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TO  
OCTOBER

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**The Middle East  
between 1967 and 1973**

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edited by  
**ITAMAR RABINOVICH**  
and  
**HAIM SHAKED**

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ITAMAR RABINOVICH  
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# Introduction



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# Introduction

It is indeed appropriate for a research project in contemporary history that its own course be affected by the very processes it has sought to explore. The present volume originated in the Shiloah Center's Annual Seminar for the academic year 1973/74. When the seminar had originally been planned, early in 1973, it seemed that the changes that had taken place in the Middle East since the 1967 War warranted a broad review of the six years that had elapsed. It was then decided to examine the major political developments of the period in the framework of a seminar that would culminate in an international colloquium.

Among many other things the October 1973 War also interfered with this plan, not only by disrupting its schedule but also by providing a point of termination for the period which opened with the June War. A clearly defined periodization was thus established for both the Seminar and the Colloquium, but two particular problems were added to the ones inherent in any examination of recent and highly charged events. There was likely to be in the aftermath of the October War a natural tendency to view the years 1967–1973 from a rather narrow perspective, focusing on the processes which led to the war and neglecting other themes and issues of that period. It would also be tempting for a group of people interested in contemporary politics and international affairs meeting in December 1974 to discuss current and future developments in the Middle East rather than dwell on the past, recent as it may have been.

With these considerations in mind the Seminar and the Colloquium were so structured as to provide as broad an outlook as possible—given the limitations of time and budget, and the scholarly disciplines of the participants—and to reflect the major changes and developments which occurred in the Middle East between 1967 and 1973. For the same reason the published volume includes several papers (on the Iraqi Ba'th regime; the Federation of Arab Republics; Saudi Arabia, Yemen and

South Yemen; and on the Sudan and Libya) which had been read during the preceding Seminar but for lack of time could not be presented at the Colloquium.

The contemporary scene became part of the colloquium in a number of ways. Quite a few participants dwelt, either in writing or during their deliberations, on aspects and problems relating to the future. They met with Minister of Defense Shimon Peres for an informal discussion. On the eve of the Colloquium Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Yigal Allon, delivered a speech titled "Directions in Israeli Foreign Policy" (the transcript of which, as well as the full proceedings of the Colloquium, are kept at the Shiloah Center's Documentation Center). Mr. Allon's lecture took a comprehensive view of Israel's diplomatic position and policy in the wake of the October War and the disengagement agreements with Egypt and Syria. Against this background he dealt specifically with the issues then discussed in the context of a second interim agreement between Israel and Egypt. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also presented a set of priorities for Israeli policy in which he defined "the achievement of real peace with all our neighbors or at least with any Arab state prepared for it," as "the central goal and the primary objective of our policy." But since he could not see that a favorable response from any Arab state would be forthcoming, he set out Israel's "secondary objectives" in the following order:

The prevention of war. If this is impossible—its postponement in the hope of eventually avoiding its outbreak. If this cannot be achieved—limiting the war to a minimum of battle fronts. If this, too, is impossible, then preventing the multiple front from becoming a simultaneous one. Of course all these steps must be taken while doing our outmost, politically and information-wise, to gain maximum understanding and sympathy for our position and policy...

The first working session of the Colloquium dealt with the Persian Gulf. The discussion which followed the presentations by Professors Ramazani and Abir and Mr. Shmuelewitz revolved around two major issues: the linkage between the Persian Gulf and the core area of the Middle East, and the repercussions of the energy crisis on the policies of the superpowers with regard to the Persian Gulf. Prompted by questions and comments by other participants, Professor Abir elaborated on the acuteness of Arab-Iranian rivalries in the Persian Gulf. He did not rule

out the possibility of Egyptian and even Syrian involvement in that area. While acknowledging "the fundamental divergency between Iran and the Arab states as a whole" and its historical and cultural dimensions, Professor Ramazani took a more conservative view of the Arab-Iranian conflict. Having outlined alternative courses for Iranian policy in the Gulf area and emphasizing its pragmatism he suggested that:

It would not be a good idea to accept the scenario or the proposition that Arab-Israeli conflict under all circumstances is a welcome omen to the Iranians. Again [since it is] a case of the [Iranian] policy being fundamentally pragmatic, it all depends if that conflict is going to have a spillover into the Gulf area in the sense of again jeopardizing what Iran considers to be its basic interest.

Prof. Ramazani pursued the same themes of caution and pragmatism when other participants pointed to the apparent incongruence of Iran's fundamental pro-Western stance and its insistence on high oil prices, which seemed harmful to the Western economic system and raised the prospects of the possibility of an armed American intervention in the Persian Gulf. In response, Prof. Ramazani explained Iran's reservations with regard to a policy of *détente* which could be effective elsewhere but harmful to Iran's interests, and described Iran's approach to the price of oil as purely economic. In this he was joined by the chairman of the session, Mr. Bitan, himself a senior oil industry executive, who thought "that in that respect Iran has not behaved differently from all the other oil-producing countries," namely, that it sought to extract the highest possible revenues from its mineral resources under the most favorable circumstances.

The repercussions of the energy crisis, the Arab oil embargo and the steep rise in oil prices were discussed in greater detail during the next session. Prof. Kanovsky and Dr. Sheffer presented two different approaches to the problems of economic development and growth in Egypt, while Professor Shwadran dealt with the dramatic changes that the Middle Eastern oil industry underwent in recent years. In the ensuing discussion and in response to statements by Prof. Ramazani, Dr. Max Singer and Mr. Larry L. Fabian, Prof. Shwadran further explained that in his opinion the Saudi Arabian government was primarily motivated in its oil prices policy by economic considerations, and that the growth in the power of OPEC and OAPEC countries was largely due to



the disunity as well as the ineffectiveness of the diplomatic and political action of the industrialized West. In the same vein he disagreed with the suggestion that the Arab oil embargo had been very effective and had been lifted (in the wake of the Egyptian–Israeli Disengagement Agreement) only after the actual goals set out by its authors had been achieved. Rather, he argued:

There was a definite dropping of demands . . . and my thesis is that it was primarily an economic factor and once this factor was achieved by Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia was determined to go back to the fold, because it was an aberration of the entire Saudi Arabian orientation and policy.

The discussion of the prospects of Egypt's economic development pinpointed the divergence between two theoretical outlooks, presented by Prof. Kanovsky and Dr. Sheffer. The former held that economic development and growth in Egypt were impeded by factors inherent in Egyptian society and its economy, particularly the absence of sufficient skilled manpower. Consequently, even a considerable influx of Arab capital could not radically alter the situation. The latter saw the dearth of capital available to Egypt as its major problem, and was of the opinion "that Egypt is going to acquire the necessary resources to advance rapidly on a path of sustained economic growth. Dr. Gur Ofer took an intermediate position. He thought that even if Egypt was provided with all the capital it needed it could not grow over a period of time at a nine per cent rate per annum, but he believed that:

Capital in Egypt can make a difference and a very crucial difference between a three per cent increase in the GNP which, given the rate of growth of the population, means [a] zero [growth] rate and maybe five and six per cent or maybe seven per cent of growth . . .

The somewhat theoretical discussion could not be divorced from the political realities of the Middle East. Even from a perspective which regards capital rather than manpower as the real bottleneck to growth, several questions remained to be answered: would the oil producing Arab countries provide Egypt with sufficient funds needed for its economic development as well as with the resources necessary for arms procurements? If this were the case, would Egypt be able to maintain heavy involvement in the conflict with Israel and at the same time take off economically? The discussion offered no clearcut answers to these

questions. It was agreed, though, that Egypt could not remain deeply committed to the conflict and at the same time mobilize all the energy and resources necessary for an economic breakthrough. This would mean that Egypt might let "this unique chance in her history for sustained economic growth" slip by. On the other hand, it was not unreasonable to assume that the oil-producing countries were likely to continue a massive flow of capital to Egypt only as long as Egypt continued to play a prominent role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Whatever Egypt's long-range economic prospects, it was suggested that the rapid expansion of the combined Arab financial resources presented a serious problem for Israel. Israel, it was noted, had been able in the past to mobilize sufficient resources so as to maintain both military preparedness and a high rate of economic growth. The massive growth of resources available to the Arabs in 1974 raised serious questions with regard to Israel's ability to keep abreast with the Arab military build-up without seriously affecting its own precarious economic condition.

The next session dealt with the Powers and the Middle East. Dr. Eran, Prof. Quandt and Dr. Büren read papers on, respectively, Soviet, American and German policies towards the Middle East during the period under survey. The discussion of Soviet policy generated a debate which vividly illustrated the difference of opinion on fundamental issues among Sovietologists and other students of Soviet foreign policy. Some, like Dr. Galia Golan, took the view that Soviet policy and conduct in the Middle East had been moderated by the policy of *détente*. This and the desire to prevent the need for an open Soviet military intervention in the Middle East governed Moscow's policy during the early phase of the October War, including the resupply of Arab armies. "Only when the Arabs were in a difficult position and there was a need or an apparent need for a Soviet intervention," Dr. Golan said, "did the Soviets in fact agree to what amounted to a risk to *détente*." It was her opinion that the USSR was interested in a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and that this attitude was explained by broad considerations of *détente* policy as well as by Soviet objectives in the Middle East and the Indian Ocean. She did not think the Soviets could expect to gain much from the Palestinians and regarded their support of the PLO as "mainly tactical."

Others, Prof. Alvin Rubinstein in particular, were more skeptical of Soviet intentions. He began his analysis of the post-October 1973 Soviet position with a summation of the major Soviet goals in the Middle East

and their involvement during the 1950s and 1960s. Against that background he considered "that the Soviet dividends from the October War have been enormous but not "in terms of an increase in Soviet influence in the Middle East" which, in his opinion, was not regarded as a priority area in their eyes. Far more important for the Soviets in terms of the then anticipated consequences of the October War were the disarray in NATO, the Western economic crisis and the reinforcement of the Soviets' belief that they could promote tension in the Middle East. Prof. Rubinstein did not see a dramatic decline in Soviet influence in the Arab world as a result of the war. Nor did he think that Moscow was seriously interested in a political settlement in the Middle East. He took a serious view of the USSR's relations with the PLO— a Palestinian state would "institutionalize a condition of perpetual tension" in the Middle East and thus would facilitate the promotion or at least the preservation of Soviet influence in the area.

How did Washington view the USSR's behavior during the war? According to Prof. Quandt:

The top level American policy makers have concluded that Soviet behaviour, while objectionable, was not outside the bounds of what *détente* has come to mean; and it is partly because we also played around a little bit that we winked a bit at their playing around.

The discussion of American policy in the Middle East, despite the apparent awareness by the participants of the crucial role of US diplomacy in the area, was less animated. Mr. Yosef Ben Aharon pointed out some of what he regarded as the counterproductive aspects of that diplomacy. Speaking mostly about the years 1969–1970, but viewing them as representing a broader pattern, he suggested that rather than having a moderating effect on Egypt, the "Rogers plan" encouraged it to step up the War of Attrition. Other participants questioned Prof. Quandt's allusion to "domestic influences" on American policy toward the Middle East. In his response he explained that he had referred to "domestic influences which are not exclusively pressure groups or lobbies" and that he did not believe "that pressure groups have helped define broad basic interests either with respect to oil or Israel." However, he thought that on two occasions, in the fall of 1968 and in the summer of 1972, electoral considerations possibly affected Administration decisions with regard to the Middle East.

The next morning was devoted to the Palestinian issue. Four panelists—Prof. Dann, Dr. Ben Dor, Mr. E. Rekhess and Mr. A. Susser—presented three papers dealing with the three major actors in Palestinian politics—the Hashemite regime in Jordan, the PLO, and the Arab population of the West Bank. Both the panelists and commentators were in agreement on the major trends of the years 1967–1974: the ups and downs in Jordan's position, the reluctance of West Bank leaders to present clearcut positions on fundamental Palestinian issues and the PLO's remarkable success in mobilizing Arab support and winning considerable international recognition. It was also agreed that the marked absence of euphoria in the PLO's ranks after Yasser 'Arafat's appearance in the United Nations was justified. The PLO, it was felt, had thereby gained an important symbolic achievement but its future remained essentially dependent on the Arab states while its actual independent power in the Middle East had not significantly increased.

Opinions were divided on other related questions. Thus, it was Prof. Quandt's assessment that King Hussein "has perhaps concluded that the West Bank is not going to be returned to Jordan, particularly after the Rabat [1974] conference," and that "despite his sense of personal commitment and involvement with that issue, over time the commitment will erode and the benefits of just building up the East Bank of Jordan will become more apparent." While reluctant to speculate on this issue, Prof. Dann felt that the immediate impact of the Rabat conference was weakening and that King Hussein was returning to his former attachment to the West Bank. He mentioned "a very good national argument" that King Hussein had against relinquishing the West Bank, "namely, that a West Bank under Jordanian rule, with all the problems that it poses, is less dangerous to Hashemite rule in the East Bank than a West Bank which becomes a separate entity."

Lebanese politics did not figure prominently in the Colloquium but the processes which led, eventually, to the 1975/76 crisis were discussed briefly in the context of Dr. Ben Dor's paper. Lebanon, it was suggested, was the one exception to the proposition that the PLO had been unable to coerce Arab states and did not have a radicalizing influence on Arab politics. The PLO, aided by other Arab parties, had been forcing Lebanon's hand, particularly since 1968. Furthermore, the leftist components of the PLO had both encouraged and influenced the extra-parliamentary Left in Lebanon.

The meeting devoted to strategic and military developments in the Arab-Israeli conflict touched on a variety of issues. Prof. Kemp opened with a paper on global strategic developments in the years which immediately preceded the October War and their impact on the Middle East. Dr. Sela dealt with the Egyptian application of the Soviet military doctrine and Dr. Evron compared two stages of the Arab-Israeli conflict, those of 1956–1967 and 1967–1973. The discussion which followed was wide-ranging and involved diverging approaches to the past, evaluation of contemporary developments and predictions about the future of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some of the participants took issue with the model constructed by Dr. Evron and with the merits, explicit and implicit, that he attributed to the model as against the patterns of the conflict since 1967. Thus, Mr. Chaim Herzog disagreed with the contention that there had actually occurred a demilitarization of the Sinai during these years as well as with Dr. Evron's conclusions which rested on that assumption. Prof. Shamir put the accent elsewhere. He saw the year of 1967 as a watershed in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. He argued that in that year, and as a result of the June War, grave new elements were introduced into the conflict—deep Israeli anxieties, loss to the Arabs of Palestinian-inhabited and other territories, the revival of the Palestinian element—and a vicious spiral was created. The dynamics of that spiral led to the October War and were reinforced by its course and outcome. The deliberations then turned to the element of deterrence in the conflict. It was evident from the discussion that in view of past experience and the overriding impact of other variables this concept should be employed with great care, but that it was nevertheless of great importance in this conflict. This was illustrated by the interpretation of Egyptian decision-making and Israeli misconceptions in the years preceding the October War that was offered by Mr. Herzog:

The Egyptian armed forces, to the best knowledge of Israeli intelligence at the time, had come to the conclusion that they could not launch a war until they had a sufficient number of medium fighterbomber squadrons to deal with the Israeli air force and airfields as an antidote to the Israeli air force. This, Israeli intelligence evaluated, would not be available until 1975.

The Soviet Union's decision to supply Egypt with Scud missiles, Mr. Herzog added, provided the latter with what it regarded as a deterrent

against the Israeli air force. The Egyptians thus felt that they could go to war two years before the expiration of what Israeli intelligence regarded as a period in which Israel had at its disposal an effective means of deterrence.

The relationship between the military and political aspects of strategic decision-making was raised in other contexts as well. Dr. Sela explained that contrary to the popular myth then prevailing both in Israel and Arab countries—the Egyptian army in 1973 did not fully apply the Soviet military doctrine. The crucial difference between Arab strategies in 1967 and 1973, as he saw it, was that in the first case the Arabs were carried away by ideological visions while in the latter “they chose their political aims within the reach of their military capability.” As for Israel, said Dr. Evron:

One of the general conclusions that one can infer from the various Arab–Israeli wars is really that Israel does not have any explicit clear political objectives or hadn’t had any in former wars and I cannot really see political objectives . . . in future wars. I think therefore that the Israeli notion that the destruction of Arab armies is the only strategic objective of any war remains valid. Whether any future war serves Israeli interests is another story . . .

Other constraints on military policy in December 1974 and in the foreseeable future were mentioned as well. Professors Kanovski, Rubinstein and Kemp mentioned the growing strain on economic systems and trained manpower resources; the former affecting primarily Israel, the latter posing more of a problem for the Arab states. Dr. Dale Tahtinen suggested that the arms race in the Middle East, and American military supplies to Israel in particular, had already been affected by the growing difficulties involved in providing ever-growing quantities of increasingly sophisticated weaponry. He cautioned that future wars could see the introduction of surface-to-surface missiles and perhaps even of nuclear arms. The issue of nuclear arms was pursued by other participants as well, most notably by Prof. Kemp who suggested that changing circumstances could lead Israel:

to think of alternative ways of achieving military deterrence at less cost, and of course that opens up the nuclear options. In other words, the rationale for an Israeli nuclear option might be based on economic as well as on strategic considerations.

A major theme of the years 1967–1973, that of the making of the October War, was addressed specifically in the Colloquium's final session titled "The emergence of the Syrian–Egyptian 'Axis'." It opened with three papers by Prof. Shamir, Mr. Dishon and Dr. Rabinovich on Egyptian, inter-Arab and Syrian politics and policies, respectively.

The questions and comments which followed the presentations revealed a marked difference between two sets of issues. The changes which took place in domestic and inter-Arab politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s seemed to lend themselves to a generally accepted interpretation of the discussants. But several of the events and decisions which did take place in the realm of the Arab–Israeli conflict as well as some policy options and decisions which did not materialize remained the subject of controversy and conflicting interpretations. Were the processes which led to the October War beyond the complete control of the participating parties? Was a settlement possible between the wars of June and October and after the 1973 war? Were there moves which could avert or at least postpone the outbreak of the October War? Could responsibility for the lack of settlement be traced and determined?

The concluding session of the Colloquium was not unique in raising questions which remained unanswered in part. The previous sessions touched briefly on such problems and processes as the relationship between center and periphery in the countries of the Middle East or recent changes in the patterns of domestic politics in the region. Hopefully, future occasions will permit these, and related issues, to be pursued more comprehensively, benefiting from a lengthened historic perspective and new, perhaps different, vantage points.

The editing in 1976 of papers read in 1974 which dealt with dynamic situations presented a particular problem. This is illustrated most strikingly by the paper which was read during the Shiloah Center's Seminar on the role of the Palestinian organizations in Lebanese politics. There was no point in publishing the original paper after a year and a half of the Lebanese civil war, and a rewriting of the paper from the perspective of 1976 was, of course, out of the question. In most other cases the changes which took place since 1974 were much less dramatic and the papers published in the volume are slightly altered versions of those presented in the course of the Seminar and the Colloquium which were held in 1974. The authors and editors alike refrained from major

revisions which would have endowed this collection with the benefits and drawbacks of hindsight. Only minor editorial and other changes were introduced during the process of publication. The papers thus reflect the authors' views and perspectives in December 1974.

The organization of an annual seminar and an international colloquium entails varied efforts by a great many people. A full list of acknowledgements owed to all those who have been of invaluable assistance in the preparation of this volume would be very long indeed. Our special thanks are owed to Mrs. Yardena Bar-Yehuda, Mrs. Lydia Gareh, Mrs. Edna Liftman-Katz and Miss Amira Margalit, members of the staff of Tel Aviv University; and to a Canadian friend of the Shiloah Center whose generous assistance made the publication of this volume possible.

*Itamar Rabinovich      Haim Shaked*  
Tel Aviv, December 1976





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# External Powers



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# The Arab-Israeli Conflict in American Foreign Policy

*William B. Quandt*

Between the third and fourth rounds of Arab-Israeli hostilities, American foreign policy passed through several stages in a quest for a peace settlement that would ensure Israeli security while meeting minimal Arab demands for the return of occupied territory. On one level American policy makers showed considerable consistency in their views over this period. A wide consensus existed that a comprehensive peace was desirable in terms of US interest; that Soviet influence in the Middle East was a growing danger and would only be checked by progress on the diplomatic front; and that American-Arab relations were likely to deteriorate in the absence of an active American role in promoting a settlement. Beyond these simple perceptions, however, there was little agreement within the US foreign policy establishment over appropriate tactics and on the issue of the priority of the Middle East in terms of US global interest. Thus, policy shifted significantly on several occasions between June 1967 and October 1973. The primary reasons for these shifts must be sought at four levels: changes in the broad international environment; changes in the Middle East; changes in American domestic realities; changes in the individuals involved in US policy making.

## THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION

If President Johnson was genuinely irritated, as he has claimed, at the Israeli decision to resort to pre-emptive war on 5 June 1967, his subsequent actions revealed few signs of this irritation.<sup>1</sup> The weeks preceding the Six Day War had been agonizing ones for the President, torn as he was between wanting to prevent an outbreak of conflict and his reluctance to become involved in another area of the world while the war in Vietnam was absorbing so much of his attention and resources. Whatever misgivings he may have felt about the Israeli resort to force were quickly dissipated as it became clear that the United States would not have to become militarily involved in the conflict. Besides, the Israeli

victory seemed so overwhelming, and President Abdel Nasser's culpability in provoking the crisis that led to war was so apparent, that Johnson quickly concluded that the new balance of forces in the region might be turned to good advantage. Israel, now in possession of substantial Arab territory, could use occupied land as a bargaining counter for peace. Above all, the United States should not return to the Eisenhower pattern of forcing Israel to withdraw without obtaining concessions from the Arabs. Like many Israeli leaders at the time, Johnson expected that the Arabs would soon conclude that diplomacy offered the only hope of recovering territory. This, of course, would require that Israel be kept strong and that the United States refrain from pressuring Israel for concessions at an early stage.

Insofar as American diplomacy was active following the Six Day War, it focussed on establishing a context in which a settlement could take place. The forum for this activity was the United Nations, where the US was deeply involved in the diplomacy of reaching agreement on a resolution articulating the broad guidelines for a settlement. Early in the summer the United States was prepared to accept a Latin American draft resolution which was fairly explicit on the issue of Israeli territorial withdrawal to the pre-war borders, but when this was blocked by Arab and Soviet opposition the US position changed. It was not until 22 November, 1967, that a resolution was finally voted, with deliberate ambiguities concerning withdrawal and commitments to peace.

It was widely assumed in the US Government that a final peace settlement, if it could be achieved, would involve virtually complete Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, some settlement of the refugee problem, demilitarization of critical areas, and explicit Arab commitments to peace. American policy makers were generally less concerned with the modalities of reaching such an agreement than the Israelis. For example, few American officials felt that direct negotiations between Israel and the Arabs were essential. They did, however, acknowledge that the US should not become party to an imposed solution, at least not at an early date.

A number of considerations dictated American policy in this period. On the international level, the fact that the Soviet Union's closest friends in the Middle East had been badly defeated by an American client led to the widely shared feeling that Soviet influence in the area had suffered. The United States was not particularly anxious to go to the rescue of those who were most closely aligned with the Soviets. Jordan,

of course, was another matter, but little could be done for Jordan in isolation from Egypt and Syria. The lingering US-Soviet cold-war rivalry, kept alive by the Vietnam War was one of the most decisive reasons for the Johnson administration's immediate post-war policy of support for Israel's basic diplomatic stance of waiting for Arab concessions prior to any offer to withdraw from Sinai, the West Bank or the Golan Heights.

American public opinion, as filtered through Congress, the press and various interest groups was also strongly pro-Israeli in the aftermath of the Six Day War. Any administration which might have been tempted to pressure Israel to abandon the newly won territory against its will would have paid a significant political price. With 1968 approaching as an election year, no politician would want to be branded as anti-Israel. Even within the US bureaucracy those pockets of sentiment that were less fully supportive of Israel remained relatively quiet. After all, Abdel Nasser had few admirers within the American Government in the summer and fall of 1967. American-Egyptian relations had been broken as a result of Abdel Nasser's false accusation of American involvement in the war, and a number of other Arab countries had followed suit. The Khartoum Summit Conference also seemed to preclude Arab co-operation in a peace-making effort. Insofar as pro-Arab sentiments did exist, they tended to favor a policy of helping Jordan and protecting interests in Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Arab States. One ironic consequence of the war seemed to be a lease on life for the conservative Arab regimes now that Abdel Nasser's prestige had dropped and he had become financially dependent on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Libya. In brief, the net effect of American domestic realities, both in terms of public opinion and bureaucratic politics, was to reinforce a policy generally favorable to Israeli interest.

The third factor which dictated US policy after the war was the nature of the decision makers involved. President Johnson was the most important person involved in the articulation of American policy in the Middle East. Throughout his political career he had been strongly supportive of Israel. He had extensive contacts within the American Jewish community and, according to a close associate, Kennedy had taken into account Johnson's presumed ability to bring in the "Jewish vote" when he offered him the vice-presidency. As President, Johnson surrounded himself with advisers who shared his basically sympathetic view of Israel. Within the White House he had Walt Rostow as adviser for

National Security Affairs at the time of the Six Day War. At the State Department, Eugene Rostow was very actively involved in Middle East policy as Undersecretary of State. McGeorge Bundy, who briefly returned to advise Johnson after the war, was also generally sympathetic to Israel. Abe Fortas, Arthur Goldberg, Hubert Humphrey and perhaps Clark Clifford could also be expected to accord high priority to Israeli concerns. Thus, Johnson's own predispositions, as well as those of most of his key advisers, led to a fundamentally pro-Israeli orientation in the immediate post-war period.

Given the nature of US interests in the Middle East and the dynamics of the regional situation, it is not surprising that this initial consensus on policy began to erode by 1968. First, the stability of the post-war Middle East was called into question, particularly with the emergence of the Palestinian Fidayeen as a potent political force in the Arab world. Conservative regimes, rather than profiting from Abdel Nasser's embarrassment, felt themselves threatened by a new wave of radical sentiment in the Arab world. Thus, traditionally friendly Arab regimes began to press the United States to do something to offer hope of a settlement in order to blunt the revolutionary forces that were rapidly gaining ground. Second, the Soviet Union decided to throw good money after bad and began a full-scale program to rearm Egypt and Syria. Soviet influence, rather than declining, seemed to be on the rise. Third, the assumption that the Arabs would sue for peace once they realized the magnitude of their defeat was less and less viable as time passed and Soviet aid increased. Fourth, Israeli requests for aid from the United States, in addition to an apparent hardening of Israeli negotiating terms during 1968, made a US policy of unconditional support for Israel appear to be increasingly expensive. Policy, after all, cannot be considered apart from cost. After the war, the least costly policy was to accept the new *status quo*. By early 1968, however, the price of such a policy in terms of both US-Arab and US-Israeli relations was rising.

Even the most pro-Israeli of presidents has at one time or another balked at total identification of US and Israeli interest. President Truman, as is well known, resented the pressures brought to bear on him to support the creation of Israel.<sup>2</sup> And even after Israel's independence, the United States did not officially supply arms to Israel, despite urgent requests. Johnson, likewise, expressed some irritation at Israeli policy. While agreeing in principle to Israeli requests for Phantom F-4 jet fighters in January 1968, he held up final approval until the fall of that year,

when electoral pressures began to build. On occasion Johnson would make comments in private about how the United States would not become a satellite of a little country like Israel. But even more importantly, Johnson and, more vocally, the State Department, stuck by a fairly rigid interpretation of UN Resolution 242 as requiring total Israeli withdrawal, at least on the Egyptian front, in return for peace. This position, which had frequently been conveyed to the Israelis in private, was formally confirmed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk in early November 1968 in a meeting with Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmud Riyad. This created some strain in UN-Israeli relations and the last months of the supposedly pro-Israeli Johnson Administration were not particularly happy ones for Israel. It was thus with some relief, and perhaps some apprehension, that Israelis welcomed the presidency of Richard Nixon.

#### THE NIXON PRESIDENCY

As a presidential candidate and then as president, Richard Nixon had emphasized his personal interest in foreign policy. Vietnam was clearly the most urgent problem for his new administration, but it was by no means the only issue of concern to him or to his newly appointed adviser for National Security Affairs, Henry Kissinger. Above all, there was an understandable priority given to US-Soviet relations and strategic deterrence. Nixon and Kissinger made clear that they were prepared to negotiate with the Soviet Union on the whole range of issues that had dominated the Cold War era. The concept of "linkage" became the basis of the administration's approach to negotiations. In simple terms, "linkage" meant that the United States was not prepared to talk about international issues in isolation from one another. Rather, arms limitations, Vietnam and the Middle East would all be considered, and a concession by one side on arms might be met by a comparable one on Vietnam or the Middle East by the other party.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Nixon began to deal with the Middle East primarily in the US-Soviet context. He did, however, appear to attach intrinsic importance to the area, referring to it as a "powder-keg." The implication of this imagery was that the Arab-Israeli conflict, as long as it remained unresolved, had explosive potential that could endanger international peace. By using this analogy, Nixon appeared to be rejecting the relatively passive Middle East diplomacy of the Johnson administration.



Among the first issues considered by the Nixon foreign policy team, working through the reinvigorated National Security Council system over which Henry Kissinger presided, was the Middle East conflict. Three options were considered: to remain relatively inactive; to pursue a comprehensive settlement through multilateral diplomacy; and to try for partial agreements. The second option was chosen, in full recognition that it might fail. An important judgment was made, however, that the US position in the area would be no worse for Washington's having tried and failed to reach a settlement than it would be if no effort were made at all.

Somewhat surprisingly, President Nixon authorized the State Department to take the lead in the conduct of Middle East diplomacy. In other areas, such as US-Soviet relations and Vietnam, it was Kissinger, not the State Department, who took charge.

### *Phase One*

In the spring of 1969 American diplomacy in the Middle East moved into high gear. At the United Nations, four-power talks were begun. More significantly, Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin held nine exploratory talks on possibilities for a Middle East settlement between 18 March and 22 April. During this period the United States tabled a working paper in the Four-Power talks which set forth a number of basic points that should govern any peace agreement. First, agreement was to be reached on the full "package" before implementation of any of the parts. Second, there were to be contractual commitments to peace. Third, final boundaries were not to reflect the weight of conquest. In addition, then, several vague formulations were advanced which addressed the special issues of Gaza, Jerusalem, refugees, navigation and Sharm ash-Shaykh. By spring, then, most of the elements that eventually became part of the "Rogers Plan" had been conveyed to the Israelis, Arabs and Soviets. The subsequent strain in US-Israeli relations was caused as much by disagreement over procedure as over substance.

On 24 April, the National Security Council met and authorized a further elaboration of these points, which were then transmitted to the Soviet Union. Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko then visited Cairo on 10 June and on 17 June the Soviets made a counter proposal. During this stage of US-Soviet talks the objective was to reach agreement on a set of principles which would govern an Arab-Israeli settlement. The

United States hoped that the Soviets would use their influence in Cairo to bring about modifications in the Egyptian position on commitment to peace with Israel, while the Soviets tried to get the United States to pressure Israel to accept the idea of full withdrawal. Needless to say, the Israeli leadership, which was generally kept well informed of these deliberations, was extremely unhappy with the US–Soviet talks, since they undermined the principle of direct negotiations between Israel and the Arabs and raised the spectre of a US–Soviet imposed settlement.

During the summer the superpower dialogue was resumed when Sisco visited Moscow from 15 to 17 July. The Soviets pressed for an American commitment to full Israeli withdrawal, while Sisco held out for a stronger position from the Soviets on Arab commitments to peace. The official US policy on territory at this point was that the pre-war boundaries were “not necessarily excluded,” a view that was increasingly at variance with stated Israeli objectives. Little further progress was made in the US–USSR talks until the UN General Assembly session in September, where Rogers and Sisco met with Gromyko and Dobrynin to discuss the Middle East. There the Soviets appeared to make a concession on the form in which negotiations between the belligerents might take place. The so-called “Rhodes formula” was reportedly agreeable to Egypt; this implied formal indirect negotiations, with the prospect of informal direct talks, as had occurred at Rhodes in 1949.

During September and October the United States Government debated whether to reveal its fallback position on territory in order to reach agreement on a US–Soviet draft of principles. It was widely felt that the Soviets had managed to modify the Egyptian position in several respects, especially during Gromyko’s June visit and with the acceptance of the Rhodes formula, and now the ball appeared to be in the US court. While recognizing that Israel would object to any public American position calling for full withdrawal, the Administration nonetheless decided to go on record with such a position, making it clear that withdrawal was conditional on a full peace agreement. On 28 October, 1969, the new US position was given to the Soviets in the form of a draft joint US–Soviet Statement of Principles. The key change in the US position was support for the old international frontier between Egypt and Israel, provided that the final status of Gaza and security arrangements in Sinai and at Sharm ash-Shaykh could be negotiated. In a major speech on 9 December, Secretary of State Rogers revealed the general lines of the new US proposal, which was immediately dubbed the

"Rogers Plan." The following day Israel rejected the new proposal.<sup>3</sup> On 18 December a set of principles was advanced for a Jordan-Israel settlement which was modelled on the document of 28 October. This was tabled in the Four-Power context at the UN, since the Soviet Union was not acknowledged by Washington to have a special role to play in the case of Jordan, as it clearly did with Egypt. The timing of the release of this document was dictated by the upcoming Rabat summit, where it was hoped that Jordan could play a moderating role once the US had demonstrated its support for a settlement which included Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank. Thus, by the third week of December only the Syrian front had not been dealt with by the United States. The Egyptians were not prepared, however, to endorse the new American proposal, and their refusal was translated into formal Soviet rejection of the 28 October document on 23 December. This brought an angry reaction from Washington and put an end to the first phase of the Nixon administration's search for a settlement in the Middle East. Phase one was characterized by primary reliance on US-Soviet talks and the nebulous concept of "linkage" to establish a broad context for agreement. The lesson of the year-long diplomacy was that the Soviet Union could not be pried loose from virtually complete identification with the Egyptian diplomatic position.

Behind the US effort in 1969 was a faulty assumption concerning Soviet-Egyptian relations. It was widely believed by the policy makers that it might be possible to persuade the Soviets to pressure Egypt into modifying its policy on a peace settlement, provided the United States was prepared to use its influence with Israel on the territorial issue. Policy makers recognized that such behavior would strain Soviet-Egyptian relations, which was seen as an added benefit for the United States since Soviet influence in the area was the overriding concern of Nixon and Kissinger. As events demonstrated, however, the Soviets saw all too clearly the implications of the US proposals and in the end decided to avoid risking their Middle East investment in favor of an agreement with the United States.

During 1969 Nixon was hardly influenced at all by domestic politics as he formulated a strategy for the Middle East. Arms that had been promised to Israel by the Johnson administration were delivered on time, and the first Phantom jets reached Israel in September 1969. But no new major arms agreements were concluded despite heavy Congressional pressure. Arms, it seemed, were to be used as an element in

influencing Israeli policy. If domestic politics had little to do with the shaping of US Middle East policy during 1969, however, regional changes did play a significant role in its formulation. There was widespread concern over the "erosion" of American influence in the Middle East, the growing militancy and appeal of the Palestinian Fidayeen movement, and the apparent rise in Soviet power throughout the region. In the spring of 1969 Abdel Nasser had begun the War of Attrition along the Suez Canal, and these limited hostilities reinforced the belief that the Middle East situation was explosive. They also added to the urgency of Israeli arms request. Single-minded backing of Israeli objectives was not, however, viewed as the key to reversing these trends. On the contrary, it was widely argued within the US foreign affairs bureaucracy that US identification with Israel was precisely the cause of the increased radicalism and polarization underway in the area. Once Nixon gave the State Department the go-ahead signal to pursue talks with the Soviets, this bureaucratically rooted view began to be translated into policy. The 28 October document was the most important result of this "anti-polarization" strategy. Kissinger appeared to be sceptical of the entire process, but his own power position was not yet what it was to become later, and he resisted the temptation to challenge the State Department on this issue. Bureaucratic politics, as is often the case, played an important part in shaping the contours of policy.

### *Phase Two*

By any standard, 1970 was an extraordinary year in American relations with the Middle East. Dramatic changes in the regional setting provoked a fundamental revision in the American approach to the area and shifted the locus of decision making from the State Department to the White House, but only after another intensive diplomatic effort to reach a peace settlement.

Following the Soviet rejection of the 28 October proposal, the Nixon Administration decided against further concessions in an effort to lure the Soviets and Egyptians back into the diplomatic process. Instead, Nixon began to come under sustained domestic pressure to reject the "Rogers Plan" and to provide arms to Israel. Whereas such pressures had little effect in 1969, in an election year the Administration might be expected to be more attentive, particularly in the absence of any evidence that the "Rogers Plan" held out hope of easing the mounting tensions in the Middle East.

The military conflict along the Suez Canal intensified in December 1969 and early January 1970 as the Israelis began to use their newly acquired Phantom jets to try to deter further escalation in the War of Attrition by carrying out "deep penetration raids" within Egypt. The consequence of this shift toward a more aggressive Israeli policy was that Abdel Nasser turned to the Soviets for additional help. During a secret trip to Moscow on 20 January, 1970, he asked for direct Soviet assistance in providing air defense, including an increase in surface-to-air missiles and Soviet aircraft and combat pilots. Meanwhile, Israel was pressing its own case for additional arms from the United States. In reply to a question at a press conference on 29 January, President Nixon stated that he would announce his decision on Israeli requests for more Phantoms within one month. This surprising news threw the US bureaucracy, the Israelis and the Arabs into a frenzy, and pressures mounted on the administration from all quarters. Finally, well after the self-imposed deadline had passed, Secretary of State Rogers announced that the US had decided to hold Israeli requests for more arms in abeyance. As consolation, substantial economic aid was offered.

During the spring, while the United States was resisting the pressures to arm Israel in the hope that this would improve the prospects for dealing with Nasser, the level of conflict on the Egyptian-Israeli front mounted sharply, as did Fidayeen activity within Jordan. Soviet equipment was being rushed into Egypt and moved toward the Canal. In April Soviet pilots were observed for the first time flying operational missions over Egypt. As early as February Middle East analysts within the US Government had urged a comprehensive review of policy in light of the growing Soviet involvement in the conflict. Other issues, however, had higher priority that spring, as the situation in Vietnam appeared to be badly deteriorating, particularly following the overthrow of the "neutralist" regime of Prince Norodom Sihanouk in Cambodia. As North Vietnamese use of sanctuaries in Cambodia grew in March and April, Nixon made the fateful decision to authorize the invasion of Cambodia, which set off massive public demonstrations in the United States against the widening of the war. With these problems dominating the top levels of the administration, it was not until 21 May that a subcommittee of the National Security Council finally met to consider developments in the Middle East. A full National Security Council meeting followed on 10 June.

Apart from the mounting Soviet involvement in the fighting, the other notable development during this period was President Abdel Nasser's 1 May speech, which was widely interpreted as a signal to the United States that Egypt was once again interested in diplomacy. The Soviets had tried to renew a dialogue with the United States in early March, but to no avail. After the experience of 1969, and with the Egyptian President's May bid in mind, the Nixon administration decided to launch its own initiative to resolve the conflict, bypassing the Soviets and dealing instead directly with Abdel Nasser, who had hinted through the Soviets that he was prepared to make further important concessions.

At the National Security Council meeting of 10 June Secretary of State Rogers presented the case for a renewed initiative which, simply stated, would aim at getting the parties to "stop shooting and start talking." On 18 June the Rogers recommendation was formally approved by the President and the following day the new initiative was launched. Prior to the adoption of the second "Rogers Plan" President Nixon had taken steps to ensure that Israeli reaction would not be automatically negative. On 21 May the President had met with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban to assure him that some arms deliveries would be quietly resumed. Egyptian negative reaction was not particularly feared, since Abdel Nasser had made it known that he would not object to new deliveries of Phantoms to Israel, provided the US used its influence on behalf of a political settlement. In addition, the Phantom was beginning to lose some of its terror and mystique as new Soviet air defense equipment succeeded in shooting down a number of the high-priced F-4s that the Israelis used as "flying artillery" in the continuing War of Attrition.

The Israeli response to the new American arms decision came on 26 May in a speech by Prime Minister Golda Meir in which a softer Israeli line on Resolution 242 and the "Rhodes formula" was articulated. This did not, however, ensure a positive response to the "Rogers initiative." On the contrary, Prime Minister Meir's initial reaction was to oppose the plan, particularly after she was assured that the decision on arms was not conditional on its acceptance. On 21 June the Israeli Cabinet decided to reject the new proposal, but Washington was reportedly not immediately informed, on the advice of Ambassador Rabin, who took the line that Israel should not be the first party to reject the plan.<sup>4</sup>

Over the next month a very tense diplomatic-military game ensued.

Israeli intelligence began to report the forward movement of SAM equipment toward the Canal and more aggressive activity by Soviet pilots. Toward the end of July, in fact, as Israeli losses to the SAMs were rising, four Soviet pilots were shot down in an encounter with the Israeli air force. Against this backdrop of military escalation, the United States, through its highest officials, went on record with statements that might have served to reassure the Israelis. At a background briefing of the press at San Clemente on 26 June, Kissinger spoke of the need to "expel" the Soviets from the Middle East. In remarks on 1 July President Nixon referred to Israel's need for "defensible" borders. A few days later Israel received word that military equipment that could be used against the rapidly growing SAM network on the west bank of the Canal would be delivered. On 20 July, Nixon, speaking at a press conference, referred to the need to retain the military balance in the Middle East.

Despite these pro-Israel statements, Egypt accepted the Rogers proposal for a ceasefire on 22 July. Two days later President Nixon sent a letter to Prime Minister Meir urging her to take advantage of Egyptian acceptance, while promising that the US would not force Israel to agree to the Arab interpretation of Resolution 242. On 26 July Jordan added its acceptance to Egypt's. Finally, on 31 July, after considerable dissension within the Israeli Cabinet, Israel also accepted, although a more detailed reply on 6 August stated some Israeli reservations. These were essentially ignored by the United States, as UN Secretary General U Thant was requested to announce on 7 August that all three parties had accepted the proposal for a ceasefire and a resumption of Ambassador Jarring's mission. Mrs. Meir was furious at the handling of the announcement, and she was to become even more irate in subsequent days.

The ceasefire of 7 August marked the end of the second stage of the Nixon administration's diplomacy in the Middle East. It seemed to reflect well on the patient efforts of the State Department, and there was near jubilation in the corridors of its Near East Bureau. Somehow the United States seemed to have maneuvered itself into that much-sought "evenhanded" position where it enjoyed confidence on the part of both Arabs and Israelis to play the role of mediator. At this point it was enough that the dangerous escalation seemed to have been halted. No one was asking what the next substantive steps would be to move the stalemate toward resolution.

During phase two American domestic politics played a more important role than during the preceding period, particularly in ending the freeze on new arms shipments to Israel. Kissinger was unhappy with such a policy in any event, especially at a time when the Soviets were hardly showing restraint, and in late May President Nixon came to share his view. Even more important in explaining the American initiative, however, were regional developments and in particular the growing Soviet involvement in the War of Attrition. This raised the danger of superpower confrontation, and to avoid this a ceasefire seemed eminently desirable. Abdel Nasser's 1 May speech was also an encouraging sign that the door was not shut to diplomacy. Thus, the State Department began to line up Arab acceptance, while the White House determined to reassure the Israelis. Once again, bureaucratic politics played an important role in the formulation of policy, but on this occasion Kissinger, whose stature was rising, was a less passive figure. The outcome in June and July of a dual policy of seeking a ceasefire while sending new arms to Israel reflected this shifting bureaucratic balance within the US foreign policy establishment.

### *Phase Three*

It was not until 10 August, 1970, that the United States carried out aerial reconnaissance of the Suez Canal area, thereby providing data against which to check subsequent charges of violations of the standstill provisions of the ceasefire agreement. For several weeks the inability of the United States to confirm Israeli charges of Egyptian violations created a serious crisis of confidence between Washington and Jerusalem. Kissinger was appalled at the poor performance of the US intelligence community, believing as he did that the American "bureaucracy" was less reliable than Israeli sources of information. To assuage Israeli anger, Nixon authorized the Defense Department to offer the Israelis a small arms package for possible use against the SAM sites in the event of a renewal of hostilities. By the third week of August, however, the United States acknowledged that there had been some forward movement of SAMs by the Egyptians. During September the Egyptians ended all pretense of observing the limitations imposed by the ceasefire agreement, and this led to a US decision on 15 October to supply an additional US \$ 90 million worth of arms to Israel immediately, and to request US \$ 500 million from Congress for arms to Israel in the following year. Increasingly, arms were flowing to Israel in response



to Egyptian and Soviet actions rather than as part of a diplomatic process or in response to domestic pressures.

During the crisis over the Egyptian violations, Israel withdrew from the proposed Jarring talks, thereby nullifying the second point of the Rogers June initiative. All that remained was the observance of the ceasefire, and even that became an open issue as tensions mounted in Jordan during the early part of September. The Fidayeen, fearing the consequences of forward movement on a peace settlement in the aftermath of the Rogers proposals, had adopted a militant posture toward King Hussein's regime in Amman. The most radical wing of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) sparked a crisis by hijacking four international aircraft and diverting three to Jordan and one to Egypt. In mid-September Hussein decided to unleash his army against the Fidayeen, and in the following few days a full-scale international crisis erupted which threatened to engulf the Middle East in another large-scale war. As the Fidayeen were placed on the defensive, Syrian military units intervened in the fighting, temporarily raising the prospect of a massive Syrian invasion of Jordan. During the most critical moments of the crisis, Jordan, the United States and Israel concerted policy to deal with what appeared to be a Syrian-Soviet challenge to the *status quo*.<sup>5</sup> Israeli power, visibly mobilized on the Syrian front, seemed to play a role in limiting the scope of Syrian intervention, and as the crisis came to an end a new balance of power appeared to have emerged in the Middle East.

The events of August and September had a decisive influence on US policy in the Middle East. The Soviets were viewed by Nixon and Kissinger as responsible for both the violations of the ceasefire and the Syrian intervention in Jordan. In response to these perceptions, the administration decided to adopt a "tough" policy, one element of which was the arming of Israel.

President Abdel Nasser of Egypt spent his last days trying to arrange a ceasefire in Jordan. The day after success of his efforts, he died of a heart attack. Egypt without him was unlikely to be as potent a political force in the Arab world. Likewise, Syria, after its setback in Jordan, was likely to be quiescent for a period. Finally, the Fidayeen appeared to have been eliminated as a political force. Thus, in a few short weeks the regimes and movements friendly to the Soviets had been badly weakened, whereas the pro-American forces in the area, namely Israel, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Iran, seemed to be pillars of strength. For the

first time, one began to hear American policy makers reflect the Israeli view that US-Israeli relations had a strategic dimension that was more important than the sentimental ties so frequently alluded to in the past as the basis for American support of Israel. Ironically, this image of Israel as an element in the US strategic approach to the Middle East corresponded quite closely to the Soviet and radical Arab view of Israel as the "cat's paw of Imperialism" in the Middle East. This view was enhanced, of course, by the growing arms flow from the United States to Israel.

For the next three years the United States, in its policy toward the Middle East, acted as if the regional *status quo* could be kept generally stable, provided that Israel remained strong. This view seemed to fit Kissinger's balance-of-power perspective and his desire to limit Soviet influence in the area. Israel, sensing a greater congruence of views between Washington and Jerusalem than ever before, tried hard to tie the hands of the Nixon administration by bargaining away such marginal concessions as a willingness to return to the Jarring talks in exchange for assurances on arms supply and support for Israel in future negotiations. Nixon never quite met all of Mrs Meir's requests for assurances, but in messages of 3 and 17 December, 1970, he went fairly far in Israel's direction. Israel, always anxious for 100% backing, professed disappointment in the arms promises contained in the 17 December message—one of the "greatest blows" to Israel, in Mrs. Meir's words—but by 28 December Israel had nonetheless agreed to return to the Jarring talks.

### *The Interim Settlement Approach of 1971*

In an effort to test the prospects for some diplomatic progress between the new Sadat regime and Israel, the United States went to considerable lengths to get Jarring to stimulate movement toward some kind of agreement between Egypt and Israel. This resulted in the "Jarring Memorandum" of 8 February, which aimed at pinning down Egypt on commitments to peace and Israel on full withdrawal, the two key stumbling blocks of the past. Rather surprisingly, the Egyptians, on 14 February, conveyed a positive reply to Jarring, only to be followed on February 26 by a negative Israeli response which included the flat statement that there would be no Israeli withdrawal to the pre-5 June 1967 borders.

On 1–2 March, Sadat made a secret trip to Moscow in search of arms

and diplomatic support. Within a few days of Sadat's return from Moscow, he sent a long letter to Nixon asking for an active US diplomatic role. This stimulated considerable interest in Washington particularly in the "interim agreement" deal which had first appeared as early as mid-September 1970, when Israeli officials had floated the idea of a mutual thinning out of forces along the Suez Canal. By January 1971 Egypt was indirectly hinting to the US that it might also be interested in such an idea. Thus a new diplomatic approach was conceived—an "interim agreement"—which represented a substantial break with the concept of a "package settlement." As usual, the State Department displayed the most enthusiasm for the idea, while Kissinger remained sceptical of the chances of success.

Sadat's initiative on an interim step was that it should include a reopening of the Suez Canal in return for a modest Israeli pullback from the waterway. Diplomacy moved slowly, as the US tried to elicit a favorable Israeli response. The best that could be achieved was a fairly tough Israeli proposal on 19 April which was not formally conveyed by the United States to Egypt. Contacts with Sadat had revealed his continuing interest in a Canal agreement, but it was clear that he would insist that Egyptian troops be allowed to cross the Canal, which the Israelis were not prepared to accept. By early May the White House had essentially withdrawn its support from the "interim settlement" idea as there seemed to be no prospect of agreement. Nonetheless, in May, Rogers and Sisco visited Cairo and Jerusalem, and by early June a new Egyptian position had been elicited, in part as a result of the "Bergus Memorandum." When no response was forthcoming from the US side, Sadat began to suspect that he was being set up to look like a fool. A salvage effort by Sisco in August simply confirmed that Israel was not prepared to budge. This was the last round of State Department diplomacy in the Middle East for two years. It left a bad aftertaste in Cairo, Jerusalem and the White House.

### *Priority to Domestic Politics—1972*

Following the collapse of the "interim settlement" effort in 1971, the United States adopted a relatively passive role toward the Arab-Israeli conflict, reminiscent in some respects of the policy of the Johnson administration. In February 1972 Nixon agreed to a large Israeli arms request (including 42 F-4s and 82 A-4s). That same month, the United States formally committed itself to consultations with Israel prior to any

future diplomatic initiatives. In essence, Rogers and Sisco found their hands tied, at White House directives, and the US-Israeli relationship took on an unusually warm tone. Nixon was obviously aware of the political benefits to be gained in an election year from appearing in the role of Israel's supporter, although even he may have been surprised by what appeared to be an open endorsement of his candidacy by Israeli Ambassador Rabin.

The consequence of domestic realities and regional developments served to ensure that 1972 would be a year in which the United States abstained from major Middle East initiatives. Sadat's "year of decision" had passed, making him appear ineffectual and the Middle East relatively stable. Bigger issues now came to the fore. In February Nixon made his historic trip to China. This was followed by an intensification of the fighting in Vietnam and the eventual mining of the port of Haiphong just prior to the Moscow Summit in May. When Brezhnev received Nixon despite the US moves in Vietnam, it appeared as if US-Soviet *détente* had reached the point where it was immune to the tensions generated by regional conflicts. With the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation agreement and the US-Soviet Joint Declaration of Basic Principle, the French no longer seemed quite so absurd in speaking of superpower condominium for the policing of the world.

President Sadat, among others, clearly drew some bitter lessons from the Moscow Summit. In his view, US-Soviet *détente* amounted to a conspiracy to freeze the Middle East situation in a "no-war, no peace" mode. If Moscow was unwilling to help him unfreeze the situation, there was little point in putting up with the irritating presence of over 15,000 Soviet military advisers and combat personnel. In mid-July Sadat surprised the Soviets and the US by ordering the Russians out of Egypt on short notice. This proved to be a particularly welcome move in the Egyptian army, where the popular General Sadiq had made his anti-Soviet views widely known.

Whatever blinders Nixon and Kissinger may have worn regarding the Middle East, they did not miss the significance of the expulsion of the Soviets from Egypt. This move was bound to impress such vintage cold warriors, although its timing was perplexing. A few months before elections, Nixon could hardly be expected to respond to Sadat's move publicly. In addition, the Vietnam conflict was receiving Kissinger's priority attention, as Nixon clearly hoped that a Vietnam settlement would crown his first term. Despite these preoccupations, a "back-channel"

line of communication was opened between Nixon and Sadat through which the Egyptians were reassured that the United States would soon turn its attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict,—this time with the White House directly in charge. On the eve of elections Nixon publicly reiterated this promise.

#### AMERICAN DIPLOMACY IN 1973

Vietnam took somewhat longer to settle than had been anticipated, but by February 1973 Kissinger was finally free of the burdens of negotiating with the intransigent leaders of Hanoi and Saigon. Seemingly a glutton for punishment, Kissinger immediately began talks with high-level Egyptians, Jordanians and Israelis. In February Sadat's adviser for National Security, Hafiz Isma'il, was the first high-ranking Egyptian to talk with Kissinger and Nixon in the post-Vietnam era. That same month King Hussein and Prime Minister Meir made the long journey to the White House. Kissinger's message to the Egyptians was a simple one: the United States was prepared to make a serious effort to help the parties negotiate an end to their conflict, but progress could only be made after the Israeli elections in October. Prior to that time some of the groundwork could be laid to find a balance between Israeli needs for security and Egyptian demands for sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> The net result of the first talks with Hafiz Isma'il was encouraging to the Americans and an early resumption of the dialogue was envisaged. Meanwhile, the Israelis were urged to begin thinking seriously about a step-by-step process of agreement on the Egyptian front after the fall elections.

The initial burst of US diplomatic activity early in 1973 was not sustained for long. Talks were held with the Egyptians, although the atmosphere had changed and seemed to mark a step backwards. US intentions, and perhaps even capabilities, were obviously uppermost in Egyptian thinking, with the deepening of the Watergate crisis in the spring of 1973 adding a note of concern. Instead of diplomacy, the Egyptians seemed interested in testing the United States, first with a serious war scare in April; a forced UN debate on the Middle East in the summer which resulted in a US veto of a pro-Arab resolution; and then with further signs of military activity in the fall. The US response was not encouraging to Sadat, particularly as Israeli intentions to create "facts" in the territories captured in 1967 seemed to be enshrined in the controversial Galili plan.

The US-Soviet talks in June 1973 were likewise not very promising