possible and that Jordan might assist in solving the Palestinian issue, but he was adamant on full Israeli withdrawal from Sinai and Golan Heights. In May, Kissinger received a new text from Gromyko that introduced principles of an Arab-Israeli settlement. Gromyko's document, different from that of the previous May, called for full Israeli withdrawal to the lines of June 4, 1967. It also referred to the "*legitimate rights*" of the Palestinians<sup>83</sup>. The document eventually was not accepted by the United States.

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<sup>81</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.226

<sup>82</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.230

<sup>83</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 100

### III. The October war

In parallel to the standstill situation, Israeli intelligence would frequently have indications of Egyptian preparations for war in 1973, which were regarded as a mere display of Egypt's military force. Israel was under the set notion that Egypt would not -and could not- go to war. The Egyptian deception plan was envisioned to encourage such Israeli errors. The Egyptians, mounted a classic "*misinformation*" campaign, resembled to the classic tale of "*Peter and the wolf*", which proved effective.<sup>84</sup>

Four major mobilizations had already happened in total before the war broke out. The first major mobilization was in 1971 — when the Egyptians attacked Sharm El-Sheikh. At the last minute it had been cancelled by Sadat because of the eruption of the Indo-Pakistan War. In 1972, a second major mobilization occurred, when Sadat planned an operation in which paratroopers were to seize and keep territory in the Sinai until the United Nations intervened. The third and fourth periods of escalation and mobilization both took place in 1973 — in April-May and September-October.<sup>85</sup> In October 1973, there was a mobilization from the Soviets and Egyptians were stationing missiles on the Suez Canal. Provisions from the Soviet Union were guaranteed, with ships leaving Soviet ports loaded with additional supplies before the outbreak of war and a Soviet military airlift beginning a few days after the war.<sup>86</sup>

On October 6<sup>th</sup> the *Yom Kippur or October* war breaks out on the Jewish Day of Atonement, the Yom Kippur Day. There was a speculation that Israeli alertness would be low on that day and so it was, Egyptians had caught the Israelis – and the U.S by extension – by surprise. The Egyptians attacked the east bank of the Suez Canal with a hundred thousand Egyptian troops and tanks. Aligned to the Egyptians, the Syrians launched an attack on the Golan Heights. That was the way Sadat chose to engage Israel and the U.S into negotiations to achieve peace in the Middle East.

The U.S reaction was immediate. Kissinger took charge, ordering the Israelis against preemption, urging the Soviets to use their influence to prevent war, telephoning the

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<sup>84</sup> Herzog, Chaim, 1984. *The Arab-Israeli wars. War and Peace in the Middle East from the War of Independence through Lebanon*. London: Vintage Books, p.228.

<sup>85</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli wars*, p. 234

<sup>86</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli wars*, p. 237

Egyptian ambassador to the UN with the Israeli message of no preemption and sending messages to King Hussein and King Faisal to be on the side of moderation. Kissinger's efforts were ineffective, and the first word of hostilities shortly began.

#### **IV. U.S reaction and response**

After the November elections, Nixon and Kissinger were still unwilling to push forward a Middle East peace plan. They sought an arrangement with both Egypt and Israel that negotiation talks would be fruitful. Yet, Sadat demanded total withdrawal as a preamble to discussions and Meir refused to return to occupied territories, so the likelihood for a settlement remained discouraging. Various interests, such as the U.S.-Soviet détente, U.S.-Israeli relations, American reliability with the Arab states and the weakened authority of the president were at stake. The early American reaction was therefore restrained. The president wanted the Sixth Fleet east and anchor close to Crete as an evident sign of American force and one aircraft carrier was ordered to depart from Athens.

After October 9, already three days of war, the American response was a gradual exploration of two aspects of policy: the call for a cease-fire in place and flow of arms for Israel. There should be no direct official American involvement in the conflict. The U.S seemed to procrastinate on sending arms to Israel, either because of bureaucratic delay or as a form of pressure to convince the Israelis to accept a cease-fire in order. Meir personally pleaded Nixon to resupply Israel.

In mid – October, Nixon ordered a full-scale transport operation of military equipment to Israel. The US airlift greatly altered the course of war. An Israeli military success would contribute to bringing the war into end. On October 15 the Israelis, launched a serious counteroffensive in the Sinai, repelled the Egyptian offensive and approached the Suez Canal. In reaction, the Arabs responded with a massive oil boycott against the United States. In the Arab oil ministers' meeting in Kuwait it was announced that oil production would be cut back by five percent per month until Israel had withdrawn from all Arab territories. Kissinger wanted to bring the Soviets into a joint approach in the United Nations Security Council by offering a resolution calling for an end of the conflict and a return to the cease-fire lines of 1967. The ceasefire proposal was welcome in Kremlin. The utmost goal was to put an end in the war state, so the two superpowers would not eventually be drawn into the conflict. After

the war the United States would resume a diplomatic effort for lasting peace. U.S.-Arab relations should therefore remain as solid as possible.

On October 21, Kissinger was invited to an urgent meeting in Moscow to discuss instant action. During the meeting, Kissinger urged for an immediate ceasefire in place linked to Resolution 242 and peace talks. Additionally, both sides decided to serve as co-chairmen of an subsequent peace conference and that hostages should be instantly exchanged by the parties after the cease-fire.<sup>87</sup> A ceasefire had been reached, Resolution 338 and was accepted by all parties. The ceasefire put a temporary end to hostilities without a superpower confrontation.

In this case, "*temporary*" meant two days later. It was evident that Israeli troops were stepping past the October 22 ceasefire lines. Brezhnev sent a threatening letter to Kissinger and all in all, the Soviets seemed to be proceeding to a confrontation with the Egyptians' encouragement. The president ordered Kissinger to devise a plan for dispatching U.S. troops to the Middle East in case of Soviet intervention. Eventually, UN Security Council approved unanimously Resolution 340, calling for an "*immediate and complete cease-fire and the that the parties return to the positions occupied by them... on October 22 1973*"<sup>88</sup>, dispatch of an enlarged UN military observer force, creation of a UN Emergency Force composed of non-permanent members of the States Members of the UN and implementation of Resolutions 338 and 339. This time, the ceasefire was established and the fourth Arab – Israeli war officially ended on October 28.

## V. Conclusion

The interval between the Jordan crisis in September 1970 and the October war in 1973 was relatively quiet in the Middle East. The context, set by Nixon and Kissinger, emphasized the U.S.-Soviet rivalry and the need to maintain the balance of power in Israel's favour. Occasionally, the State Department tried to launch new initiatives, like the Jarring

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<sup>87</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.559

<sup>88</sup> UNSCR Search Engine for the United Nations Security Council Resolutions. UNSCR, <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/340>

talks or the interim canal settlement, but the White House was only either slightly supportive or negative. As a result, United States policy during this period was unproductive.

Because of election year 1972, no initiatives were taken on, even as a reaction to Sadat's eviction of the Soviet advisors. Then, in 1973, the Watergate scandal started to distract the president and the heavy load fell upon Kissinger. An impressive change in policy during this period concerned U.S.- Israeli relations. Due to the crisis in Jordan, the United States and Israel entered an intense cooperative phase and Israel was regarded a strategic asset. Yet the military balance proved not to sustain regional stability or the deterrence of war.

Structuring American policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict was essentially affected by the events of the October war. In 1973, Sadat's decision to launch an attack on Israeli forces along the Suez Canal and in western sections of the Sinai Peninsula intended not to attack Israel itself, but to cease the diplomatic deadlock and convince Israel to withdraw from its conquests of Egyptian territory and reach a peace settlement.<sup>89</sup> Sadat's decision to lead his country to war in October 1973 was a direct consequence of détente. Only after the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to set aside their differences in the Middle East for the benefit of détente<sup>90</sup>, was Sadat forced to attack Israel. He managed to put the Arab-Israeli crisis to the forefront of American foreign policy and initiate a part of the process that would lead to the return of the Sinai Peninsula under Egyptian control.

*"The Egyptian-Syrian attack was a strategic and tactical surprise. But the surprise of the October war is not explained fully by background noise or deception. It resulted from the misinterpretation of facts available for all to see, unobscured by any conflicting information. Sadat boldly all but told what he was going to do and we did not believe him. He overwhelmed us with information and let us draw the wrong conclusion. October 6 was the culmination of a failure of political analysis on the part of its victims".<sup>91</sup>*

Israeli victory in 1967 had given Israelis a feeling of superiority and self – satisfaction that they could easily win this war too. However, this war proved greatly costly and difficult. Eventually, introducing a new era in Israeli politics followed by the peace treaty with Egypt

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<sup>89</sup> Slater, Jerome, 2021. *Mythologies without end. The US, Israel, and the Arab- Israeli Conflict, 1917– 2020*. New York: Oxford University Press, p.172.

<sup>90</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.298.

<sup>91</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.335.



and the return of Sinai. We can say that in a way Sadat had achieved a political victory, even though his armed forces were defeated by the IDF.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the two superpowers had not been able to separate themselves from the Arab – Israeli conflict. Each side was too ardent to allow its friends to be sacrificed for détente. Both superpowers had the opportunity and the power to end the war quickly by calling for an immediate cease-fire in the UN Security Council. Instead, they initiated a massive airlift to their corresponding clients, protracting the war and aggravating tensions in Soviet-American relations.

In the aftermath of the 1973 Arab- Israeli war, the power of OPEC increased and consequently its Arab members used oil as a "*weapon*" of blackmail and sought to halt oil shipments to the U.S and other Western states that had supported Israel.<sup>93</sup>

The result of the October 1973 crisis brought about a more dynamic approach aimed at producing substantial change. The vital decisions of the crisis, though, were not the outcome of domestic pressure. Pro – Israeli collectives were not responsible for the arms resupply of Israel nor pro – Arab groups played a role in pressing Israel to accept the ceasefire. Rather, the decisions were made based on the pretext of maintaining Israeli superiority, keep the Soviet Union in the nosebleeds and not humiliate Sadat. Thus, for the first time, the United States committed its top diplomatic qualities to a continuous search for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From the end of Yom Kippur war, Kissinger's Shuttle Diplomacy in the Middle East was about to begin.

## 5. Postwar policies

In the following months after the October 1973 war, American contribution in search for a peace settlement was substantial and the United States would actively participate in trying to explore a tangible solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Nixon and Kissinger sensed that the situation in the Middle East posed a threat to American interests and could not be ignored any more. Second, the new American strategy that would be formed would not link early

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<sup>92</sup> Gawrych, George W, 1996. *The Albatross of Decisive Victory: War and Policy between Egypt and Israel in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars. Leavenworth Papers*, (21), p.82.

<sup>93</sup> Slater, *Mythologies without end*, p.16.

diplomatic steps with a final peace agreement. Therefore, a step by step process would be followed, which would keep a pace of the negotiations, as Nixon wanted results.

In the Egyptian-Israeli front, things were still tense, since the Egyptian Third Army Corps, surrounded by the Israeli troops, was almost isolated from supplies, an intolerable situation for Sadat. International pressure fell upon Israel to withdraw to the October 22 lines, a condition that would let the Third Army go. For Israel, prisoners of war (POWs) had to be exchanged in return to the release of the Third Army. For Meir, the exchange of POWs was a sensitive issue and became her top priority in the negotiations. These two issues from both sides were a first step that would produce the ceasefire through a "*disengagement*" of military forces.

Kissinger met first with Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmy, who presented the Egyptian proposal of unconditional Israeli withdrawal to October 22 lines and then they could discuss the exchange of POWs. Kissinger, then, met with Meir in the beginning of November. She argued that the conditions for keeping the Third Army Corps resupplied was the return of wounded prisoners of war, a complete record of all prisoners and visits from the Red Cross to them. Israel would approve a permanent non military supply of the Third Army once the prisoners were returned and the naval blockade at Bab al-Mandab was lifted. Under these conditions, would Israel negotiate with Egypt on the October 22 lines. Then, Nixon met with her and assured that the United States would stand up to the Soviets and improve its relations with Egypt and Syria, an action that would also facilitate Israel. His intention was to guarantee "*secure borders*" for Israel<sup>94</sup>

#### **I. The PLO channel**

On October 10 — the fourth day of the Middle East war —the PLO sent a message to the U.S through Beirut stating that it was ready to participate in Arab negotiations with Israel. In case of clash with the Soviets it was important to reduce Arab support for Soviet intervention. As Kissinger argued, "*it was in our interest to create the best environment for moderate governments to join the peace process. The PLO had a high potential for causing*

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<sup>94</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 136

*trouble all over the Arab world. We wanted it to be on its best behavior during the delicate early stages of our approaches to Egypt and while we were seeking Saudi support*"<sup>95</sup>. A meeting in Rabat was arranged in November. Kissinger sent a representative to meet with the PLO officials, in order to treat the Palestinian problem not as an international but limit it to an inter-Arab issue. The PLO representative spoke of a secular state (code words for the destruction of Israel) or possibly degrading Israel to its status under the UN partition plan of 1947, pre-1967 Israel actually. Engaging the PLO was incompatible with the interests of any of the parties to the Middle East conflict. It was up to the PLO to sort out its affairs with the other Arab states. The PLO's realistic option was compromise with the Hashemite Kingdom, not its overthrow. The meeting achieved its primary goal: to gain time and to prevent radical assaults on the early peace process.<sup>96</sup>

## II. Kilometer 101 talks

On November 7 Kissinger met with Sadat in Cairo. Sadat's two points were clear: to regain "*his territory*", re-establish the 1967 frontier in the Sinai and make peace. Kissinger noted that progress towards peace rested on two factors: An Arab leader willing to relate words to reality and an America eager to employ itself in the progression. Peace in the Middle East could not come about by the defeat of American allies with Soviet arms. But if Egypt pursued its own national policy, that would find the U.S ready to cooperate. The U.S sought no preeminence in Egypt.<sup>97</sup>

Sadat and Kissinger had resumed diplomatic relations, interrupted since the Six-Day War, and agreed to exchange ambassadors within two weeks. They also reached an agreement on a "*six-point program of action*". Based on this program, both Israel and Egypt would monitor the UN Security Council cease-fire, negotiations between Egypt and Israel on a return to the October 22 line and on the disengagement and separation of forces were to commence without delay, under the auspices of the UN. Also, daily supplies of food, water and medication were to be delivered without interference to the town of Suez and the transfer of non-military provisions to the East Bank would take place unhindered. United

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<sup>95</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.451

<sup>96</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.452

<sup>97</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.459

Nations checkpoints would be established to replace Israeli checkpoints on the Cairo- Suez road and finally, an exchange of POWs would follow the creation of the UN checkpoints. Egyptian and Israeli military representatives formally signed the agreement embodying the six-point program in mid-November in a tent at the "Kilometer 101" checkpoint on the Cairo-Suez road. The plan was announced on November 9 and the first Israeli and Egyptian prisoners were exchanged on November 15. The Israeli government, however, was not in full agreement. Golda Meir was sceptical about supplying the Third Army and wanted affirmations that no weapons slipped through. So, words in the document were changed and rearranged.<sup>98</sup> As Kissinger argued, it was soon plain that Sadat could not accept any restriction on his own forces upon Egyptian soil if that was proposed by Israel. American mediation then came to be critical. On November 29, Egypt broke off the Kilometer 101 talks and disengagement would have to be reviewed after Geneva's assembly— "*much as we had planned*".<sup>99</sup> Israel refused to go to the Geneva conference in December.

Meanwhile Kissinger encouraged King Hussein to participate in the peace negotiations. Hussein rejected a West Bank Palestinian state led by the PLO as decisively as Israel. He claimed that if Palestinian territory was to be returned to the Arab nation, Jordan should do the negotiating. He did not oppose to disengagement agreements but he advised on a delay in their implementation until a comprehensive settlement could be finalized as a "*package*". The best manner to protect Jordan's interests on the Palestinian issue was to invite Jordan as a founding member of the Geneva Conference and present it as the representative of the Palestinians.

In Saudi Arabia Kissinger appealed to King Faisal for support of his diplomatic effort, characterizing the oil embargo a hindrance to the American efforts. He also pleaded for help in opening lines of communication with the Syrians. Faisal promised to ease on the embargo once the Israelis agreed to withdraw.

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<sup>98</sup> Sheehan, Edward R.F, 1976. *How Kissinger Did It: Step by Step in the Middle East*. Foreign Policy, (22), p.18.

<sup>99</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.537.

### III. The Geneva Conference

Kissinger sent letter through the UN inviting Egypt, Israel, Jordan, and Syria to a conference in Geneva on December 17 or 18. The U.S and the Soviet Union would co – chair it. Egypt and Jordan agreed to participate but Israel adamantly refused to, in case the PLO did. The Arab summit meeting in Algiers had recognized the PLO (except Jordan) as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, so the PLO would be eligible to attend. However, if the PLO attended the conference, Israel would not negotiate with Syria unless a record of Israeli prisoners confined in Syria was published.

Because of Israel's intransigence to attend the conference, the date was transferred for December 21. Kissinger travelled again to the Middle East to discuss with Dayan. He was presented with a list of arms requests, to which, he implied, the U.S would give it consideration. In return, Dayan proposed a disengagement based on Israeli withdrawal to a line west of the passes, combined with substantial demilitarization of forward areas and an Egyptian commitment to reopen the Suez Canal.<sup>100</sup> Israel opposed Palestinian participation at the conference and Israel's representatives would not discuss with the Syrians until Syria conformed to Israeli demands for the names of POWs and visits from the Red Cross to them. It seemed that Israel might reject Geneva. To achieve Israel's participation, Nixon and Kissinger began to exert heavy pressure on Israel, linking international topics and NATO to Israel's decision. Finally, the Israeli cabinet approved the participation to the conference.

Kissinger set off for Syria to meet President Hafez al-Assad. Assad used the war to retrieve the Golan Heights militarily while inflicting damage on the Israelis in the process. Syria would not join the conference unless an agreement of disengagement was reached first including the entire Golan Heights nor was he willing to offer the list of Israeli POWs. As it was decided, Syria would not attend the conference from the very beginning but the decisions produced in the conference would determine Syria's ultimate participation. Once a disengagement agreement was concluded, then Syria would attend the conference.

As regards Jordan, the war had profound consequences, too. The October war had evoked the prospect of a Palestinian state at Jordan's expense. Many Arab states were in favour of an independent Palestinian role in the peace negotiations at the Algiers summit in

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<sup>100</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 139

November 1973. All Arab leaders except Hussein approved the Palestine Liberation Organization as the exclusive representative of the Palestinian people, while the Soviets were willing to recognize the PLO as a government-in-exile. The king feared that an independent West Bank would be lead up to a Palestinian takeover of Jordan.

Eventually, on December 21 the Geneva conference was assembled under the auspices of the UN secretary general Waldheim, with the United States (mainly) and the Soviet Union co-chairing and the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan and Israel present.

## 6. Shuttle Diplomacy

### I. The first shuttle: Egypt – Israel

After the Geneva Conference in December Israel's Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, presented its disengagement plan. It proposed Egypt to hold still to the territory it had occupied to a line of six to ten kilometers on the east bank of the Suez Canal and Israeli forces to pull back to another line twenty kilometers east of the Canal. He also suggested a loosening of military forces on both sides of the Canal in five separate zones. In the Sinai the two sides would be divided by a United Nations buffer zone. Israel would remain west of the Mitla and Giddi mountain passes. The practical goal of Dayan's outline was the removal of all the Egyptian forces that had crossed the Suez Canal during the war except a few. Dayan demanded no belligerency between Egypt and Israel, revoking of the blockade of Bab el-Mandeb and a pledge to reopen the Suez Canal and allow the transit of Israeli ships and cargoes. From the U.S ("*us*" in the original) Israel sought assurance of long-term arms supply.<sup>101</sup>

In mid -January Kissinger resumed his visits to the Middle East to engage in the process called "*shuttle diplomacy*", namely travelling from Egypt to Israel and back again with proposals to promote discussions and negotiations on the Israeli plan, with the Egyptian views in mind. Sadat accepted the idea of force limitations in three zones and also offered to put some effort to stop the oil embargo once an agreement was developed. He agreed to

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<sup>101</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.573

Israeli forces west of the passes, but he had trouble with the range of force limits. To overcome Sadat's reservations, Kissinger suggested that the United States might take the responsibility for proposing the limitations on forces. In January 1974, the *Sinai I* disengagement agreement was signed by the Israeli and Egyptian Chiefs of Staff and the process was completed in March. Sinai I was only a primary step towards peace in the Middle East and signified the first time that Israel had voluntarily granted to withdraw from the Arab territory occupied in the 1967 war and indicated the effect that the October War and Kissinger's strong personality had on both sides.

The Kilometer 101 and Sinai I agreements changed the relationship between Cairo and Washington and put Egypt on a path towards peace with Israel. The negotiations that began in 1973 by the end of the decade would result in the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty, which returned the entire Sinai Peninsula to the Egyptians. In this way, for Sadat the war had fulfilled his goal for the development of discussions. The U.S had entered into important and unprecedented pledges. American prestige in the Arab world was strengthened and American aid was still progressing to Israel.

## **II. Efforts to end the oil embargo**

The next step to Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy was to end the oil embargo and lay the ground for a Syrian – Israeli agreement. President Sadat flew to Saudi Arabia to converse with King Faisal on lifting the embargo. Kissinger travelled to Jordan and Syria to discuss with President Hafez al- Assad. The Syrians needed progress in negotiations with Tel Aviv as a preface to terminate the embargo.

The United States issued a plan to Assad in February. Syria would give the United States the information on Israeli POWs and the U.S would forward it to Israel. Once it received the actual names, Israel would prepare a solid proposal on the withdrawal of forces. Following the Red Cross visits with the Israeli prisoners in Syria, Kissinger would forward the Israeli proposal to Assad and invite Israeli representatives to Washington for further discussion. Negotiations would commence in Geneva in the context of the pre-existing Egyptian-Israeli working group. Asad accepted this proposal. Between late-February and early- March, Kissinger shuttled between Damascus, Tel Aviv, Amman, Cairo, Riyadh and Bonn before his return to the U.S.

Meanwhile, Kissinger flew to Egypt to confer with Sadat. He sought the Egyptian leader's assistance on how to deal with other Arab leaders. This shows the degree, in which U.S.-Egyptian relations were restored and developing rapidly well. Sadat even delivered an invitation to Nixon to visit Egypt. From Egypt, Kissinger flew to Israel, where he received the Israeli proposal. The plan was that disengagement be structured like the Egyptian-Israeli agreement of January, with three zones—one for Israel, one for the UN and one Syrian—all into the territory detained by Israel in October 1973.

Kissinger's next stop was Saudi Arabia. His aim was to propel the lifting of the oil embargo and request support for a Syrian- Israeli disengagement. As an extension, a notion of various shared commissions was put forward and ultimately was implemented, signifying Kissinger's desire to utilize American technology and arms supplementary to his diplomatic efforts, with the aim of establishing a dynamic U.S. presence in key Arab countries.

Finally, on March 18 the embargo was lifted. Syria, however, opposed the lifting of the embargo and Kissinger wanted to ensure that there would be Arab pressure on Syria to proceed to the disengagement agreement and isolate it from the radical Arabs and rejectionists. Thus, an appropriate Israeli offer would draw Asad to an agreement, namely Israel would have to draw back to the October 6 lines and give up Quneitra without abandoning their settlements for the time being. In general, the Syrian – Israeli front proved to be more difficult to negotiate than the Egyptian. Syrian tensions increased in the spring of 1974 and the danger of renewed hostilities was imminent.<sup>102</sup>

### III. The Syrian Shuttle

At the end of April, Kissinger went back to the Middle East to facilitate the Syrian – Israeli negotiations on the disengagement agreement. He embarked on another shuttle, this time more exhausting than the Egyptian – Israeli with hostile demonstrations in Jerusalem.

One important fact was to avert the Soviets from intruding into the negotiations in a futile manner. Both Egypt and Syria needed to understand that their own interests were best served by American mediation<sup>103</sup>. The Soviets insisted that the negotiations be worked out

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<sup>102</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 147

<sup>103</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.732



under joint U.S – Soviet in Geneva, but Asad favored going to Geneva only after Kissinger had settled the primary features of an agreement, he preferred to negotiate without his Soviet ally.<sup>104</sup> Any direct participation of the Soviets would reduce the chances of peace in the region. Both Sadat and Assad wanted to keep them out and at least Washington keep them updated about parts of the process without getting into details.

Assad would not negotiate an Israeli withdrawal only to the October 6 pre-war line. One other debatable point was Quneitra, the old capital of the Golan Heights, a piece of land seized by Israel in 1967. The Israeli cabinet agreed to give back a part of the city, with a proposition to divide it into three zones, one Israeli, one for the United Nations and one for Syria accordingly. For the next weeks, Kissinger shuttled back and forth striving to bridge the gap. The easternmost section would be given back to Syria, the central part would be converted into a UN zone and the western part would remain under Israeli annexation. Assad began to discuss a line close to that proposed by Israel. Quneitra and the three adjacent hills now emerged as the main complication.

In Damascus it seemed that the gap could not be bridged. Kissinger decided to leave the negotiations. At the last moment Assad dropped his firmness on keeping the hills west of Quneitra under his control and urged Kissinger to keep searching for an agreement. Israel could keep the hills if there was guarantee that no heavy weaponry able to attack Quneitra would be placed there. Problems on force limitations arose. A wearing stalemate was imminent and Kissinger threatened to leave again. Assad had changed his position to accept a large UN unit and a broader buffer zone of ten kilometers and limited zones of fifteen kilometers. He verbally pledged that the Syrian side of the disengagement line would not become a source of terrorist attacks against Israel. Finally, Syria and Israel reached agreement on the terms of disengagement and on May 31, Syrian and Israeli military delegations signed the documents required in Geneva. The force-limitation agreement stated a UN buffer zone equidistant at the post-1967 line, containing the city of Quneitra. In ten-kilometer zones east and west of the buffer zone, each party could position armaments. The three zones would be inspected by the UN Disengagement Observer Forces (UNDOF) and U.S. aircraft would execute reconnaissance flights like the Egyptian-Israeli accord. There was

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<sup>104</sup> Kissinger, *Years of upheaval*, p.732

also agreement on the exchange of prisoners and both sides accepted that disengagement was a step toward peace based on UN Resolution 338<sup>105</sup>

The disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria was another successful step in Nixon – Kissinger diplomacy in the Middle East. Nixon, despite his weariness by the Watergate scandal, decided to organize his trip to the Middle East. His first stop was Cairo and Alexandria and then Saudi Arabia, Damascus, where diplomatic relations were restored and Israel, where he met the new Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzhak Rabin.

Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy eased Arab-Israeli tensions and put Egypt on a path toward permanent peace with Israel, but it also marked an effective end of Soviet-American cooperation in the Middle East. It further showed that détente could have its limits, as Kissinger had no intention of involving the Soviets in the Middle East negotiations. The Soviet Union faced the weakening of its strategic position in the Arab world to the advantage of the United States and so had no reason to side with Washington in the conclusion of the peace agreements that would take other Arab states further into the American sphere of influence. On the contrary, the Soviets displayed hostility in the mid- to late 1970s to retrieve the strategic land they had lost in the Middle East as a result of détente. In 1972, Moscow and the Baath party in Iraq signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and sponsored Baghdad in the nationalization of its oil. It later provided Iraq with enough arms to increase the size of its armed troops by 1975 and in 1978 the Soviets supported the coup in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen<sup>106</sup>

## **7. The Ford Presidency and the Arab – Israeli conflict**

Gerald Ford, a non – elected president, came to the Oval Office in August 9, 1974, after Nixon's resign. Foreign policy was not his area of expertise, so Kissinger would still remain in charge and the new President basically consulted and endorsed Kissinger's initiatives. Kissinger came back to a step-by-step diplomacy, as the finest means to maintain an active peace process. Another major point was to strengthen diplomacy with Jordan as a way of weakening the radical side of the PLO. Kissinger would also continue to press for a

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<sup>105</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 152

<sup>106</sup> Daigle, *The limits of détente*, p.345

second step between Egypt and Israel and tackle the thorny issue of the West Bank after the Syrian – Israeli disengagement.

Ford and Kissinger clarified the Soviets that notwithstanding Nixon's resignation, the United States still aspired to détente. Ford entered office with U.S.-Soviet relations on very shaky ground, though. The 1973 Yom Kippur War in the Middle East had nearly led to the massive military involvement of the superpowers.<sup>107</sup>

Even though an early cease fire had been applied to end conflict in the Yom Kippur War, Kissinger's ongoing shuttle diplomacy was displaying little progress. The Arab League met in Rabat in late October 1974. There, the moderates – with Saudi Arabia and Syria among the strongest advocates - endorsed an independent Palestinian state "*on any liberated Palestinian land*" from Israeli occupation and recognized the PLO as the "*sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people*"<sup>108</sup>. This meant that the Arabs authorised the PLO and not Jordan as the negotiator for the future of the West Bank and Gaza. Appointing the PLO to negotiate for the West Bank was reasonable from the perspective of intra-Arab politics, but it was also disastrous. By cutting off the possibility of Israeli-Jordanian talks, the Arabs lost the opportunity to gain Israeli agreement to withdraw from the West Bank.<sup>109</sup> The Rabat summit, followed soon by the appearance of PLO Executive Committee chairman Yasser Arafat at the United Nations in November and removed Jordan from the negotiations, suddenly brought the Palestinians to the front and center of the Arab-Israeli conflict and made the Palestinian question "*inevitable*".<sup>110</sup> This was a setback to Kissinger's interim diplomatic efforts, since he was trying to avoid resolving the Palestinian question and he was unprepared for this turn of the events. The summit's decision, the surging oil prices and Arafat's speech in the UN General Assembly in November undermined Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy. To gain any type of agreement – a "*success*" for Washington- he turned to Sinai again employing his strategy of partial agreements between Israel and Egypt. Egypt wanted

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<sup>107</sup> Greene, John Robert. et al. (2017) *Gerald Ford: Foreign affairs*, Miller Center. Available at: <https://millercenter.org/president/ford/foreign-affairs> (Accessed: October 9, 2022).

<sup>108</sup> "Arab League Summit - Rabat 1974 - English Text.", ECF, [https://ecf.org.il/media\\_items/515](https://ecf.org.il/media_items/515). (Accessed: November 20, 2022)

<sup>109</sup> Spiegel, *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict*, p.288

<sup>110</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 159 and Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 806

Israel to pull back beyond the strategically important Mitla and Giddi passes and to quit the Abu Rudeis and Ras Sudr oil fields, which were providing Israel with almost fifty percent of its total oil demands. Israel necessitated that Egypt renounced the state of belligerency, that the new agreement last for long and that Israeli retreat not include the passes or the oil fields.

Kissinger embarked on another trip to the Middle East in March 1975. He had mistakenly figured that an Egyptian-Israeli accord would be possible and as a result he was disappointed with the adamant Israeli stance on Egypt's non-belligerence, something that Sadat was not willing to further negotiate. Israel also rejected all Egypt's demands and Kissinger left the country, not having extracted concessions first and announcing the suspension of the negotiations.

This miscalculation led to the policy of "*reassessment*". In March, Ford announced to the leaders of both parties of a reassessment in the Middle East policies. "*Reassessment*", practically meant cancelling or suspending additional aid to Israel, which in fact was a powerful effort to pressure Israel. Between March and September 1975, the United States refused to settle any new arms agreements with Israel. That did not mean abandoning Israel, but Washington wanted an Egyptian – Israeli agreement and Rabin was aware of that.<sup>111</sup> Many pro – Israeli American supporters were upset by the announced reassessments. On May 21, seventy-six U.S. pro – Israeli senators sent a letter to Ford collectively urging him to endorse Israel's appeal for \$2.59 billion in military and economic aid. The reassessment alienated the pro-Israeli side in the United States and the relationship of the two sides reached a new low.

In the beginning of June, Ford met with Sadat in Salzburg where they discussed economic and military aid and agreed to proceed to a limited agreement in Sinai. By mid-June Israel also sought an agreement. Step-by-step diplomacy, thus, had been resumed. After talks on the Israeli line, the passes, the U.S – Israeli military relationship and oil supplies, the final points were worked out and the Sinai II agreement was signed in Geneva in September, 1975. This was the Sinai II Interim Agreement. With the completion of Sinai II, Kissinger's active involvement in the Middle East, a product of the October War, effectively came to an

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<sup>111</sup> Stein, Kenneth W, 1999. *Heroic Diplomacy. Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab- Israeli Peace*, London: Routledge, p.177.

end. The disengagement agreement would mark Egypt's passage from dependence on the Soviet Union to partnership with the United States.<sup>112</sup>

Kissinger and Israel concluded that the next step with Egypt should be a final peace agreement and the same should be realized on the Jordan front. Also, as regards the Palestinians, the U.S policy assured that it would not recognise or negotiate with the PLO until the PLO recognized Israel's right to exist and accepted UN Resolutions 242 and 338.<sup>113</sup> Egypt was promised economic aid and presses towards a Syrian – Israeli agreement. In late October 1975, Sadat was the first Egyptian leader to visit the United States. The administration agreed to lift the arms embargo and provide military and economic assistance to Egypt. Added to that, in mid- March Sadat announced the termination of Egypt – Soviet treaty of friendship and cooperation, signed in 1971.

Israeli Prime Minister Rabin visited Washington in January 1976. Kissinger and the prime minister agreed to explore future deals with Egypt, Syria and perhaps Jordan to end the state of belligerency in exchange for Israeli withdrawals from a major part of the Sinai and the Golan Heights and perhaps the West Bank. After that, Ford approved a list of arms for Israel.

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<sup>112</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.589

<sup>113</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 169

## 8. The Carter administration and the road to Camp David Accords.

Governor of Georgia Jimmy Carter, a Democrat, won the 1976 elections over Ford and became the thirty-ninth President of the United States. He had little experience with foreign affairs but during the time he was elected there was no immediate crisis in the Middle East, thus, no emergency actions to be taken. However, the new administration was in favour of a new Mideast policy agenda and a substantial U.S role in the negotiations. As Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was selected and Zbigniew Brzezinski as National Security Advisor. These two, along with Carter, were the key decision makers during Carter's presidency and agreed that it was the right time for negotiations to break free of the political gridlocks in the Arab – Israeli conflict.<sup>114</sup> The Arab – Israeli topic was dealt with high priority and at first broad principles were agreed upon before their implementation. As for the Soviet Union, it would be briefed upon negotiations but with no actual involvement, just as in the previous Mideast policy agenda. Quickly, though, Carter promoted cooperation with the Soviet Union and proof of this cooperation was a joint communique about *"achieving, as soon as possible, a just and lasting settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict"*.<sup>115</sup>

Rabin, King Hussein of Jordan, Sadat and the Prince Fahd of Saudi Arabia were all invited to Washington to meet the new president and the idea of a conference between Carter and President Asad of Syria was also suggested. They all consented to reconvene a Geneva meeting in September 1977 and that the main focus of the talks should entail the nature of peace, the Palestinian question and delineation of borders and territories (Israel's withdrawal from conquered territories). On a prior level, the Palestinian delegation in the conference was a thorny issue and Vance proposed an Arab single delegation including the PLO. Israel, once again, would not accept any PLO delegation, since it heralded Israel's destruction. However, if the PLO was pressured upon accepting Resolution 242, there would be some change in attitude. Carter supported the notion that Israel would eventually have to see eye to eye with the Palestinians. In his speech, he also called for the term *"Palestinian*

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<sup>114</sup> Jensehaugen, Jorgen, 2018. *Arab-Israeli Diplomacy Under Carter: The US, Israel and the Palestinians*. London: I.B. TAURIS, p.35.

<sup>115</sup> Reich, Bernard, 1984. *United States Middle East Policy in the Carter and Reagan Administrations*. Australian Outlook, 38(2), pp.72-80.

*homeland*". "*Homeland*" brought about reaction from the Israeli lobby and domestic problems for the administration, whereas the PLO was encouraged.

Carter's aim was to promote a comprehensive approach towards Middle East. With the support of the CIA and the State Department, the administration committed to formulating a policy of full influence in an effort to achieve a settlement.<sup>116</sup> However, the Palestinian dilemma was obvious since the beginning and central to the conflict. Carter wanted to involve the Palestinians into the peace process, but they would not meet the US demands, such as UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and recognizing Israel's right to exist as a state. On the other side, Israel would not negotiate with the PLO for the latter reason, even though Palestinians were to be seen as independent representatives of the Palestinian state. Furthermore, until then, US policy restricted the communication with the PLO, as long as it did not meet the demands. This restriction, finally, led to forming indirect communication channels between the new administration and the PLO.

One other element of Carter's policy was the inclusion of the Soviet Union. Contrasting to Kissinger's policy and Brzezinski's conviction, Carter desired a more active role for the Soviets. The Palestinian and Soviet early participation in the negotiations was debatable in the administration and caused tensions between Brzezinski and Vance. Even so, Middle Eastern trips were set off, with most states agreeing on an overall peace agreement and a conference in Geneva. The next phase was the visits of Israeli and Arab leaders in Washington in spring of 1977 except for the Palestinians. However, the PLO leader, Arafat, attempted to establish direct communication lines with Washington, but in the light of U.S position, this could not be realised.

In April 1977, Yitzhak Rabin resigned. Menachem Begin from the Likud party came to power, a game – changing for the U.S administration. Begin defended an anti- Palestinian rhetoric and favoured an expansion of the settlements and no withdrawal from the West Bank. Due to this rhetoric, the PLO and the Arab leaders became doubtful on an effective solution. In July, Begin visited Washington and set the Israeli points. The only point that saw eye to eye with the U.S was the reconvening of the Geneva. The other points were the following: only Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and perhaps Lebanon, would be allowed to join in.

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<sup>116</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 36.

He clarified that there could be no prerequisites for Geneva, that Jerusalem would continue as Israel's undivided capital, that there would be no PLO participation and no "*so-called Palestinian state*" in "*Judea, Samaria [and] the Gaza Strip*"<sup>117</sup>. His insistence was that Israel would remain on the Golan Heights, with possible withdrawal on that front.<sup>118</sup> When he returned to Israel, he reaffirmed this hard-line position and approved another three settlements on the West Bank. Carter condemned this action and the comprehensive approach found itself again in stalemate. A Geneva layout that would serve Israel, the Arabs and the Russians could not be designed.

### **I. The administration going around in circles**

In September 1977 the administration goals consisted of written drafts of peace treaties from each party – a Sadat's proposal, the Palestinian representation to the Geneva conference and the active role of the Soviet Union. Regarding the treaties, Sadat had proposed in August that each state would draft a peace treaty, however, the Palestinians were by definition excluded from the process, since they were not considered a state. Most Arab states highlighted Israel's withdrawal to 1967 lines and that the refugee problem needed to be solved. Syria, though, did not provide a treaty but pointed out the thorny issue of the representation of the PLO. Since no official contact could be made, Carter used the Syrians as a line of communication with the PLO.

In October, a U.S – Soviet joint statement urging for comprehensive peace and inviting all the parties, including the Palestinians, to enter into negotiations was issued in October and the conference was scheduled for the end of the year. The communique stressed Israeli withdrawal to 1967 lines and thus, caused a great deal of reactions from Israel and pro- Israeli groups domestically. A few days later Carter met with Dayan in Washington, he was surprised by the Israeli negative reaction. After lengthy negotiations, a joint U.S – Israeli statement was revised and would present the ground for the Geneva conference. Six principles were drafted: a unified Arab delegation, including the Palestinians would act as envoy, the Arab states would be formed into working groups and one working group consisting of Israel, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians would discuss the issue of the West Bank and Gaza.

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<sup>117</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 55.

<sup>118</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 55.



Furthermore, the problem of the Arab and Jewish refugees would also be debated. The negotiations would be conferred upon the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and last but not least, the initial terms of reference would remain in force.<sup>119</sup> The working paper did not manage to initiate talks, though. Neither Israel nor the Arabs supported it, only Jordan and Egypt accepted it. Finally, both the communique with the Soviet Union and the working paper were withdrawn, since there was no common ground for neither of the two. The joint communique had satisfied the Soviet Union and the PLO but upset Israel, the US domestic section and Egypt.<sup>120</sup> The other way around happened with the working paper.

In the meantime, a channel of communication had been opened between Israel and Egypt. Both considered an option for a separate peace treaty and until then the U.S administration was kept in the dark. In November, it seems that Sadat took matters into his own hands, starting by stressing in his speech the urgency to reach peace with Israel and that he himself was "*prepared to go their very home, to the Knesset itself and discuss things with them.*".<sup>121</sup> Ten days after his speech, he paid a visit to Jerusalem, the first time for an Egyptian leader. In his speech to the Knesset he referred to the non-negotiable Israeli territorial withdrawal to the 1967 lines, he said that he had come to Israel "*not to forge a unilateral agreement between Egypt and Israel, seek a partial peace,*" nor to sign "*a third disengagement agreement.*" In his speech, Sadat mentioned the Palestinians or the Palestinian problem no less than a dozen times. Claiming that he undertook this trip on behalf of the Egyptian people, the Arab nation, and the Palestinian people, he affirmed his will to live in peace with Israel, to accept Israel as an existing state and to allow Israel to benefit from any guarantees it sought for its security. He spoke of "*the need for Palestinian self-determination including their right to establish their own state*".<sup>122</sup> Begin accepted Sadat's condition of full withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula but he also developed a counter-proposal concerning the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza, which he conferred with President Carter in Washington D.C., with Sadat in Egypt and then presented to the Knesset in the end of December 1977. Begin's proposal put forward the idea of establishing self – rule

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<sup>119</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 79.

<sup>120</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 87.

<sup>121</sup> Jensehaugen, *Arab – Israeli Diplomacy under Carter*, p. 89.

<sup>122</sup> Stein, Kenneth W, 1999. *Heroic Diplomacy. Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab- Israeli Peace*, London: Routledge, p.226.

arrangements for the Palestinians living in these areas, implemented by Israel. The eleven – member Palestinian government, which would be elected, would possess administrative authority, but not authority on land.<sup>123</sup> Israeli forces would be accountable for maintaining security and public order. This proposal set an allocated time of a five-year interim period. Both leaders insisted on a process leading to peace treaties and the Geneva conference. On the whole, this political turn of events brought about a new reality, which the Carter administration found difficult to adjust. Furthermore, it had reduced the U.S role as the mediator in the Arab- Israeli conflict and made the comprehensive approach almost impossible. Nevertheless, the U.S kept a subtler stance to the matter and in a way, adopted parts of Begin's proposal. For America, self-rule would pave the way for something more tangible, like Palestinian self-determination.

## II. The Camp David Summit

The new year entered and half of it went by with no apparent solution or flexibility, moving from stalemate to stalemate. After almost a year of diplomatic efforts, an Arab- Israeli settlement was unable to reach. Begin would not yield to a commitment on the Palestinian issue and Sadat, after his solo initiative to visit Jerusalem, had been isolated in the Arab world. Syria and the PLO had toughened their stance against Egypt as well. This impasse also caused a drawback for the American side, since the comprehensive peace policy was falling through. One thing was certain, the deadlock the talks had come to. The Carter administration desperately needed a way to set the peace process in motion and met with both Sadat in February and Begin in March 1978. He pressed Begin to accept Resolution 242 and to clarify the post – interim period of Palestinian self – government in the West Bank and Gaza. Begin did not accept any participation of the Palestinians and was determined to keep political control over the region.

In the meantime, an arms sale dispute entered the political scene. In 1975, Kissinger had promised Israel advanced equipment and Israel had attained permissions to purchase. Secondly, Kissinger had also promised the Saudis an update fighter equipment, but the

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<sup>123</sup> Singer, Joel, 2019. *Developing the Concept of Palestinian Autonomy*. [online] *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. Available at: <<https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/developing-the-concept-of-palestinian-autonomy/>> [Accessed 16 October 2022].

process was stuck in bureaucracy although Carter had agreed to the purchase. Thirdly, Egypt sought a new fighter aircraft as a reward for distancing itself from the Soviet Union. The problem to this triple arms sales package was to persuade Congress to consent to the deal. Furthermore, opposition soon emerged from groups led by AIPAC, which objected to the possible sale to Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They supported that the Saudis were unreliable (due to their participation in the 1973 oil embargo) and that generally posed a threat to Israel. Ultimately, the president consented to the sale of arms to Israel, giving assurance that the U.S would not sell ammunition to the Saudis, which could prove threatening to Israel. Thus, the arms sale package deal proceeded, but pro – Israeli support for Carter declined.

A Geneva conference was not reconvened, but between 5 and 17 September, Carter, Begin, Sadat and their delegates, gathered in Camp David to produce a framework for peace. Both the Israeli and Egyptian delegates worked separately with the Americans and Carter would lead the whole process. On the first days, two trilateral meetings were held, where Sadat presented his firm plan which demanded complete Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories in 1967, redistribution of Jerusalem, Palestinian self-determination and the right for the Palestinian refugees to go back to their homeland. As expected, Sadat's proposal infuriated Begin, who announced that the plan was unacceptable for Israel. For the next ten days Carter met separately with both leaders, announcing a draft peace proposal aiming mainly at an Egyptian – Israeli peace with secondary linked process to the West Bank and Gaza. Begin's stance was still unwavering: the Palestinian self- determination issue was excluded, there was no discussion on giving up the West Bank, Gaza and the settlements to the Sinai and the five – year interim period was still negotiable, although Israel agreed for her forces to remain in the West Bank after the transition period. This firmness caused Sadat to threaten that his whole team would depart from the talks, but Carter managed to persuade him to stay, promising of some pressure upon Israel. If Sadat left, the U.S – Egyptian relationship would be terminated and he did not want to take that risk. Since Begin would not concede to the West Bank, there should be a withdrawal of the settlements in Sinai and thus, an Israeli- Egyptian peace would be in place. After mounting pressure upon him, he conceded to submit the issue to the Knesset, which would decide on the settlements and withdrawal in Sinai. Regarding Jerusalem, the three states stated their positions, with the U.S simply recapitulating the location of the U.N forces.

After almost twelve days of strenuous discussions and negotiations, the Camp David Accords were signed on September 17, 1978 by Sadat and Begin at the White House, under Carter's monitoring. The "Framework for the Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel" included a gradual Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, including Israeli settlements and airbases and the use of them only for civilian purposes, the complete implementation of Egyptian sovereignty up to the internationally accepted border between Egypt and mandated Palestine<sup>124</sup>, in exchange for normalized diplomatic and commercial relations between Cairo and Jerusalem. In addition, U.N. units and limited buffer zones would separate the armies of the two states.

The second *"Framework for peace in the Middle East, agreed at Camp David"* established the context for settling the West Bank and Gaza Strip issue. Under its terms, a five-year transition self-governing authority would be established by a board consisting of Israel, Egypt and Jordan. The Palestinians of West Bank and Gaza might be included in the Egyptian and Jordanian delegations. Arrangements for full autonomy in these two territories would be made by an administrative council, *"freely elected by the inhabitants of these areas to replace the existing Israeli military government"*.<sup>125</sup> The five-year transition period would begin as long as the administrative council is established and inaugurated. Security during the transition period would be provided in three ways. First, the Israeli armed forces in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip would withdraw to *"specified security locations"*. Secondly, *"a strong local police force"* with citizens of Gaza and the West Bank, formed under the self-governing administration, would be established and be in cooperation with Israeli, Egyptian and Jordanian officers. Thirdly, the borders were to be jointly patrolled by Israeli and Jordanian forces.<sup>126</sup>

In the third year of the five-year transition period, negotiations to regulate the ultimate status of West Bank and Gaza would be initiated among Egypt, Israel, Jordan and

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<sup>124</sup> Quandt, William B, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*. 2nd ed., Brookings Institution Press, 2016, p. 396.

<sup>125</sup> *Framework for Peace in the Middle East and Framework for a Conclusion of a Peace Treaty between Egypt and Israel (Camp David Accords), 1978, United Nations Peacemaker*, <https://peacemaker.un.org/egyptisrael-frameworkforpeace78>

<sup>126</sup> Spiegel, Steven L., 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.360.

the elected representatives of the citizens of West Bank and Gaza.<sup>127</sup> Two committees were to be formed, the first, with representatives of all parties, was to negotiate on the final status of the West Bank and Gaza regions and the second, with representatives of Israel and Jordan, Gaza and the West Bank, to organise the peace treaty between Israel and Jordan. In the solutions, the legitimate rights of the Palestinians would also be recognized.

### III. The Aftermath of the Accords

The overall post- summit climate satisfied Carter. The reactions from the public, the press and Congress was optimistic. He had managed to be the first U.S President to bring together the Egyptian and the Israeli leaders to the negotiating table. However, his policy had to be adjusted to the events from the Middle Eastern front, not always easily manageable. This took a toll on his initial ambitions and philosophies on the issue, since a compromise should be delivered, which needed less grand and controversial ideas. A compromise that would be accepted by both conflicting parties, of course. The Camp Accords had established a basis for a Mideast peace treaty and the aim of the administration was to put the accords into practice and ensure that peace would be permanent between Egypt and Israel. They showed that diplomacy and commitment can bear results. The next thing on the list was the negotiations on the autonomy talks for the Palestinians, which would lead to a broader peace in the Middle East.

For the Arabs, though, the accords were unacceptable. They did not consent to an agreement that still left the Palestinian issue unresolved. In the Arab League summit in November, they denounced the Camp Accords, for not including the Palestinians. King Hussein was also cautious of the agreements and the Saudis would not support them, despite Carter's impression otherwise. Begin, in addition, adamantly resisted to halt the expansion of settlements on the West Bank for the three-month duration of the negotiations and Carter continued to put pressure on Begin to adhere to the freeze on settlements. Begin's reply to the U.S President was that he had agreed not to create new settlements, but never conceded to halt the expansion of the old ones in those three months. Another point that he still held an intransigent position on was the issue of linkage. Since Camp David, Begin refused to

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<sup>127</sup> Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*, p. 393.

concede to a linkage between withdrawal and the Palestinian autonomy talks. Carter was not in the position to challenge Begin, so there was not any serious pressure from the U.S on the issue, he was rushing for the negotiations to move forward.

This was not the issue, though. The deadline passed and the talks were at a stalemate again. With rapid developments occurring in the Middle East, such as the imminent Iranian revolution, Carter opted for securing an Egyptian – Israeli peace rather than a Palestinian solution. With negotiations dragging on for months, due to Begin's adamant position and after alterations on the frameworks, the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was finally signed in March, 1979. The Palestinian issue continued to be on the sidelines and the only provision was that the negotiations for self-rule would begin within a month after the peace treaty accord. Washington still failed to negotiate with the PLO and the issue remained in limbo. During Carter's last year of tenure, events in the Middle East – Soviet Union's invasion in Afghanistan and the shift of focus to the Persian Gulf areas - moved the administration's attention away from the Arab – Israeli conflict, although it still sought to finalize the application of the Camp Accords. After four years as President, Carter left office in January 1981 having secured the Egyptian – Israeli peace treaty, but not a broader Arab – Israeli peace. From a U.S. perspective, though, the peace treaty had been a major achievement.

## **9. The Reagan administration's approach to the Middle East: "The second Cold War"**

Ronald Reagan was elected President of the United States in November 1980. His administration's policy contained the following ideologies. First, firm anti-communism and antagonism to the Soviet Union expansion. Second, this expansion would be tackled by an anti – Soviet coalition in the region and third, U.S military active presence to secure its effectiveness. The Reagan administration saw the Soviets and communism as responsible, a "source of evil"<sup>128</sup>, for U.S. problems worldwide ("hot spots in the world")<sup>129</sup> and therefore

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<sup>128</sup> Lawson, Fred. *The Reagan Administration in the Middle East*. MERIP Reports, no. 128, Nov. 1984, p.29.

<sup>129</sup> Quandt, *Peace Process*, p.248.

was more prepared to use a considerable amount of economic and military force to challenge Russian aims.

Ronald Reagan began his presidency with an impressive coalition of domestic support on Middle East issues. The administration supported a "*strategic consensus*", namely to "*pursue policies with the dual aim of fighting communism and bolstering Arab states*",<sup>130</sup> which in turn would strengthen U.S interests in the area. The goal was a "*geopolitical grouping*"<sup>131</sup> of the states in the Middle Eastern area, from Pakistan to Egypt and Turkey, to join forces and be supported by the U.S to oppose the threat of a Soviet expansion. The Arabs and Israelis were seen as means to resolve new tensions in the region and therefore, the administration planned to provide incentives to both of them so they would join the effort to block the Russian threat. Israel was seen as an important strategic partner to the United States and Washington would offer the Israelis unprecedented cooperation and increased military assistance. This *consensus / grouping* was translated into economic and military assistance, such as the deployment of a sophisticated radar aircraft system (AWACS) to Saudi Arabia and anti- aircraft missiles to Jordan or three billion aid to Pakistan. Saudi Arabia was regarded as anti-Communist, a friend of the United States and supported major businesses active in the area. As for the Egyptian – Israeli peace treaty, President Reagan, at the beginning of his tenure, declared that peace would be finally realized in Middle East and urged Israel and Egypt to implement the treaty. As the events turned up in the following years, though, Reagan eventually did not pressure for a total Arab – Israeli peace process. Efforts were made for a policy towards an agreement but until then, a comprehensive U.S policy had not been formulated.

The AWACS sell to Saudi Arabia created a debate with the Israeli side and it was one of the points of crisis and disagreement with Reagan. Strained relations continued after Israel's bombing of an Iraqi nuclear reactor in June and retaliated terrorist attacks in Beirut

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<sup>130</sup> Anziska, Seth, 2018, *Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p. 166.

<sup>131</sup> Reich, Bernard, 1984. *United States Middle East Policy in the Carter and Reagan Administrations*. Australian Outlook, vol. 38, no. 2, p. 75.

in July 1981, resulting in the suspension of the F-16 aircraft shipment from the U.S. Despite a tense and electrified atmosphere, the two states signed a Memorandum of Understanding for increased military collaboration to be deployed against Soviet – driven forces in the area. The crisis did not subside however, because in December, Begin extended Israeli law on the Golan Heights, in context of annexation and suppressed Palestinian activity in the occupied territories.

### **I. The Lebanon War in 1982**

In early 1981, Israeli – PLO conflicts had occurred on Israel's northern border and Reagan appointed the veteran diplomat Philip Habib to work out a cease-fire and for a while, the hostilities halted. In the presidential elections in Lebanon in 1982, the Israeli- driven government of Gemayel was brought into power and the ultimate goal of Israeli leaders was to propel the PLO and Syrian forces out of Lebanon. The pretext appeared in June 1982, in the form of a terrorist attack against the Israeli ambassador in London. Instantly, on the third of June, Israel initiated bombings against PLO targets in Lebanon and in retaliation, the PLO struck towns in northern Israel. Israel invaded Lebanon three days later and on the eleventh of June, they reached Beirut. West Beirut was cut off and PLO military and political forces were trapped. Washington did not approve of these Israel actions and there were protests among Congress and Jewish groups. Habib was trying for a cease-fire and arranging the PLO to evacuate the city, while Israel was heavily bombarding West Beirut. The U.S, then began taking up a more active role, first with the deployment of U.S Marines in a multinational military peacekeeping force to maintain the cease-fire and supervise the evacuation of PLO from the city and second with the "*Reagan Plan*".

The expelled PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat, arrived in Greece, where he was welcomed by the Prime Minister, George Papandreu. The two leaders stated their discontent on the situation in Beirut and support to the Palestinians from the Greek Prime Minister. After Arafat's visit, PLO delegation offices were established in Athens.

In late summer of 1982, the Reagan administration under Secretary of State George Shultz, proposed a new peace initiative on the Middle East process, focusing on the Palestinian question. Reagan would not recognise the PLO, but, after the PLO fighters left Beirut, he secretly promised to negotiate as a representative of Palestinians to compensate



them for Israel's invasion. The PLO's and the Soviet Union's roles were weakened and the Russians did not much to assist Syria in the war. Israel's military might was fervently demonstrated and the Arab states recognised that fighting Israel was no longer an option, guerrilla wars served no one, only through negotiation would the Palestinians achieve an agreement and stop the expansion of Israeli settlements in the area. The "*Fresh start*" peace initiative was announced in September 1982 and aimed to bring Jordan and moderate Palestinians in direct negotiations with Israel in order to find a resolution for West Bank and Gaza. Reagan's position on the core elements of the Arab – Israeli conflict was the following: he opposed Israeli annexation of the West Bank and a Palestinian state. Rather, he suggested a self – governing authority in West Bank under Palestinian control, linked to Jordan. Jerusalem should remain undivided. Begin instantly rejected the proposal and the Arab states, in their annual summit in Fez, restated that the PLO was the only legitimate representative of the Palestinians and King Hussein, eventually, announced in April 1983 that there would be no participation and no negotiation in the peace process, since he failed to reach an agreement with Arafat. The matter remained as so and the Reagan initiative failed to handle either the Palestinians or Lebanon.

In Lebanon, after the departure of the multinational force, Israel forces under the command of Sharon moved into West Beirut, despite the cease-fire and to the southern camps of Sabra and Shatila, killing thousands of Palestinian civilians. Strong reactions and protests developed in Israel and by American Jews in the U.S. The administration's reaction to the massacres was to restructure the multinational military force and send the Marines back to Beirut to safeguard the refugee camps and support the Lebanese government, as well as an agreement in May on the withdrawal of Israeli and Syrian forces from Lebanon became a priority. Syria, did not accept these conditions and now rearmed with upgraded Soviet equipment and would not withdraw voluntarily from Lebanon. After a terrorist attack on U.S Embassy in Beirut by Hezbollah in April, Shultz travelled to the Middle East in May 1983 and negotiated an Israeli – Lebanese agreement. The accord concluded the state of war between the two countries, created liaison offices, established the basis for discussions on the normalization of relations, created a security zone in southern Lebanon where Israeli and Lebanese patrols would operate for at least two years and included the withdrawal of Israeli troops. But the agreement would be effected only if Syria also agreed to remove its troops

from Lebanon. However, Assad declared that the accord merely ratified Israel's gains in Lebanon and refused to withdraw.<sup>132</sup> With backing – up from the Soviet Union, Assad undermined the accord and assisted Lebanese factions against the Gemayel government and PLO rebels against Arafat.

The war on Lebanon had a toll on Israel's economy and psychology and Begin himself. He resigned in the fall of 1983 and his replacement was Yitzhak Shamir. That time, Israeli troops were gradually withdrawing from Lebanon. Syrians factions took control of the evacuated areas and targeted U.S troops at the Beirut airport. The fatal attack against the United States occurred in October, 1983, when terrorists bombarded the Marines' garrisons at the airport of Beirut, killing U.S. servicemen. Suspecting that Hezbollah was behind the attack, Reagan authorized air strikes against Hezbollah's leadership. Even so, the attack on the barracks brought about a reassessment of the Lebanon policy. Finally, the U.S Marine forces were withdrawn to the U.S vessels waiting ashore.<sup>133</sup>

However, Reagan's challenges in the Middle East did not conclude with the withdrawal of U.S. troops. Initiating in late 1983, anti-American terrorist groups intensified attacks on the United States. Shiite terrorists in 1984 and 1985 took hostage seven Americans living in Lebanon, aiming at pressing for a change in U.S. policy towards the Middle East, which the terrorists considered anti-Arab and pro-Israel. Reagan wanted to free the hostages, but the administration was overtly adamant that they would not negotiate with terrorists. In 1985, terrorists also seriously attacked Americans. Relations between the two countries had already deteriorated after Libyan leader Muammar el-Qaddafi's threatening Americans in 1981. The conflict flared again in 1985 and 1986<sup>134</sup>, where Libya was responsible for placing a bomb in a Berlin club that killed American citizens, among others. In April, 1986, American planes bombed Tripoli. In the mid – eighties, the administration set forth a combat against terrorism, stemming from Iran, Syria and Libya.

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<sup>132</sup> Spiegel, Steven L., 1985. *The Other Arab-Israeli conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy, from Truman to Reagan*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p.425.

<sup>133</sup> Cannon, Lou. *Ronald Reagan: Foreign Affairs*. Miller Center, 11 July 2017, [millercenter.org/president/reagan/foreign-affairs](http://millercenter.org/president/reagan/foreign-affairs).

<sup>134</sup> Cannon, 2017, *Ronald Reagan: Foreign Affairs*.

Reagan's second term was stained by the Iran – Contra Affair in 1986. Openings to Iran resulted in an "*weapons for hostages*" policy. The White House, through Israel, initiated a flow of weaponries to Iran in exchange for the liberation of American hostages from Lebanon. The money from these arms dealings were diverted to the Contras, anti-communist guerrilla groups in the Nicaraguan revolution, against Congress's prohibition. The political scandal that emerged, cause a crumble in American credibility to the Middle East, as well as divisions within the administration, weakening the president.

For the remainder of Reagan's second term until the elections in 1988, the Arab – Israeli peace process saw no significant or game – changing developments. The outburst of the first Palestinian Intifada – or "*shaking off*" in Arabic- in Israeli – occupied Gaza strip, nearly brought the engaging parties into negotiations on an international conference under the Shultz proposal for peace talks, but eventually only Egypt endorsed the idea.

In general, though, since the late – eighties, the idea of direct communications between the Reagan administration and the PLO was gaining ground. Two reasons were behind these actions. The first was seen as a way to put a halt to the aggravation of the Israeli – PLO situation and the second was a reaction to King Hussein abandoning the responsibility of the West Bank. Two diplomatic efforts were made to the issue. The first was between the administration and the PLO and the second was a Swedish initiative including American Jewish leaders and PLO representatives. These two diplomatic channels were leading up events to the 1993 Oslo accords. For now, a little before the end of 1988, Arafat announced that he condemned terrorism, recognised Israel as a sovereign state and authorised the peace conferences with Israel. The White House granted that the PLO leader met the conditions needed and with Reagan's consent, in December, the United States lifted the ban on negotiations with the PLO.

## 10. The Bush Presidency and the road towards the Oslo Accords

President Bush's approach of foreign affairs was conservative and pragmatic. He did not blast into new engagements or policy changes but reconsidered the administration's policies.

On August 2, 1990, Iraq invaded Kuwait. The United States and Soviet Union delivered a joint statement condemning Iraq's actions, marking the beginning of an unprecedented cooperation between the two superpowers. When the invasion began, Arab countries joined the United States into a coalition of thirty- five states to warn Iraq to leave Kuwait or deal with repercussions. When Saudi Arabia warned of a possible invasion after Iraqi troops building up on the border, President Bush announced the placement of U.S. troops to defend the desert kingdom. He also declared the four principles of "*Operation Desert Shield*": the direct and full withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait and its compliance with the United Nations resolutions, the restoration of the Kuwaiti government, enhancing the security and stability of the Middle East.<sup>135</sup> The administration feared that Israel's involvement would alienate the Arab countries that had already agreed to join the alliance so Israel stayed out of the coalition. It also vowed not to retaliate if attacked and allow the coalition's greater resources to deal with Hussein. After unsuccessful efforts to persuade Hussein to pull his forces from Kuwait, the administration turned to military force. In order to gain domestic support for the imminent military act, it turned to Congress for authorization. On January 12, Congress authorized the deployment of troops against Iraq, a key victory for President Bush.

"*Operation Desert Storm*" was activated on January 17, 1991, when U.S.-led alliance forces started air striking Iraq. Thus, a ceasefire was reached at the end of February 1991 and Bush could then turn his attention to the Arab – Israeli peace. In mid – 1991, Baker's shuttle diplomacy to the region, produced the framework for an international conference in Madrid.

The shifting landscape of foreign policy was apparent in the Middle East Peace process. In October 1991, the Bush administration, in cooperation with the Soviet Union and Spain, sponsored a conference in Madrid, attempting to reach consensus on carrying on with the peace process. The United States had earned credibility within the Middle East following

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<sup>135</sup> Bush George H. W., 1991, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George H. W. Bush, 1991, Book I, January 1 to June 30, 1991*, (Washington DC: Government Publishing Office, 1992), pp. 42–45, [www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg42-3.htm](http://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PPP-1991-book1/html/PPP-1991-book1-doc-pg42-3.htm)

the Persian Gulf War. Arab nations were now ready to collaborate with the United States, and the discomfiting of the Iraqi invasion had shown all participants that the use of force was futile. As for the Soviet Union, the coup against Gorbachev weakened the regime and eventually Boris Yeltsin became the new Soviet Premier. The degrading of the Soviet power left the Palestinians and Syrians standing on their own, without serious support. Thus, Middle Eastern countries were no longer able to depend on the Soviet Union to counterbalance the United States. So, at the end of October 1991, the conference was held in Madrid. Syria, Israel, Lebanon and a dual Jordanian – Palestinian delegation attended the conference. Representing themselves, the Palestinians sat at the same table with the other parties for the first time. Although the Madrid conference did not bring any lasting agreements, it was an significant step toward future peace agreements.<sup>136</sup>

### I. The Oslo Accords in 1993

Until the election of Bill Clinton as the new President of the United States in January 1993, peace process was in hiatus due to American elections. Israel elections of 1992 designated Yitzhak Rabin as the Prime Minister of Israel.

Due to an equally competing crisis in Yugoslavia, the Clinton administration did not set the Arab – Israeli conflict as an initial priority. The Israeli – Palestinian issue had come to an impasse and during the spring of 1993, Israel engaged in secret direct talks with the PLO under the Norwegian auspices and in the summer a framework of mutual recognition was negotiated. The details of the negotiations were concealed from the Americans, although they were informed about the general picture. In late August 1993, Israeli Foreign Minister Simon Peres and Norwegian Foreign Minister Johann Holst informed Secretary of State Warren Christopher that a settlement had been reached. This agreement was named "*The Oslo Accord*" and the settlement was reciprocal recognition between Israel and the PLO and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.<sup>137</sup> The talks, introduced months earlier under

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<sup>136</sup> Knott, Stephen. "George H. W. Bush: Foreign Affairs." Miller Center, 14 Aug. 2020, <https://millercenter.org/president/bush/foreign-affairs> .

<sup>137</sup> Shapiro, Daniel B. "For Better or Worse, George H.W. Bush Changed the Face of the Middle East: Opinion: Opinion." Haaretz.com, Haaretz, 1 Dec. 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/2018-12-01/ty->

the aegis of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, had unofficially begun with low position Israeli and Palestinian diplomats and academics. However, "*with growing success in the drafting of an agreement, the talks were upgraded and soon were conducted by high-level Israeli and Palestinian officials*".<sup>138</sup>

On September 9, Israel and the PLO declared mutual recognition prior to the official signing of the agreement. The PLO correspondence recognized Israel's right to carry on "*in peace and security*", rejected terrorism and other acts of violence and guaranteed to recall provisions in the Palestinian National Covenant against Israel's right as a sovereign state. In a response, Rabin affirmed that "*the Government of Israel has decided to recognize the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and commence negotiations with the PLO within the Middle East peace process*". On September 13, 1993, the Israel-Palestinian Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed by Prime Minister Rabin and PLO leader Arafat in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton on the White House lawn.<sup>139</sup>

The DOP, the first in a series of subsequent agreements called the Oslo Accords, contained a two-stage framework. The first stage or the interim period was to last five years and during this period Israel would gradually pull back from areas with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, while shifting administrative power and territory to an elected Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority, in return pledged to non-violence and security with Israel. The second stage was the permanent status of negotiations, to conclude issues that still remained, involving Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security provisions and borders. After the signing of the Oslo Accord, the U.S mobilized a five hundred million aid within international support for progress in the West Bank and Gaza, even though there was no significant involvement by the United States to the agreement.

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<sup>138</sup> "*The Oslo Accords/Oslo Process*." ADL, 10 Jan. 2022, <https://www.adl.org/education/resources/glossary-terms/the-oslo-accords-oslo-process> .

<sup>139</sup> "*The Oslo Accords/Oslo Process*." ADL

## EPILOGUE

As history has shown, all is seldom quiet on the Middle Eastern front. There is a lot of turbulence leading to attacks and clashes, with lots of actors engaged. The main conflict was waged between Israel and its Arab neighbouring states, which gravely opposed the establishment of the Israeli state.

The United States has a long history of engagement into the Middle Eastern affairs, it goes back to the state creation of Israel and since then, Israel has been considered a strategic ally in the region and widely endorsed by the U.S. US policy has been formulated by diverging priorities in domestic and foreign policy and it stood as mediator between the parties. In these thirty years (1967-1993), in the midst of Cold War, peace process was nothing like an easy task. One fundamental goal, apart from peace, was to limit – even vanish- Soviet expansion in the area, which had already been strong since the mid-fifties. The complexities of the conflict displayed the difficulty to shape a formula towards mutual recognition and compromise, which all parties would accept and abide by. The intractability of both parties led negotiations to lasting deadlocks and specific steps and decisions needed to be taken, such as Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy. A large step towards enduring peace was the Camp David Accords and it was successful due to President Carter's insistence and domination of the talks.

The Palestinian question has remained a thorny part of the procedures. The Oslo Accords of 1993 and following Oslo II in 1995 were one last effort to bring the two conflicting parties together under peace. Despite hailing support of the public opinion, the accords failed.

In general, the U.S involvement in the conflict, although active, has not been able to produce a standard foreign policy model, which deals with the Arab- Israel conflict. On the contrary, some patterns developed during decisions on the agreements, continued to emerge in the U.S approach to the Arab – Israeli conflict. However, against the background of regional upheaval, the long history of U.S involvement lingers into the 21st century as the unresolved Arab – Israeli conflict still continues to face new challenges.

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