

## The October 1973 War: Culmination of the Failure of Political Analysis

By Yigal Kipnis

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“We were not surprised,” Prime Minister Golda Meir declared on a televised broadcast to the Israeli public on the evening of October 6, several hours after the war had broken out.

“A coalition of Arab nations led by Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on October 6, the day of Yom Kippur...The offensive surprised US policymakers as well as Israel,” stated a special publication issued by the CIA 39 years later.<sup>1</sup>

So what actually did take place?

At the beginning of 1973, there was a real change in the political situation in the Middle East, engendered by Egyptian President Sadat. This new reality forced decisionmakers in Israel to choose between two alternatives. The first was to respond to Kissinger’s proposal and to conduct secret peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt in accord with the outline that he had suggested. The second was to wait for war to be initiated by the Egyptians and the Syrians during the second half of 1973. The immediate and decisive refusal by Israel of the first alternative of negotiations led Kissinger and US President Nixon to abstain from advancing a political process which would have implicitly involved an American confrontation with Israel, and caused them to wait until after Israeli elections which were to take place at the end of October 1973.

The war, with no connection to its military results, has been perceived in Israel as a failure and a disaster and remains so, while in Egypt, it is viewed with pride. Kissinger defined the war as “the culmination of a failure of political analysis on the part of its victims.”<sup>2</sup> Previous to the war, in early 1973, Kissinger had been serving as Nixon’s national security advisor, but in September 1973, he was appointed Secretary of State. Almost alone, he conducted the channels of communication between the two superpowers, in addition to the secret communications with Meir and with Sadat. Nearly all the information relevant to these issues was concentrated on his desk and, at times, only in his head, and in many cases, this knowledge was his exclusively.

The circumstances of the war in October 1973 will be investigated against the backdrop of Kissinger’s characterization, an analysis that included four insights: It was a failure and a political failure, a continuing failure that had a starting point and a culmination – the war.

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<sup>1</sup> President Nixon and the Role of Intelligence in the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, issued on 30 January 2013. <https://www.cia.gov/static/c92e6ff4c7b383b2c719ac47c87f45ce/President-Nixon-and-the-Role-of-Intelligence-in-the-1973-Arab-Israeli-War.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982) 459.

**These events will also be examined in the context of Kissinger's comment to Golda Meir after the war: "I don't want to accuse anyone, but during 1973, the war could have been prevented."<sup>3</sup>**

In order to answer the questions of how this happened and why it happened, we must first clarify what actually did happen. Up to date research of the events confirms this. It indicates the central role of political conduct preceding the war and reduces the role of the failure in decision making by Israeli military intelligence, as the Yom Kippur War did not surprise the Israeli leadership. Research also enables us to understand that the avoidance by Israel of a preemptive attack and the non-mobilization of its reserves, as would have been expected by the deployment of Egyptian and Syrian troops, was not due to intelligence considerations. This was a political dictate imposed on the Israeli military a long time before the war.

Thus, current research enables us now to examine the two main questions about Israeli conduct leading up to the war:

First, what was the political alternative offered to Israel?

Second, what caused Israel to be more unprepared than it should have been in acting in advance of the outbreak of war?

These questions will be examined in this article.

### **The Turning Point**

"We were not surprised" stated Meir, just after the war had broken out, as noted above. So what about the alternative of trying to prevent it?

Until the beginning of December 1972, Kissinger, with the approval of President Nixon and coordination with Israel, had attempted to thwart any peace initiatives by the State Department. This policy stemmed from the fact that the Soviets would have been involved in any proposed solution and would then be representing Egypt in achieving any peace agreement. Kissinger wanted to initiate an agreement which would return sovereignty to Egypt over the territories it had lost in June 1967 as a means of driving the Soviets out of the region. He planned to lead negotiations only when the Soviets had been eliminated from the political process, so that the United States would be the only mediator. That was also the reason that he preferred mediation rather than direct talks between the two sides.

In December 1971, the "year of decision" between war and peace, as proclaimed by Sadat, had ended and nothing had happened. **That month, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir visited Washington for talks with President Nixon and Kissinger, and they reached a number of secret understandings, the "Understandings of December, 1971", as termed by then-Israeli Ambassador to the US, Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>4</sup>** These included the

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<sup>3</sup> Matti Golan. *Ha-Sichot Ha-Sodiot Shel Henry Kissinger [The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger]* (Tel Aviv: Shoken, 1976) Hebrew, 142.

<sup>4</sup> See Yigal Kipnis, 1973 *The Road to War* (Charlottesville, Virginia: Just World Books), "December 1971 understandings", 78-79; also, Yitzhak Rabin, "First Thoughts", Israel State Archives (ISA), 7061/6-Aleph 18/2/1973.

abandonment of the Rogers Plan for peace in the Middle East,<sup>5</sup> an implicit freeze on political steps towards peace, and a continuing supply of Phantom and Skyhawk jets to Israel. “Now having said that, we then move to the **‘appearance’ of negotiations**, under the Department of State’s auspices. That’s why I use the term appearance,” said President Nixon to Meir during his and Kissinger’s meeting with her.<sup>6</sup> A few days later, Nixon met with Kissinger and they agreed to hide these understandings from Secretary of State William Rogers and to prevent the Department of State from making any further political steps towards a Middle East solution.<sup>7</sup>

**At the beginning of 1973, a turning point took place in the political situation.** Sadat’s aim to replace Soviet patronage with American sponsorship, to establish ties with the American government and to recognize Israel was not new. However, at the beginning of 1973, these plans received practical expression.<sup>8</sup> Kissinger’s and Nixon’s policy “to frustrate Egypt...[from thinking that] their salvation would come from Moscow”, had succeeded, according to Rabin’s report regarding the relations between Egypt and the Soviet Union, just after this shift in policy had taken place.<sup>9</sup> In July 1972, after Sadat had modified the relationship between Egypt and the Soviet Union, and after a seven-month waiting period, on 25 February 1973, a direct and secret discussion channel was opened between Kissinger and President Sadat via his advisor, Hafez Ismail. Simultaneously, Sadat was preparing his army for a limited war as a means of motivating a political process if his peace initiative was not accepted.<sup>10</sup> **“Henry, the time has now come that we’ve got to squeeze the old woman,” Nixon said to Kissinger a month before both Ismail and Meir were due to arrive in Washington for governmental talks.**<sup>11</sup>

Kissinger knew the positions of the two sides regarding a peace agreement and could analyze them; he was able to identify the important points for each side and to understand where each of them could compromise. It was not the gaps in positions that deterred him. His expertise was in overcoming such difficulties, and he knew that, during negotiations, the sides would become more flexible. His position about a peace border between Israel and Egypt was well known. It was very different from the Israeli demand to annex about a third of the Sinai desert. Identical to that of Nixon, Rogers and Sadat, he favored the international border, or at very most, “tiny changes,” as Kissinger put it.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Rogers Plan, initiated by Secretary of State Rogers included a withdrawal from the areas conquered by Israel in June 1967 and related to all dimensions of the Israeli-Arab dispute as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> National Archives of the United States (NA) RN White House Tapes, Conversation no. 628-16.

<sup>7</sup> NA RN NSC File, Saunders Files, Box 1166.

<sup>8</sup> Yitzhak Rabin, *Pinkas Sherut [The Rabin Memoirs]* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma’ariv, 1979), 345-346 Hebrew; also Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1979), 1329; also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 38; also CIA document summarizing the creation of the President’s track: NA RN NSC Files, HAK files, Box 131; also Kissinger-Rabin meeting. 6.12.1972, ISA 7061/5 Aleph. Rabin’s report to Meir about what he had heard from Kissinger on this issue was not listed in the protocol and this information was reported to him during a private meeting with Kissinger.

<sup>9</sup> Rabin to Meir. “First thoughts about the expected visit of Ismail to Washington.” ISA 18.2.1973, 7061/6-Aleph

<sup>10</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 38.

<sup>11</sup> Nixon, in a conversation with Alexander Haig, NA RN, White House Tapes, Conversation no. 404-6, 23.1.1973. Nixon wanted to begin pressuring Israel immediately.

<sup>12</sup> Rabin, “Report – Conversation with Shaul”, 9.3.73, ISA 7062/8-Aleph.

**On 23 February, just before Nixon met with Ismail, Kissinger presented the President with three possible modes of action:** "There are *three basic choices* for the US in deciding what, if any, new effort should be made toward breaking the Arab-Israeli impasse:"<sup>13</sup> About the first, "We could stand back and let the two sides reflect further on their position." The President reacted: "Absolutely not. I totally disagree. This thing is getting ready to blow," correctly anticipating events. The second was "to renew the efforts to achieve an interim settlement that lost momentum in 1971." **The President opted for the third alternative – to work simultaneously in two channels, one public and similar to the second alternative, and the other, "private" and secret, to formulate understandings for an overall agreement. "It would stand or fall on whether Israel can be persuaded to think in terms of restoring Egyptian sovereignty over most of the Sinai while retaining control at strategic points—rather than insisting on a permanent change in boundaries," Kissinger explained to the President. "That is the preferred track for action," responded the President, "The time has come to quit pandering to Israel's intransigent position."**

After Ismail's public meeting with the President, he secretly met for two days of discussion with Kissinger. Ismail presented Sadat's initiative – to achieve understandings with the United States on the principles of a peace agreement with Israel, and on that basis, to conduct negotiations with Israel with the mediation of Kissinger and as such, Egypt would also disengage from the patronage of the Soviet Union. Ismail could not hide his talks with the Americans from the Soviets, but he hid the existence of the secret track with Kissinger and their agreement. Thus, he had to mislead them and to fraudulently present his talks with the Americans.

During the two days of secret talks with Ismail, Kissinger did not engage in negotiations.<sup>14</sup> He listened. He asked questions and analyzed what he was hearing rigorously, in accord with the directions by the President, in order to identify Egyptian positions which would make it possible to bridge the gaps between Egypt and Israel. And he found what he was seeking. He knew that what he was hearing from Ismail were not dictates but were points preliminary to the initiation of negotiations. According to Kissinger, these were "points which were raised in the framework of the exchange of views and had not been considered as agreed upon."<sup>15</sup> Even before his meeting with Kissinger, Nixon had advised Ismail that he did not have to volunteer his positions during the first meeting. Ismail requested that Kissinger develop the issues that were raised in the discussions, and Kissinger later reported to Meir, "He asked for us to draw up a paper with their and your views as a kind of starting point." He stressed to Meir that the Egyptians were demonstrating flexibility "especially in the field of the time limit between the ending of the state of war and the beginning of normal peace."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Memorandum from Kissinger to the President, 23.2.1973, NA RN HAK, Box 135. The President's reactions were handwritten on the document, Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 212.

<sup>14</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 64-72, the protocol of the discussions and their summarizing memorandum based on the informal discussions. NA, RN, HAK, Box 131.

<sup>15</sup> Kissinger to Rabin in a private talk, 9.3.1973, ISA, 7062/8-Aleph.

<sup>16</sup> Meeting between Meir and Rabin, and Kissinger. 28.2.1973. ISA 4239/3-Aleph.

During the two days of discussion, in accord with Kissinger's request, Ismail exhibited flexibility on two key points. About the first, he stated that the Egyptians were ready "to change the demand for evacuation from all Egyptian territory to a demand for recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over Egyptian territory." They would be ready to accept recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai for a long period, rather than a full evacuation, to be seen "as a possible response to the security needs of Israel." After the meeting, Ismail increasingly referred to the "new formula", thinking about "the untapped possibilities in that formula." Ismail explained that recognition of sovereignty was "solid enough for them to defend to their own people, yet flexible enough to accommodate practical arrangements that may be necessary."

Kissinger updated Meir with this information in a report to Ambassador Rabin.<sup>17</sup> This was also true of the second point, that "the Egyptian issue, that is, Egypt's agreement to such a solution, could be separated from dealing with an agreement with Jordan and/or Syria." Later Kissinger was even more decisive. In June, he said, "This time it is completely clear ... that the Egyptians are concerned only with themselves and don't tie an agreement with them to the other Arab states." And in September, "Egypt wants a separate peace."<sup>18</sup> Sadat was well aware of the severe criticism he would receive in the Arab world if he set his sights on a separate peace with Israel. At this early stage, Ismail would pay lip service to the prediction that "[a]s Egypt and Israel move through the above stages, Syria and Jordan would be roughly one stage behind." And "[a] Syrian settlement had to be based on the same principles as Egypt's." Regarding the Palestinians, he said that "Egypt would consider whatever Hussein worked out with the West Bank Palestinians as an internal Jordanian matter, not an Arab-Israeli matter."<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, his comments about the Syrians were identical to what was afterwards to be written into the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement, and his demand for what was later autonomy for the Palestinians was his way of minimally fulfilling his obligation to relate to the Palestinian issue.

The lengthy protocols of the two days of discussions between Kissinger and Ismail indicate the dynamics that Kissinger was employing towards the Egyptian emissary who, as required at this early stage of the process, did not reveal much of his willingness to make concessions. In addition to what was said in the official discussions, Kissinger also made use of unofficial talks, which were an inseparable part of the diplomatic process,<sup>20</sup> as what was revealed, free from the limits of the official protocol, clarified important points. **These caused Kissinger to hurry to the President immediately following the end of the discussions and to tell him: "Frankly, until this weekend, I didn't know how to do it. I was—I had no concept of how to get this thing done. I now see a**

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<sup>17</sup> Meeting between Kissinger and Rabin, 9.3.1973, NA RN HAK Box 135; About the private discussion, ISA, 7062/8-Aleph. Kissinger showed Rabin important information transmitted by Trone who had accompanied Ismail on his visit and had conversed with him later, on 26-27 February 1973.

<sup>18</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 156 and 203 respectively. Kissinger to Dinitz, 2.6.1973, NA RN Box 135, Dinitz about his meeting with Kissinger, 10.9.1973.

<sup>19</sup> Kissinger to the President, 6.3.1973, NA RN HAK Files, Box 135.

<sup>20</sup> As he and Saunders, who was accompanying him, testified in their summarizing memorandum that they showed to Rabin, ISA 27.2.1973, 7062/8-Aleph.

**glimmer of how we might do it.”**<sup>21</sup> Kissinger updated the President that he “thought the most important thing, that he’s [Ismail] never said to anyone and won’t say to anybody,” was that the Egyptians were “willing to make a separate Egyptian-Israeli deal, because they know that afterwards the Jordanians and Syrians are going to follow the same procedure.” He requested and received approval from the President to advance negotiations on two parallel tracks, one in public and via the Secretary of State, towards an interim agreement for an Israeli withdrawal from the Suez Canal, and the second, a secret track between him and Ismail to discuss the details of a peace agreement. On the basis of what he had heard from Ismail, he estimated to the President that “by September first, we have two things going, an interim settlement and direct negotiations between the Arabs and the Israelis. And it will look lovely, and it will be a tremendous boon.” Nixon had actually presented this approach to Ismail when they met on 23 February.<sup>22</sup> As a matter of fact, Nixon and Kissinger were adopting a draft for discussion that was similar to what had been proposed by Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon three months earlier.<sup>23</sup>

**“They would be flexible”, Kissinger updated Meir when they spoke two days later. He also told her that after the United States and Egypt had reached understandings, “they will sit down with you.” He countered her claim that there was nothing new in the Egyptian approach. “There is a new Egyptian approach,” he explained, but was faced with her stiff opposition to what he was proposing. He added, “Again, I would only try if you and I agree.” “Then we will just not go along with this,” she responded.**<sup>24</sup>

Kissinger and Hal Saunders, a National Security Council official, summarized the discussions in a memo that “described Ismail’s position as it evolved over two days of talks and the process he envisage[d] over the coming months.”<sup>25</sup> The memo, also immediately transmitted to Rabin, opened with the schedule determined by Ismail, noting that “fundamental principles of an agreement would [be] agreed by this September” although, by his timetable, implementation “[c]ould take well beyond the end of 1973 to complete.” Kissinger explained that Ismail was considering separating the issue of recognition of sovereignty from the issue of withdrawal and, as such, integrating the demand for Israeli security. So, said Ismail, “If the issues of territory and sovereignty could

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<sup>21</sup> Meeting between Nixon and Kissinger, 26.2.1973, NA Nixon White House Tapes, no. 413-33; See also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 71.

<sup>22</sup> NA RN, Box 131. The meeting took place without the presence of Secretary of State Rogers.

<sup>23</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 51. Allon had tried to return to this proposal in June 1973 but had been thwarted by Prime Minister Golda Meir. See p. 158), “By the Wayside”.

<sup>24</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 80-83 Kissinger’s discussion with Meir, 28.2.1973, There is no American protocol for this meeting. The following day Meir was forced to agree that Kissinger would continue to maintain the secret track with Ismail, on condition that “he does not do anything behind our backs,” as she put it. NA RN Box 131; See also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 87, and the reaction of the President to the Kissinger memorandum,

<sup>25</sup> The summary transmitted to Rabin on 27.2.1973.

be put aside, we could be open-minded.” “This of course, could be quite significant,” as Kissinger emphasized to Rabin.<sup>26</sup>

On 6 March, Kissinger transmitted a summary memo to Nixon, as well. He was aware of the President’s desire to advance negotiations, but now, he was also aware of Meir’s adamant opposition. He added a moderating sentence to the memo, noting that Ismail’s opening positions were no different than Egypt’s positions in the past. But he also stressed that this time, Ismail was open to considering other approaches in order to reach an agreement.<sup>27</sup> Under the heading “What Ismail Proposed,” Kissinger wrote to Nixon that “[t]he U.S. and Egypt could work out the principles of an agreement and then present them to Israel” and that “[t]he U.S. could listen to both Egypt and Israel and try to develop a position that would meet the reasonable interests of both sides.” He added that “[i]f there were a serious process, Egypt would not feel the need to set deadlines.” The positions proposed by Ismail were not dictates. They intimated that, as long as negotiations were continuing for a permanent solution, the Egyptians were not demanding that Israel withdraw from more than what might be determined in an interim solution.

On 9 March, after Kissinger had also received intelligence information about Ismail’s reactions to the talks, confirming that the positions he had presented were preliminary and open to discussion and change,<sup>28</sup> Kissinger presented Israel with an outline and schedule for progress in negotiations during 1973.<sup>29</sup> He updated Ismail that same day, saying that he was making every effort to formulate an agreement in principle, according to the draft that he (Ismail) had presented.

The Sadat initiative, which had started to take on practical form in the Kissinger-Israeli track and had initiated a change in Kissinger’s approach, was exactly what Golda Meir had feared. **For two years she had been receiving information from a Mossad agent, Ashraf Marwan, that Egypt was willing to recognize Israel and to sign a peace agreement, without consideration of the**

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<sup>26</sup> The President had reacted to an additional earlier memo leading up to his meeting with Meir in which Kissinger reported on the progress in both tracks: “This is the time to get moving—and they must be told that *firmly*.” From Kissinger to the President, 23.2.1973, NA RN Box 131; See also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 58; and the reaction of the President to the memo. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 212.

<sup>27</sup> Memo from Kissinger to the President, 6.3.1973, NA RN Box 131.

<sup>28</sup> NA RN, Box 131. Important information was transmitted by Eugene Trone, the CIA station chief in Cairo at the time, who had accompanied Ismail on his visit and had conversed with him afterwards on 26 and 27 February. Kissinger let Rabin read the information when they next met. ISA 7062/8-Aleph. Ismail had said, “Unfortunately, it had not been possible for him to be very specific this time.”

<sup>29</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 93. Researchers of the period who did not combine American documentation with Israeli documentary sources erred in reconstructing these events. For example, Craig Daigle, editor of the volume on the Yom Kippur War of the US National Archives, did not make use of Israeli documentation and based his work on a selection of American documentation. He thus missed important and vital information when reconstructing and understanding events. One of them was the outline presented by Kissinger to Israel, explaining to Rabin in a personal conversation which is documented only in the Israeli archives. Daigle did not know about this documentation and thus, ignored the public part of the discussion in which Kissinger detailed the schedule for the implementation of his outlined plan. This is also true of the comparable Israeli editor who did not do comprehensive research in order to integrate American documentation.

**Palestinian issue.<sup>30</sup> She also feared negotiations based on the Kissinger-Nixon outline even more than she feared war. Thus, she ignored this turning point and rejected Kissinger's outline.** She termed his proposal "Kissinger's cockroach,"<sup>31</sup> but "Kissinger's cockroach," based on what he had heard from Ismail, was the alternative to the war facing Israel.

### **The Outline**

As Kissinger described, this was the outline that he proposed to Prime Minister Golda Meir in March 1973: "The creation of three security areas in Sinai for the stage following the attainment of a peace agreement (creating a state of peace) until full normalization. In one area, Egyptian forces would be stationed, primarily in the canal sector, the second area in which Israeli forces would be stationed and a third area covering most of Sinai, which would be a demilitarized zone, constituting a demarcation between the sides. The stage between achieving a peace agreement up until the transition to normalization, could be long and might continue for many years."<sup>32</sup>

Kissinger stressed that this draft was based on Egyptian flexibility which could be identified "at two main points." The first was the conversion of the Egyptian demand for complete withdrawal to a demand to recognize Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai. The second was the Egyptian approach to the possible implementation of the agreement in stages and over a period of time – "Egyptian willingness to see two main stages in the progress to **a real peace**," as Rabin reported. Rabin added that "Shaul [Kissinger] sees the possibility to respond to Israel's security needs between the period from achieving a political agreement signed by the sides creating a state of peace, until the completion of **the normalization process in relations between two states**, by leaving Israeli military forces at critical points in Sinai, but without harming the principle of Egyptian sovereignty."

Kissinger also proposed stages to achieve a comprehensive agreement.<sup>33</sup> At the first stage, Egypt and the United States would conduct secret negotiations in order to reach an agreement on understandings between the two states, and in this framework, the Americans would recognize Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai. Kissinger would inform Israel of this step when he saw fit. This state would end by 1 September 1973 in a mutual statement "of general principles between the two superpowers." The mutual statement was Kissinger's way of enabling the Soviets to maintain the appearance of partnership in this political process. That was what Kissinger was referring to when he had told the president that "By summer we can ...put the two [channels] together...It gets the Russians off our back... and it will be a tremendous boon." "What we lose is the commitment of the US to the sovereignty of Egypt," reacted

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<sup>30</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 313. Golda Meir avoided transmitting this information to the Americans because she viewed it as an opening to pressure Israel to enter negotiations on the basis of the Rogers Plan, a plan she opposed; Yitzhak Rabin, *Pinkas Sherut*, 345-346.

<sup>31</sup> Meeting of the "Kitchen Cabinet" 2, 18.4.73, IDF Archives 175/383/1975

<sup>32</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War* 91-96; also Meeting between Rabin and Kissinger, "Report of a discussion with Shaul". 9.3.1973, ISA 7062/8-Aleph.

<sup>33</sup>Kissinger's memorandum to the President, 6 March 1973 NA RN Box 131.



Rabin.<sup>34</sup> And regarding the schedule, he responded: "It comes with principles publicly, say July or August, which will be very unpleasant to the prime minister, that is two or three months before our election."

Parallel to this stage, there would be a separate channel of negotiations for an interim settlement which would involve Israeli withdrawal from the Suez Canal.

The second stage would begin after Israel accepted the agreement to US-Egyptian understandings. It would aim at summarizing the specifications for implementing the agreement and the commitments of each of the sides. At this stage, for which Ismail did not set a time limit, the negotiations would take place directly as well.

The third stage would be implementation of the agreement in stages. Kissinger attached great importance to the "stages of implementation which would grant opportunities and time when passing from stage to stage," providing for "the security needs of Israel to maintain military forces at vital points in Sinai."<sup>35</sup> He was fully aware of the suspicions of both sides inherent in such a process and thus, he stubbornly adhered to an approach ensuring implementation of the peace process in stages, a process that would continue for a lengthy period of time. He intended to act on this plan following the Israeli elections. And so he did. But during the interim, war had broken out.

Israel was not facing a dictate that had to be obeyed. At the beginning of 1973 it was facing a proposal by the most influential political figure in the world to initiate negotiations. The proposal was aimed at preventing the danger of war and attempting to achieve a peace agreement. In order to advance, Kissinger wanted to know, at this stage, and for information only, "whether we [Israel] are ready to digress from the demand for significant border changes in comparison to the international border [i.e., annexation of about a third of Sinai]," as transmitted by Rabin to Golda Meir.<sup>36</sup> Kissinger did not set any other condition for Israel in order to begin negotiations. **The Egyptians did not demand implementation of an entire Israeli withdrawal with the signing of a full agreement, and neither did Kissinger who, as noted, only requested the elimination of the demand for annexation of a large part of Sinai.**

Rabin discussed this proposal with Meir for about two hours, a discussion which Rabin later termed as long and difficult. Meir responded with total rejection. "For two hours, I have tried my best to explain," the ambassador told a frustrated Kissinger who had difficulty understanding Meir's negative reply which prevented him from immediately beginning negotiations to implement his proposed plan.<sup>37</sup> In May, Kissinger again requested that Israel consider its position and eliminate the obstacle to the political process. **He explained, "I do not share Israel's optimism about the low probability of renewing the war."**<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Meeting between Kissinger and Rabin, 9 March 1973. NA, RN, HAK, Box 135. This document is not included in the collection of American archival documents edited by Daigle.

<sup>35</sup> ISA, 7062/8-Aleph, Meeting between Kissinger and Rabin, 9 March 1973

<sup>36</sup> ISA, 7062/8-Aleph, Meeting between Kissinger and Rabin, 9 March 1973

<sup>37</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 96; also NA, RN, Box 19 HAK Telcon 14 October 1973

<sup>38</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 140-141. Meeting between Dinitz and Kissinger, 13 May 1973, NA, RN, NSC Files, Box 135

## How Israel Related to Kissinger's Plan as an Alternative to War

Three decisionmakers in Israel reacted to the Kissinger plan: Prime Minister Golda Meir, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, and Minister Without Portfolio Yisrael Galili. Yigal Allon was only partially informed about this secret proposal. Rabin knew about all of the details and developments until mid-March. He had been completely distanced from future moves following the end of his term as ambassador, and as Israeli elections approached, he was involved in political activity and far from the focus of decision making.

Allon and Rabin felt that Israel should enter negotiations in accord with Kissinger's plan and, as Kissinger intended, conduct two channels – the secret channel for a permanent settlement and the public channel for an interim agreement. That may be the reason that both of them were distanced from information and from decision making about the political alternative. Dayan, like Golda Meir, was opposed to the alternative at the beginning. **Meir continued to resist while, from the middle of June, Dayan changed his opinion and was ready to accept an agreement which would include recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai with security arrangements for Israel, on condition that negotiations start after the Israeli elections.** Dayan informed the Americans of his views, but did not tell his decision-making companions.<sup>39</sup>

Meir was the first to react to Kissinger's outline. As noted, already at the end of February, while she was in Washington, she completely rejected his request to eliminate her demand for Israeli sovereignty over a large part of Sinai.<sup>40</sup> Kissinger was thus prevented from beginning to advance the political process.

In April, Sadat was waiting for Kissinger to set a date for an additional meeting with Ismail, while Kissinger, who was trying to postpone continuing clarifications with Egypt until after the Israeli elections, delayed appointing a time for the meeting. In the meanwhile, Israel received targeted information about Sadat's intention to start a war in May. In Egypt, there were no real preparations for a war in May, and it appears that the alert warning of war actually expressed Sadat's desire to pressure Kissinger. Israel interpreted this intelligence in a similar vein when "Golda's kitchen cabinet" met on 18 April to discuss the war alerts and relate to them.<sup>41</sup> The meeting opened with an evaluation of the probability of war and its possible scenarios. The Chief of Staff David Elazar (Dado), the head of the Mossad Zvi Zamir and the head of army intelligence Eli Zeira reported in detail and the discussion continued based on the assumption that sooner or later "they were moving towards war", as Dayan predicted.

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<sup>39</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 200-203. "What is Moshe Dayan cooking up?"

<sup>40</sup> It appears that, in order to explain and defend her decision, there is a handwritten note by someone from her office, probably Dinitz, that "the flexibility seen by Shaul in the Egyptian position was actually in Shaul's mind and not in the present reality of the Egyptian position." ISA, 7064/8-Aleph. These comments reflect the thoughts of the commenter.

<sup>41</sup> "Cabinet 2" 18 April 1973. Website of ISA <https://www.archives.gov.il/product-page/2410417>; also IDF Archives 175/383/1975; for further details Kipnis 2013, pp.97-100.

In the second part of the meeting, Galili forced Meir and Dayan to relate to the political alternative – a response to Kissinger’s proposal. As such, this discussion became the only one in which the decision makers directly related to Kissinger’s outline for negotiations. It is thus important to expand on this discussion which took place between Meir, Dayan and Galili.

“Is there anything that we could do so that that [war] will not happen?” asked Galili, referring to the political alternative. Meir tried to avoid dealing with Galili’s queries. She related to three questions. The first was how to avoid war by deterrence – “Could we bring what we know [the information from Mossad agent Marwan about the intention to initiate war] to our friends [Kissinger] or not, with all of the danger that entails?” Her additional two questions were about preparing the home front and whether to update the government about the possibility of war. “How can we do that without arousing panic that war is on the way?” she asked. She directed the discussion to minimizing the report about a coming war because of the “dangers” involved, that is, aiming not to expose the fact that Israel had a high-quality source of information and the fear that Kissinger would leverage the tension in order to motivate negotiation.

Galili again requested that they devote an “internal discussion” to the political alternative. Meir again avoided the question and returned to an internal discussion about how to prepare the home front, about the “gasoline that we need. Maybe there are other things, Civil Defense, cleaning the shelters and of course, many of them have been filled with old furniture, etc.” Galili did not give up. There were very few who dared to face up to Golda’s stubbornness. Galili was one of them, even though he worded his comments with care. Indeed, his words were careful, but he kept returning to them in an almost nagging fashion. “It seems to me, that internally, we are not in a good place, that is, all of these developments stem from the fact that we do not agree to return to the previous line.” Galili did not allow Meir and Dayan to evade “the elephant in the room” and not even to avoid recognizing that the “elephant” was actually “Kissinger’s cockroach.” **“If you take what Hafez (Ismail) said to Shaul (Kissinger) and the paper he left with him,”** said Galili, “then their starting point is that **they are ready for peace** and for a system of agreements and international assurances and so forth, and all of that on condition that we completely withdraw to the previous line.”

Galili did not give up. “I think that basically, we have to bring this up to the government. Because I think **this requires a new mandate, that is, a new exclusive mandate** from our side that we do not agree to withdraw to the previous line, nor will we begin negotiations on the basis of the demand to withdraw to the previous border.” Galili’s words also undermined the basic interpretation that the plan proposed to Israel “was Kissinger’s ‘vision’ and not what he had heard from Ismail.”<sup>42</sup> Relating to Dayan’s words that “if not, then there will be war”, Galili again said, “But relating to that, **there is also a possibility of avoiding all of this “tribulation” if we are ready to enter a series of discussions on the basis of a return to the previous border.**” Galili requested that they also discuss the political alternative with the Americans and even hinted at Yigal Allon’s point of view. Allon’s views called for Israel to begin negotiations, and that position was absent from this

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<sup>42</sup> An interpretation offered by someone in the prime minister’s office, ISA 7064/8-aleph.

discussion: “I would really be “thirsty” for such a discussion, in this framework [of the “kitchen cabinet”] with Yigal [Allon], to try to work out what Kissinger is hinting at **time after time, when he talks about strategic strongholds as an alternative to a change in borders**. We are always trying to educate him that when we talk about a change in borders with Egypt, **we are talking about [Israeli] sovereignty** and not about all of Sinai [but a third of it]. In contrast, they [the Egyptians] have come out with the formula of [Egyptian] sovereignty on Egyptian ground, but which will take the security needs of Israel into account, sovereignty in exchange for security.” Sovereignty in exchange for security was the basis of the plan proposed by Kissinger and by Ismail.

Galili was expressing opposition to Meir’s and Dayan’s preference for war over negotiation. “I see another state of war as a threat that will deepen hostility, hatred,” he said, and added, “It will involve great destruction and many lives lost. And so (we are talking about) a very long-term postponement of any possibility of a return to quiet.” He proposed considering the alternative of negotiations in order to distance the likelihood of war and to begin moves towards reconciliation. His proposal stemmed from the fact that, unlike the others, he understood that “our potential to deter them is limited, but I would like to be able to tell ourselves that everything possible [to achieve progress] has been done.” Galili also went more deeply into the tactical aspect of the situation, considering that a positive reply to Kissinger would earn points for Israel when moving into a political process which would obviously occur sooner or later.

The participants could no longer ignore the fact that they were facing two alternatives: to agree to conduct negotiations or to wait for a war initiated by the Egyptians and the Syrians. And they also had to decide whether to share this information with the government. **Meir did not leave room for doubt as to her refusal to accept Kissinger’s plan. She well understood its significance: “Sovereignty [annexation of a large part of Sinai] no, security [security arrangements in Sinai] yes. And other things like that.” She determined that “he [Kissinger] should be told again, that he must know, what he has heard from us many times, that this is not our conception, and he cannot propose such a plan in our name.”**

The three agreed that the government should be told about the war alerts, but that they would not provide the details of the political alternative. “Yisrael, I wouldn’t suggest that this should be placed before the government in this context, that is, are we willing to go to war only on condition that we don’t return to the Green Line?” Dayan responded to Galili. Meir agreed to transmit the agreed-upon information to the government but only the possibility that war would break out and not the possibility of preventing it by negotiating.<sup>43</sup>

Kissinger was aware of the fact that Sadat might go to war. He especially feared that this would take place before the summit meeting between Nixon and Soviet leader Brezhnev. His second meeting with Ismail had been set for 20 May. A week earlier, he met with

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<sup>43</sup> In her words: “We won’t be doing the right thing if we tell the government that there were signs in the past, and we thought that here it is (war), it’s coming, and the information was false... The government must know that it is possible. And we are talking about weeks. That is to say, Sadat is talking about only a few weeks.”

Israeli Ambassador Simha Dinitz, who had taken Rabin's place, and again examined Israeli readiness to accept his outline. "Why couldn't you take it in the form of security zones instead of annexation? Sovereignty will be Egyptian but in actuality, you will be present there," Kissinger queried the ambassador. "My estimate of what you want is a straight line west of El-Arish." Kissinger was making sure that he understood the Israeli annexation demand that was preventing him from initiating negotiations. Dinitz confirmed: "It might not be a straight line... but in general terms you are right. In strategic terms we need sufficient depth to make it secure. But three-quarters of Sinai would go back... I really think it is reasonable!"<sup>44</sup>

As neither the second meeting between Kissinger and Ismail in May nor the summit meetings in June set a political process in motion, in Sadat's view, the only alternative left to him was the military one. The setting of a coordination meeting with President Hafez Assad of Syria was accelerated. On September 12 Sadat and Assad determined that October 6 would be the opening attack of the war, and from mid-September, military preparations began to appear in the field.

On September 22 Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State of the United States. "Israel and the Arabs must be ready to make difficult decisions based on an agreement," said Kissinger in his testimony to the Senate, at which he called for negotiations in the Middle East.<sup>45</sup> Leading up to his appointment, he had prodded Israel to cooperate in order to advance negotiations. He clarified that, after the Israeli elections, a political process would begin and he even presented timing for the initiation of this process – January 1974, immediately after the formation of a new government in Israel.<sup>46</sup> To that end, it was also determined that on 8 December, Dayan would travel to the White House for talks in Washington.<sup>47</sup> This was also reported in the press.<sup>48</sup>

Dinitz left the United States for consultations in Israel about the expected political attack on Israel.<sup>49</sup> By the time he returned to Washington, the threat of war was concrete. Kissinger had already begun to serve as Secretary of State. Six days before the outbreak of war, Dinitz transmitted Meir's response to his demand that she advance negotiations: As he (Kissinger) knows, I do not think that the present situation (military tension) is ideal,

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<sup>44</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 141. Meeting between Kissinger and Dinitz 13 May 1973, NA RN NSC Files Box 135.

<sup>45</sup> Nahum Barnea, *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 12 September 1973; see also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 203-205.

<sup>46</sup> Meeting between Kissinger and Dinitz 10 September 1973: NA RN NSC Files, HAK Files, Box 135; and Dinitz to Gazit, 10 September 1973, ISA 887/Lamed Vav, Ibid.; also Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (New York, Little, Brown and Co., 1979), 463.

<sup>47</sup> Dinitz to Gazit, 30 September 1973; ISA 934/ Lamed Vav, 4996-2=Aleph; also the headline in the *Haaretz* daily newspaper, 17 September 1973.

<sup>48</sup> For example, Philip Ben, *Haaretz*, 23 September 1973; also Moshe Carmel "Expectations and fears approaching 1974," *Davar* daily newspaper, 26 September 1973. Like many other details providing information on developments in the secret channel, important details from this discussion do not have American documentation as well. Kissinger himself confirmed this in his book published thirty years later, Henry Kissinger, *Crisis: An Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 203.

but a time of elections is not convenient for serious discussion.<sup>50</sup> “That horse is finished,” reacted Kissinger about a continuation of the Israeli policy of stagnation. He emphasized that the validity of the December 1971 Understandings had ended and that in January 1974, after the elections and after he had become established in his post, a new political era would begin in the Middle East.<sup>51</sup> Apparently, it was no coincidence that, at the beginning of October, an editorial appeared in the *London Times* saying: “Israel will be behaving with foolishness if it rejects the Kissinger plan... Israel will be very foolish if it tries to prevent an agreement by procedural objections or territorial claims.”<sup>52</sup>

The failure of political analysis, which had begun at the end of February, reached its peak at the beginning of October. Not one of those involved knew that within less than a week, a war would break out which would mark the collapse of the Israeli approach that it could prevent war by deterrence. Thus, the Egyptian military attack preceded the political attack by Kissinger, or actually, postponed it to the end of the war. And at a heavy price.

On the basis of his outline, a plan that Golda Meir had not accepted, Kissinger led the political process immediately following the war. This was a war that Meir and Dayan had not wanted but had preferred over the implementation of the Kissinger plan before war had broken out. When they had made this decision, they well knew that the Israeli army would be limited in the steps it could take in advance of the fighting. They believed in the Israeli ability to win the war, but they also knew that its costs would be heavy.

### **The Commitment**

“We were not surprised,” Golda Meir told the public a few hours after the war had broken out. What actually had taken place?

On the morning of the day that the war would begin, Meir reacted with anger towards one the ministers who objected to the decision not to approve a preliminary attack. “We are fighting for our lives,” she told the minister. “But that does not mean just fighting at the borders; it also means fighting to stand with our friends, that is, one friend.” Dinitz, who was standing nearby intervened, “Kissinger always told me that what would be, was not important; don’t be the first ones to attack.”<sup>53</sup> “He also said this to Rabin.” “Do you think I have forgotten?” reacted Meir to Dinitz.

Meir had obligated herself to Kissinger to wait for longer than two hours and that had become a political directive to the army – the opening moves of war would be made by the other side. This commitment directed Meir and Dayan not to approve a preventive attack or a comprehensive military mobilization. It was Golda Meir who bore the responsibility

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<sup>50</sup> Dinitz to the prime minister, about his meeting with Kissinger, 30 September 1973, ISA 934/Lamed Vav, 4996/2-Aleph.

<sup>51</sup> Dinitz to Gazit about his private conversation with Kissinger 30 September 1973. ISA 937/ Lamed Vav, 4996/2-Aleph. Also 934/Lamed Vav. Ibid.: also about this important meeting in order to understand the behavior of Israel considering the coming war. There is no documentation in US archives, nor is it mentioned in the publication, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, Foreign Relations of the United States, Volume 15*.

<sup>52</sup> *Haaretz* 19732 October 1973. Quote from an editorial of the *London Times*.

<sup>53</sup> Protocol of the meeting between Kissinger and Dinitz, 7 October 1973 at 8:20 pm at Kissinger’s office. NA RG 59, Box 25.

and it was not due to a failure of intelligence. In December 1972 Kissinger had again warned Israel not to carry out a preliminary strike if Egypt attacked<sup>54</sup> and minutes before the outbreak of war, he repeated this demand in a tough message: “We demand that you not take any preventive action.”<sup>55</sup> This time he was resolute even though Meir had already committed herself not to conduct a preventive strike. And she carried that promise out, creating the difficult opening conditions for the IDF.

A third political demand was appended to these two. Meir and Dayan did not want war, yet, more than not wanting war, they feared the political moves that Kissinger was attempting to set in motion. Thus, the army’s preparations were forced to conform to the wish to prevent military tension that would motivate Kissinger to initiate a political process, as Sadat desired. “We do not want to inflate preparations **that will serve the (Egyptian) political aims without going to war,**” as stated by Chief of Staff Elazar.<sup>56</sup>

The military command did not know of the commitment made by Israel to Kissinger, but they did know about its ramifications – the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were forced to prepare for a war that would be initiated by the enemy. In keeping with this political demand, the army prepared plans for war which, as estimated in Israel, would break out during the second half of 1973. The commitment was not a last-minute consideration or demand.

The promise not to conduct a preventive attack was one aspect of the commitment to Kissinger. “We are preparing plans on the assumption that we will not be the ones to initiate the war but rather, we must “welcome” them” said Chief of Staff Elazar to Meir and Dayan when he presented them with the plans for war.<sup>57</sup> And although he preferred to deliver the first preventive blow, he said, “I understand that we cannot initiate a preventive strike.” In May, when Dayan ordered the General Staff: “Gentlemen, prepare for war!”, he also knew well enough to specify that he was talking about a clear attack by Egypt and Syria.”<sup>58</sup>

“The answer is no,” Elazar was told by Dayan when he requested “to carry out a preventive strike on airports in Egypt and Syria,” or alternatively, to attack airports in Syria and missiles in Egypt.<sup>59</sup> This was on the morning of 6 October, when the war was already a certainty. Dayan also explained, “In my estimation, it is important, even if the Americans are 100% certain, they will not let us attack first.” “Regarding a preventive strike,

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<sup>54</sup> Dispatch from Rabin, 1 December 1972 ISA, 7043/16-Aleph.

<sup>55</sup> Kissinger’s discussion with Shalev, 6 October 1973 morning, NA, RN, NSC Files, Box 136. Kissinger, *Crisis*, 11.; also Dispatch from Golda Meir to Kissinger, received on 5 October 1973. After the war, Kissinger claimed that he had never made that demand to Israel, but real time documentation negates this claim.

<sup>56</sup> Presentation of war plans to the prime minister and Minister of Defense, 9 May 1973, Israeli Defense Forces Archives (IDF Archives) 2016/264/41.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 147. Regarding the additional directive by Dayan to “plan and prepare a preceding strike” and its implications, see the chapter in this paper: Chaos.

<sup>59</sup> Consultation at 5:40 am. The website of the Yom Kippur War Center.

fundamentally, we cannot let ourselves do that this time,”<sup>60</sup> he said in consultation with the prime minister on the morning of the war. He added, “We cannot carry out a preventive strike. Even five minutes.”

“He was schizophrenic,” recalled Simha Dinitz about the Dayan’s misgivings during those hours leading up to the war. “As a general he felt that they must [strike first], but as a member of the Cabinet, he knew that they couldn’t.”<sup>61</sup> That was true of Meir as well. “A preventive strike – really attractive. But this is not 1967,” she said. Meir’s and Dayan’s considerations were political. It appears that they would be valid even if the head of army intelligence, Zeira, had not been mistaken in his evaluation and had correctly thought that the war would break out.

## Chaos

“**We were not surprised**” said Golda a few hours after the war had begun. In everything relating to the decision makers, she was right. It was the Israeli public who were surprised, while censorship prevented them from knowing about the deployment of Egyptian and Syrian forces at the front. Most of the regular and career army soldiers were also surprised as, except for the senior army command, the order given to increase military readiness and the fact that regular soldiers were not permitted to take a holiday leave was not accompanied by explanations of an expected war and there were no relevant briefings or instructions. So the shock was general and comprehensive. Only then were decision makers made aware of the gap between knowing and being informed, between knowledge, and awareness of the significance of events.

**The failure of political analysis – starting from the decision to prefer war over negotiation – had reached its summit. The mistake of relying on deterrence to prevent an unwanted war was now understood. Israeli deterrence, meant to dissuade Sadat from initiating a comprehensive war, was not effective in preventing a limited war which would serve his political objectives.** This deterrence turned out to be an illusion and an obstacle. In order to deter, Israel would have had to transmit messages to Egypt that it had credible information that Egypt was about to initiate fighting, and to warn Egypt that Israel would react with great intensity. However, such a message would have revealed the sources of Israel’s information and would have also caused Kissinger to leverage the danger of war in order to advance his political plan, which Israel did not want. “You get to know your friends there. They will care for their own interests at your expense,” in Dayan’s words.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Consultation with the prime minister, 8:05 am, 6 October 1973, 7049.19-Aleph. Dayan even made sure to tell the prime minister, “I told Dado not to do air patrols over the border today. It must be clear that we didn’t start this.”

<sup>61</sup> Protocol of the meeting between Kissinger and Dinitz at 20:20. 7 October 1973. NA RG 59 Box 25.

<sup>62</sup> Cabinet 2 18 April 1973 (See footnote 41).



The political directive to keep calm and to hide the military tension took its toll on the eve of elections.

“Waiting for more than two hours” was actually put into practice. However, it forced the Israeli army to deviate from its combat culture based on initiative, surprise and the transfer of the fighting to enemy territory, forcing its officers and soldiers, who lacked knowledge of military containment, to wait for the enemy attack. It also became clear that the Israeli containment plan was not practical, as it rested on an internal contradiction. It relied on the air force as a central factor in the holding defense, but also assumed the need to grant it two days to destroy the missile battery and to attack the airfields.

The “**political conception**” was also found to be an illusion. Although the Egyptian and Syrian concentration of forces was known, Meir and Dayan preferred to retain the assumption that Sadat’s political goals created “a low probability that he would initiate a war” and that he would wait for the outline Kissinger planned to put into action after the Israeli elections, and that the Syrians would not go to war without Egypt. These assumptions collapsed. “I accept that conception about the difference between Egypt and Syria one hundred percent.” Golda had said on October 3, responding to the approach offered by Dayan, that the “Egyptians would now prefer an additional political round to a military round,”<sup>63</sup> and that “on the way to peace, or at least the non-renewal of war, I expect that there will be a decline of hostility, or no fanning of the flames into an active state,”<sup>64</sup> and also, “I don’t expect a renewal of war in the battlefields, but I do expect a difficult political struggle,”<sup>65</sup> “that the Egyptians will now prefer to ‘gather the fruits’ of the political campaign that they have begun.”<sup>66</sup> This approach turned out to be a wish rather than a reality.

“What is the logic in beginning a war?” Zamir echoed this incorrect political conception to Marwan a few hours before the war broke out. “Starting a war now will do harm to recent Egyptian political gains and the chances of reaching understandings with Kissinger,” the head of the Mossad wondered as he met with the Egyptian agent just before the war. He well understood Golda Meir’s thinking, but had trouble understanding the political analysis of the enemy.<sup>67</sup>

### **Sadat’s Intentions, Motivations and Actions**

Based on a reconstruction of events and updated documentation, we may now propose the following explanations to the question of why Sadat chose war and did not wait until after the elections in Israel:

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<sup>63</sup> Cabinet consultation 3 October 1973, website of the State Archives and also, IDF Archives 1975 175.383; see also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 247.

<sup>64</sup> Bartov, *Dado, 48 Years*, 317; see also Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 247-248.

<sup>65</sup> *Yedioth Aharonoth*, 11 September 1973.

<sup>66</sup> *Davar*, 11 September 1973

<sup>67</sup> Notes taken of the meeting by Zamir and Dubi Asherov, Marwan’s contact person, with Marwan in London. Early morning (Israeli time) of the day the war broke out. Website of the ISA. [www.archives.gov.il](http://www.archives.gov.il).

1. Even during the meetings at the end of February, Ismail emphasized to Kissinger that Sadat's schedule to reach an agreement was timed so that he would be able to meet the test and trial of the Israeli public during elections. This point came up several times.<sup>68</sup>
2. In 1971 and 1972, Sadat had experienced the failure of his attempts to reach an agreement led by Secretary of State Rogers and Joseph Sisco and the United Nations envoy Gunnar Jarring. Even in the discussion channel with Kissinger that had been set in motion, Sadat encountered rejections. At the beginning, it was the argument of elections in the United States, and afterwards, problems of scheduling with Kissinger who was very busy. The second meeting between Kissinger and Ismail was also postponed a number of times, and only took place on 20 May and without the preparations necessary to achieve an agreement on understandings. Sadat was able to assume that the delay had been coordinated between Kissinger and Meir. Added to this was the indecisiveness in the inter-superpower track at the summit meeting. He had reason to suspect that this conduct would also continue after the elections in Israel.
3. Sadat did not know the details of the contacts and the messages between Kissinger and Meir. And he did not know that already at the beginning of March, Kissinger had presented the outline for an agreement and a schedule to conduct negotiations to Israel. Sadat also knew nothing about Dayan's intentions to act to advance an agreement after the elections which was, in principle, similar to his own initiative.<sup>69</sup>
4. Preparations for a limited war had been based on their own schedule, independent of political moves that were taking place at the same time. The heads of the Egyptian army planned to complete preparations in autumn 1973 and were unaware of a political track. As such, they determined possible dates to initiate the fighting in September or October. Sadat would have had to face great internal criticism if these dates had passed without starting the war.
5. In his first year as Egyptian President, Sadat had announced that it was a "year of decisions" for either war or peace. In October 1973, he would have been in power for three years and he would have had difficulty in explaining an additional postponement of decision making.
6. On 4 September 1973, the "Galili document" had been made public in Israel, determining the settlement policy of the Labor Party in the occupied territories.<sup>70</sup> This document included the establishment of a bloc of settlements in northwestern Sinai and the establishment of the city of Yamit, including a large port. Discussions about formalizing the document were publicized in the media. Sadat viewed this document as the Israeli reaction to his peace initiative.

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<sup>68</sup> NA RN NSC Files, HAK Box 131. Kissinger was told the following: "I assume that in the coming days Mrs. Meir will tell you that in Israel there will be elections this year. But the elections in Israel do not enter into our considerations. It's enough that we waited until after the election in the United States. They [the Israelis] have to raise questions of war and peace and let's see what the Israeli nation has to say about that."

<sup>69</sup> All of this: Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 154-155. Based on the telegram from the embassy of the United States in Tel Aviv, Dayan's thoughts on the possibility of a peace agreement with Jordan and with Egypt. NA GR 59 Pol 27-14 Arab-Isr., Tel Aviv 3039.

<sup>70</sup> See Kipnis, *The Road to War*, 2013 191-192.

Sadat would have preferred that his political channel had led to negotiations rather than being required to choose the military alternative. When Mossad agent Marwan had brought alerts to Israel for the dates of incipient war during the previous year, he had conditioned the possibility that Sadat would carry out his threats and emphasized that political moves initiated by the United States, the Soviet Union or Israel would prevent Sadat from giving the final order to attack. This was also transmitted by King Hussein of Jordan, who had arrived in Israel several days after discussions with Sadat and Assad in Cairo, for a meeting with Meir at which he warned her of the coming war.

After the war, it was claimed that the war had meant to return the honor and the pride, lost in the Six-Day War, to Egypt and its army, as well as the loss of sovereignty over Sinai. However, we should distinguish between the fact that, after the war, the impression of military victory and pride was returned to Egypt, and the idea that that had been the objective of the war. **This argument does not take into account the possibility that the war might have ended with an additional defeat for Egypt and an expansion of the Israeli occupation on the west side of the canal.**

Arguments made after the fact are usually raised because the sides wish to cultivate them. This time Israel also had an interest in promoting this idea – in order to prove that the war was unavoidable and would have broken out even without Israel's refusal to negotiate – for Sadat internally to foster the image of a recovery of honor in return for the heavy price of the military loss in the war, or to reject outside criticism that he had not waited for a political move. This argument also served Kissinger as justification for the fact that he had not used his influence or that of the United States to advance a political agreement before the war.

**The argument that the political initiative was fraudulent and was meant to serve as camouflage for war intentions should also be rejected. Egyptian and Syrian preparations for war were open and public, and Sadat did not hide his intention to go to war if there was no progress in the political channel. These messages were transmitted openly in the media as well as through quieter diplomatic channels. It is not reasonable to think that Sadat would have risked initiating a war if Kissinger had succeeded in advancing a political process, as going to war during negotiations would have created a serious crisis of confidence between him and the United States, the nation from which he had requested its patronage. This was true even if Israel had responded to his initiative and had conducted negotiations in an attempt to reach agreement. In starting a war while negotiating, Sadat would have lost trust as a partner for a peace agreement.**

### **The Outline Returns**

From the outbreak of the fighting and while in the course of the war, Kissinger considered his moves and navigated the United States towards the negotiations that would begin immediately after the fighting had ceased. Sadat did the same. But, in contrast to Sadat, Kissinger also had a great effect on the war's ending. Kissinger had not wanted this war. But when it broke out, he knew how to use it to advantage in order

to establish the undisputed status of the United States and his own personal position in guiding political developments during the war and afterwards.

What Kissinger had avoided before the war, he undertook decisively and with great talent afterwards. And it was done according to the outline he had presented to Israel in March and which correlated to the principles of Sadat's initiative: preliminary understandings between the United States and Egypt, recognition of Egyptian sovereignty over Sinai as a substitute for full withdrawal, a withdrawal which would take place gradually and would respond to Israel's security needs, and separation between the Egyptian track and the other disputes, that is, basing an Israeli-Syrian agreement on the one between Israel and Egypt and a solution to the Palestinian problem separately and not as an Arab-Israeli issue.

From the end of the war, the Egyptians became full partners with Kissinger in developing political steps and in their implementation, acting both behind the scenes and publicly. Already at the end of October, Ismail Fahmi, the new Egyptian Foreign Minister, arrived in Washington and assisted Kissinger in conducting talks with Meir and Aharon Yariv, who had joined Meir there for the discussions. About a week later, Kissinger travelled to Egypt and, in a lengthy private discussion with Sadat, he began implementing the outline that he had presented to Israel in March 1973. This time he advanced without requesting Israeli agreement to withdraw its demand to annex a part of Sinai. Egypt did not request this, just as it had not made this request at the beginning of the year. **“Edward (Nixon) wanted to issue an announcement supporting Israeli withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 lines,” was the way Kissinger hinted to Israel about his understandings with Egypt, and added that he, Kissinger had prevented this.**<sup>71</sup> At Kissinger's meeting with Sadat, they had actually agreed upon the understandings between the United States and Egypt regarding the political process that Kissinger and Hafez Ismail had wanted to advance after their first meeting at the end of February. Statesmen like Kissinger and Sadat needed only one discussion to take that step. “He is the best hope for peace in the area”, said Kissinger about Sadat. In contrast to the Israelis, “[he] is a person who can make decisions,” Kissinger characterized the difficulties he had met with in his discussions with Israel.<sup>72</sup>

On 11 November 1973, the Six-Point Agreement was signed to stabilize the cease-fire.<sup>73</sup>

On 21 December 1973, Kissinger opened the Geneva Conference, a meeting with only declarative significance to give the appearance of the inclusion of the Soviet Union in the process. What was decided was what Egypt, Israel and Kissinger had actually

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<sup>71</sup> Report from Foreign Minister Eban about his discussion with Kissinger in Geneva 22 December 1973, ISA 7035/12- Aleph

<sup>72</sup> Meeting between Kissinger and Fahmi 16 January 1974 NA RN NSC Country Files Box 140 “You don't have anyone who can make decisions on foreign policy,” Kissinger to Dinitz, 26 October 1973, Kissinger 2004 p. 316.

<sup>73</sup> The agreement defined ways to stabilize the cease-fire, the exchange of prisoners and arranging the removal of the blockade around the third Army. The agreement was signed at Kilometer 101 by General Gamasy and General Aharon Yariv.

agreed upon previously – first, the beginning of the discussion about separation of forces, and actually, the beginning of the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai.<sup>74</sup>

On 18 January 1974, the Disengagement Agreement was signed which determined that “it would represent the first step towards a final, just and lasting peace.”<sup>75</sup> This was the beginning of what was termed “a state of peace” in Sadat’s initiative, and in Kissinger’s outline, implementation of the partial agreement and continuing discussion on a full agreement. Israel withdrew from the Suez Canal to a line that, at this stage, provided its security needs. To that end, Sadat agreed that the Israeli withdrawal would be to the western side of the Sinai passes and not at their eastern side. Sadat explained to his army Chief of Staff that it was a pity to postpone the signing of the agreement for an argument about withdrawal from an area from which Israel would withdraw in the future.

On 31 May, “one step” after Egypt, Syria signed a separation of forces agreement with Israel. In coordination with Sadat, Kissinger pressured Israel that its withdrawal in the Golan would also symbolically be from an area it had conquered in June 1967.

On 4 September 1975 the Interim Agreement was signed. Egypt and Israel agreed to a commitment that “[t]he conflict between them and in the Middle East shall not be resolved by military force but by peaceful means” and that “[t]hey are determined to reach a final and just peace settlement by means of negotiations.”<sup>76</sup> Israel continued to withdraw eastward. There was agreement between Kissinger and Rabin that, on the Syrian track, they would skip the interim agreement stage as the geographical conditions in the Golan would make a partial withdrawal difficult.

The final stage of implementation of the outline, “a peace agreement”, was led by a new American government. The Sadat formula to separate Egypt from other conflict channels was included in the agreement. It determined that a solution to the Palestinian problem would be achieved by the creation of autonomy and that the agreement between Israel and the other Arab states would be based on the Israeli-Egyptian agreement. Syria declined to join the process despite Begin’s invitation but was later forced to negotiate after the collapse of the Soviet Union.<sup>77</sup> Since 1992 the prime ministers of six governments have conducted negotiations with Syria in an effort to reach a peace agreement on the basis of the Egyptian agreement as a foundation document, including the territorial aspect of full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan. During this period, a peace agreement was signed with Jordan, and like the agreement with Egypt, the “international border” was determined as the peace border.

**The peace process represented the implementation of the Sadat initiative and Kissinger’s outline, conducting negotiations on that basis before the war. The war that followed could have been prevented, as Kissinger observed to Golda Meir.**

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<sup>74</sup> This decision had been accepted by Egypt, Israel and Kissinger previously. The idea to call for the conference came from Sadat. See Farhi-Kissinger meeting, 31 October, NA RN NSF Box 132. For Sadat, the aim of the conference was to give the impression of cooperation between the various tracks of the dispute. The Syrians declined to participate and stated that Egypt would represent them.

<sup>75</sup> The separation of forces agreement between Israel and Egypt was signed by the heads of the Egyptian and Israeli armies. Knesset website: [www.knesset.gov.il](http://www.knesset.gov.il).

<sup>76</sup> The Interim Agreement between Israel and Egypt. Knesset website: [www.knesset.gov.il](http://www.knesset.gov.il)

<sup>77</sup> Yigal Kipnis, 1982, *Lebanon, The Road to War 1982* (Modi’in: Dvir, 2022) 174.

