The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War: Looking Back 50 Years Later

By William B. Quandt, September 2023

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One might expect that after nearly five decades a relatively clear picture of the causes and consequences of the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war would have emerged. After all, another international crisis, of even greater severity and equal complexity, the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, has been the subject of a fairly broad and very well documented understanding for many years. But that is not the case with the October 1973 war—also known as the Yom Kippur War or the Ramadan War, depending on whose perspective is being emphasized.

Part of the difference between the two crises may stem from the fact that there were essentially two key parties to the Cuban missile crisis—Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev and the American president John F. Kennedy—each of whom could claim at least some degree of success from the way the crisis was resolved. By contrast, in 1973 the number of key actors was greater. There was Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, who essentially made the decision for war; Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who refused to consider the political alternative to war, since she was convinced that Israel, if deterrence failed, could easily defeat Egypt on the battlefield, as it had in June 1967; Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, who ineffectually tried to warn against the war, but then decided to provide political and military support to his Arab allies once it was underway; and, finally, US President Richard Nixon, who presciently warned in early 1973 that the conflict was about to erupt, but then became distracted by his own collapsing political position, leaving his national security adviser and secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, as the key American decisionmaker having to deal with a region of the world that was relatively unknown to him. And there were others who played significant roles in the 1973 crisis as well, most notably Syrian President Hafiz al-Asad and Saudi Arabia's King Faisal.

One similarity in the two crises on the American side is the unusually rich documentation of key moments of decision. After all, both Kennedy and Nixon kept tape recordings of many of the most important meetings and phone calls, and those have been available to scholars for years. In addition, many of the American participants have written revealing memoirs with detailed accounts of these crises. But the abundance of source material for both crises has not been enough to provide an entirely clear picture of what happened at key moments in 1973. In part, [1]the key actors have had strong motives to spin their respective versions of what actually occurred for political reasons. If both parties to the Cuban missile crisis could take some satisfaction in successfully managing a truly unprecedented nuclear crisis, the same was not true in October 1973. The Israelis, while ultimately prevailing on the battlefield, suffered serious losses, were caught by surprise, required massive American military help, and were denied a decisive victory on the Egyptian front by their own American ally. For most Israelis, someone had to be blamed for this startling and disappointing outcome.

For Egyptians, the story was just the opposite. Sadat, who had taken the gamble of launching the limited war, had no interest in revealing how close he had come to defeat. For him and most Egyptians, the war was a success, one that helped to erase the shame of the 1967 failure. For Kissinger, who has written extensively about the war, this was a crisis that established his

"Super K" reputation, and he has doggedly defended his record, while soft-peddling some of his more questionable judgments, such as his underestimation of Sadat and overestimation of Israeli military prowess.[1]

Another reason for some of the continuing uncertainty about what happened at crucial moments in the 1972-1973 period is that the written record is overwhelmingly weighted to the American and Israeli side of the story. American archives have been open for years and have been quite carefully reviewed by many scholars.[2] Israeli archives have recently also been opened and are providing a sharper picture of what took place at crucial moments.[3] These archives, especially the documents reserved for the restricted Israeli security cabinet, include insights into how Kissinger often communicated directly with Meir through the Israeli ambassador in Washington—Yitzhak Rabin until March 1973 and thereafter Simcha Dinitz—without leaving any record of these conversations in the American files. As these Israeli archives become more accessible, we can expect to fill in a few of the holes in the narrative of what occurred before and during the war.[4]

Although several useful memoirs and first-hand accounts of the war have been written by Egyptians—including Sadat—and there are even a few from Syrian sources, the Arab documentation is not nearly as complete as that from the American and Israeli sides. The same is true to a lesser degree with Soviet/Russian sources.[5] One result of this imbalance is that significant questions remain about important dimensions of the crisis.

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[1] Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), 545-613; Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); Henry Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).

[2] For example, see United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (*FRUS*)*, 1969-1976*, Vol. 25: *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office [GPO], 2011). I should note here that I played a minor role during the crisis as the acting head of the Middle East office of the National Security Council from October 6 to October 26, 1973. As such, I was present at most of the meetings of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), which met almost every day, and had access to most of the diplomatic communications and intelligence reports. In 1977, I published *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), which contains my first public account of the events surrounding the 1973 war.

[3] Yigal Kipnis in article in this posting makes ample use of both American and Israeli archival material, as he also does in an important book. See Yigal Kipnis, *1973: The Road to War* (Charlottesville, VA: Just World, 2013).

[4] The most recent contribution based on US and Israeli archives, as well as extensive interviews with Kissinger, is Martin Indyk, *Master of the Game: Henry Kissinger and the Art of Middle East Diplomacy* (New York: Knopf, 2021).

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Without doubt, the October 1973 war must be seen as a major international crisis. It imposed severe human and economic costs on the immediate participants, but its repercussions were much broader. They included a marked deterioration in the détente-like relationship that was still intact between the United States and the Soviet Union; an unprecedented use of oil supplies from Arab countries as an economic and political weapon, which resulted in a rapid rise in oil prices in the months following the war; and a reordering of the interstate system of the Middle East, with Egypt beginning to shift away from its previously strong alignment with other Arab states and toward becoming a major client of the United States, allowing Cairo to move toward reconciliation with Israel in the process. The war was also accompanied by more than a hint of nuclear menace, especially in its dramatic final days, when the United States declared a DEFCON 3 military alert in response to a perceived threat of unilateral Soviet military intervention in the conflict.

The above considerations lead to the obvious question of whether a crisis of this magnitude could have been avoided and, if so, how? Counterfactuals can never be easily addressed, but they nevertheless deserve consideration. And here we have two significantly different schools of thought. One maintains that the war could not have been easily avoided because the positions of the two key parties, Egypt and Israel, were so far apart, and the chance for diplomatic initiatives to narrow those gaps so limited, that some resort to force was inevitable. Sadat himself essentially promoted this line of argument, claiming that only Egypt's heroic crossing of the Suez Canal was able to break the logjam that had blocked diplomacy.[6] Some Israelis, self-servingly, have also argued that Sadat needed "his war" to restore his dignity and legitimacy in order to reinvent himself as a statesman and peacemaker.

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[5] Two important memoirs by key Egyptian actors in 1973 are Anwar el-Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977) and Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993). See also Ahmed Aboul Gheit, *Witness to War and Peace: Egypt, the October War, and Beyond* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2018). For a rare Syrian insider's account, see Bouthaina Shaaban, *The Edge of the Precipice: Hafez al-Assad, Henry Kissinger, and the Remaking of the Modern Middle East* (Beirut: Bissan, 2017). The best account by a Soviet official who was present during Politburo deliberations is Victor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). See also Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow's Ambassador to Six Cold War Presidents* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995), 287-301. For more on the superpower rivalry, see Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012). On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the war, a conference which included participants from nearly all the involved parties, was held in Washington, D.C. The results were published in Richard B. Parker, ed., *The October War: A Retrospective* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2001).

[6] Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 244.

An alternative view is that the war could and should have been prevented. Yigal Kipnis in the accompanying essay presents a strong case that the Egyptians in early 1973 had conveyed to Kissinger a clear willingness to proceed with a plausible diplomatic initiative that was not intrinsically hostile to fundamental Israeli interests. In his retelling, even the main skeptic on the American side—Kissinger—concluded belatedly that the war could have been avoided if only Meir had been more of a realist and less of a politician. Kipnis views her as the main obstacle to an effort to test Sadat's intentions by means of negotiations. He cites her as saying that if war came, it would be to Israel's advantage, since Egypt would lose even more decisively than it had in 1967, a view partially shared by Kissinger. She also, correctly, said that Sadat would demand a high price—the return to Egypt of all of the Sinai Peninsula—for something that might turn out to be less than full peace. Her view was that Israel needed to keep a significant portion of the Sinai as a security buffer – as much as 25-30 percent -- and she understood that no Egyptian leader could accept that. Thus, she chose to continue to rely on deterrence, believing that even if that failed, Israel could fight and win another war, which might actually strengthen the Israeli hand in future negotiations. As long as Israel could count on unqualified American support, this sounded like a plausible stance. But by early 1973, Nixon was already talking to Kissinger about the danger of an explosion in the Middle East and about the need to squeeze the "old woman."

After Kissinger's meetings with Hafiz Ismail in February and May 1973, it was clear that the Egyptians were moving in the direction of meeting several of Israel's most important concerns, especially on security. Kissinger had introduced the idea of distinguishing between sovereignty and security—in other words, Egypt might be able to reclaim sovereignty over the Sinai, but Israel would be given time to withdraw its forces, and security arrangements would go into effect that would limit Egypt's ability to use the Sinai as a staging area for future wars against Israel. In addition, Egypt had made it clear that while it would publicly espouse the need for an overall Arab-Israeli peace, Sadat would leave the Palestinian question for the Jordanians and Palestinians to sort out, and he would be prepared to reach an agreement with Israel without it being contingent upon Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinians doing so. This, in fact, is what Sadat eventually settled for at Camp David in September 1978, but only after the October 1973 war had shattered a number of unwarranted assumptions.

Based on the evidence we now have, I think it is fair to conclude that the war could have been avoided if a major diplomatic effort had been launched in mid-1973. That would have required American leadership to persuade the Israelis to take some risks, and real progress in the negotiations would not have come until after Israel's elections, then scheduled for October. But it seems quite possible that Sadat would have put his war plan on hold to see if his opening to the United States could produce a diplomatic breakthrough. Most Egyptian accounts claim that the final decision for war was not made until after the US-Soviet summit in June, which seemed to indicate that the United States had no intention of supporting a new diplomatic effort in the Middle East.

A second important but still unanswered question is whether the war could have been ended within its first week. This would have required a serious parallel effort by the United States and the Soviet Union to press for a ceasefire, backed by a United Nations (UN) Security Council resolution. This is what one might have hoped for if the principles of superpower détente had been in play. And, indeed, there was a serious move in this direction. But the precise details of why it failed are still partly obscure, and the archival records have not yet shed much light on how close Kissinger came to getting a ceasefire-in-place on October 12-13— just before the Egyptians launched their second offensive toward the Sinai passes, just before the massive US military airlift to Israel got underway, several days before the Arab oil producers announced their oil embargo and production cuts, and two weeks before the DEFCON 3 alert.

Because the ceasefire initiative of October 12-13 failed, it has not received much attention, but one key Soviet observer, Anatoly Dobrynin, the USSR ambassador in Washington, has expressed the view that this was the best moment to end the war and preserve détente, and that the Soviets were fully behind the ceasefire-in-place initiative.[7] We also know that Meir had agreed to Kissinger's ceasefire proposal, but we do not know how Kissinger managed to persuade her. Neither the American nor Israeli archives are of much help on this question. At the time, Kissinger blamed the British for a clumsy diplomatic move that led Sadat to a premature rejection of the plan. But Sadat's own account makes it seem as if he had no interest at that point in a ceasefire and was determined to move his forces deeper into Sinai in order to relieve pressure on his Syrian ally. Given how little trust there was between Asad and Sadat by this time, one must wonder if Sadat really took such a major military risk to assuage the Syrians. The Soviets also claim that they tried to persuade Sadat to agree to the ceasefire, but that he refused. In short, there are still many unanswered questions about this moment in the war. My own sense at the time was that it came close to succeeding, and we all would have been better off if it had.

A third bundle of related uncertainties surrounds the three days after Kissinger managed to reach an agreement in Moscow on what became UN Resolution 338, which called for a halt to the fighting. The ceasefire was to go into effect on October 22, just as the Israelis were on the verge of surrounding the Egyptian Third Army in Sinai. As Galen Jackson and Marc Trachtenberg have shown[8], Kissinger, during his stop in Israel en route home to Washington, gave the Israelis more than a wink and a nod that they might continue fighting beyond the strict deadline set by the UN resolution. Kissinger has said that he might have unintentionally given that impression, but that the Israelis went much further than he had expected. But upon his return to Washington, according to a recently declassified Israeli cable, he told Dinitz on October 23 that the United States would not press Israel to withdraw to the October 22 lines and that, in fact: "They [the Americans] will give us all the cover support for our move." The Israeli ambassador quoted Kissinger as saying that he supported extending Israel's progress "in the field"—possibly a better translation would be "on the ground." Dinitz went on to say that Kissinger wanted Israel to improve its position as much as possible, but that he had to worry about relations with the Soviets and the Arabs. But he promised to cooperate closely with Israel in devising a postwar strategy. Then, "Kissinger added that if anyone knew about the degree of intimacy between us he [Kissinger] would be fired."[9] This seems to imply that Nixon, the only person who could fire Kissinger, was not aware of what his secretary of state was telling the Israelis and would not have approved of it if he had been.

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[7] Dobrynin, *In Confidence*, 296, describes Sadat's rejection of the ceasefire in place proposal of October 12-13 as "a gross political and strategic blunder, because it brought military disaster some days later."

[8] See their article in Galen Jackson, ed., *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War,* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023.

[9] For some of the translated Israeli archival materials, see http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/trachtenberg/cv/selfinflicted(appendix).pdf. The Dinitz-Kissinger conversation quoted here may be found in this collection and is titled Document 3 (n. 81): Dinitz to Gazit, October 23, 1973, 6 p.m. reporting 3:00 p.m. meeting [frames 281-82].

Shortly after this exchange, the crisis got worse. On October 24, several messages went back and forth between Moscow and Washington, the last of which included Brezhnev's threat to take unilateral military action if Israel did not stop its advances. As is well known, Kissinger reacted by convening a meeting of top security officials that decided, without Nixon's direct participation, to order US troops worldwide to be placed on a DEFCON 3 alert status. The next morning, there was a brief moment of alarm in the Situation Room of the White House when an intercepted Soviet diplomatic message seemed to suggest that Soviet troops were on their way to Cairo. Kissinger immediately contacted Dobrynin and was told that these were a small contingent of military observers to monitor the ceasefire that had been agreed to when Kissinger was in Moscow. Soon thereafter, tensions began to ease, the United States strongly urged Israel to allow food and water to get to the Egyptian Third Army, and the ceasefire finally took hold. A few days later, Kissinger made his famous "we are in the catbird seat" comment. But he had gotten there with what seems like a highly risky series of steps that might well have led to further escalation. And, as Jackson and Trachtenberg argue, the DEFCON 3 crisis helped put an end, at least for the remainder of the time Kissinger was in power, to any effective policy of détente.

One other angle of this crisis that has received relatively little attention is the nuclear shadow that loomed over it. Since at least mid-1967, it was generally known in US policy circles that Israel had acquired some degree of nuclear capability. Meir had told Nixon as much in September 1969, and presumably the Soviets and their Arab clients knew as well. During the 1973 war, there were a few moments other than the DEFCON 3 alert when nuclear dangers were part of the drama. From my position on the National Security Council staff, I recall on about October 8 or 9 seeing an intelligence report that the Israeli Jericho missiles had been placed on a higher alert status. Nothing was said about the kind of warheads they might have carried, the issue was not discussed in any meeting that I attended, and no one has managed to unearth the document. Still, knowledgeable Israelis have confirmed to me that Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, without cabinet authorization, might have given the order to make sure the Jerichos were ready for possible use. It is also now known that on about October 8, Dayan sought a meeting of the security cabinet to discuss his idea of a demonstrative nuclear blast, and he wanted Meir to allow Israel's top nuclear specialist to brief the cabinet. She refused, and the issue reportedly did not come up again.[10]

Even if the Israelis did not make any explicit nuclear threats during the October 1973 war, the mere existence of their nuclear capability almost certainly had an impact on Arab war planning. For example, Syrian tanks were given orders to stop if they reached the Israeli border, as some of them almost did in the first days of the war. Egyptian forces concentrated on crossing the Suez Canal and then consolidating their foothold on the Eastern bank. Only a week after crossing the canal did they move their tanks toward the passes, some thirty miles or so farther East. At no point did Egyptian forces launch strikes into pre-1967 Israel. Sadat, years later, was reportedly asked by an Israeli general why he had not moved more swiftly and aggressively to take the passes after crossing the canal. He replied, in a joking manner: "You have nuclear arms. Haven't you heard?"[11]

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[10] See Elbridge Colby et.al., "The Israeli 'Nuclear Alert' of 1973: Deterrence and Signaling in Crisis," Center for Naval Analyses, April 2013, https://www.cna.org/reports/2013/DRM-2013-U-004480-Final.pdf, 2. For more on Israel's nuclear program, see, for example, Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Avner Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

The only other hints of some nuclear dimension of the crisis involve reports of Soviet ships passing through the Dardanelles and triggering a monitoring system that was looking for signs of nuclear weapons on the ships. At least one of the ships that had triggered an alarm was seen in mid-to-late October docking in Alexandria. Some wondered if the Soviets might be sending nuclear warheads for the Scud missiles that were known to exist in Egypt. US Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger later said that he was concerned, although he considered it a low probability.[12] It should also be noted that just before the October 22 ceasefire went into effect, the Egyptians, with Soviet support, fired two Scud missiles at Israeli troop concentrations in Sinai, doing a small amount of damage. They were not, of course, armed with nuclear warheads. Still, without factoring in the nuclear shadow caused by these events, one misses part of what made this a crisis that was widely considered to present the most serious risk of nuclear war since the Cuban missile crisis.

A final issue that deserves more discussion is whether or not détente could have been preserved after the October war. In one of their discussions in the middle of the war, Nixon and Kissinger had a very frank exchange:

> **Nixon**: As far as the Russians are concerned, they have a pretty good beef insofar as everything we have offered on the Mid-East, you know what I mean, that meeting in San Clemente [in June 1973], we were stringing them along and they know it. We've got to come up with something on the diplomatic front, because if we go with [only] the ceasefire, they'll figure that we get the ceasefire and the Israelis will dig in and we'll back them, as we always have. That's putting it quite bluntly, but it's quite true Henry, isn't it?
> **HK**: There's a lot in that.
> **Nixon**: Because we've got to squeeze the Israelis when this is over, and the Russians have got to know it. We've got to squeeze them goddamn hard.... We told them before we'd squeeze them and we didn't.... We ought to tell Dobrynin... that Brezhnev and Nixon will settle this damn thing. That ought to be done. You know that.
> **HK**: Exactly. Exactly right.[13]

This exchange strongly suggests that Nixon, had he managed to remain in power, might well have tried to preserve the core principles of détente, unlike Kissinger, who seemed distinctly unenthusiastic, even while voicing his apparent agreement with his boss. So it is possible to argue that it was not only the DEFCON 3 alert, and Kissinger's role in triggering it by his nudging the Israelis to keep going after negotiating the ceasefire in Moscow, that undermined détente—as important was Nixon's loss of authority and eventual departure from office in August 1974. With Kissinger at the peak of his power by then, détente no longer had an advocate in the White House.

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[11] Dan Sagir, "How the Fear of Israeli Nukes Helped Seal the Egypt Peace Deal," *Haaretz*, November 26, 2017.

[12] Schlesinger's comments on the DEFCON 3 alert can be found in Richard B. Parker, ed., *The October War: A Retrospective*, 174-76, 200.

[13] Transcript of a Telephone Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, October 14, 1973, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 25, 496, 499.

Whereas Nixon seems to have genuinely believed in some sort of US-Soviet condominium as the central element of détente, Kissinger's view was much more that the façade of diplomacy offered by détente would allow him to outmaneuver the Soviets in the Middle East. The key would be convincing Sadat to place his bets on Washington to use its influence to help him recover his territory. Once Kissinger actually met with Sadat in early November 1973, he realized that he had a real chance of sidelining the Soviets, provided that he could produce at least some initial results that responded to Sadat's desperate need to lift the Israeli siege surrounding the Egyptian Third Army in Sinai. This led to Kissinger's step-by-step diplomacy, which for the next two years left the Soviets essentially on the sidelines and produced three disengagement agreements, setting a pattern for US-led peacemaking in the region for the next two and one-half decades.

By way of conclusion, I want to reflect briefly on several of the key analytical errors made during the crisis. First, despite ample warning by mid-1973 that Egypt and Syria were preparing for war, both the Israeli and American leadership generally adopted the view that deterrence would work, and if it did not, Israel would easily defeat the Arab armies as they had in 1967. As Risa Brooks has noted,[14] the Egyptians had, in fact, made significant improvements in their military organization and capabilities after the 1967 debacle, and Sadat was therefore able to exert his authority over a highly professional officer corp. The Israelis and Americans badly underestimated these improvements, as well as misunderstood the nature of Egypt's limited war plan. They also failed to recognize the extent to which Sadat's frustration was increasing, after two serious attempts at dialogue with the United States earlier in the year. Ismail, at the end of his second meeting with Kissinger, had urged the latter to travel to Cairo to meet directly with Sadat. One can only wonder what might have been the result if Kissinger had accepted the Egyptian invitation.

Second, Kissinger more than Nixon was very wary of coordinating too closely with the Soviets in the Middle East. He had publicly talked about his goal of "expelling" them.[15] And yet he was in regular, and often productive, contact with Ambassador Dobrynin and with Brezhnev himself. In retrospect, his willingness to urge the Israelis to ignore the ceasefire agreement that he had just negotiated in Moscow was reckless and was bound to produce a sharp Soviet response. The whole DEFCON 3 drama could have been avoided, and Kissinger would still have been in a commanding position to take the lead in the postwar diplomacy.

Third, there was a woeful misunderstanding at the top levels of the US government of the new realities surrounding energy supplies. In previous crises in the Middle East—in particular, the 1956-1957 Suez crisis and the June 1967 war—the Arab oil producers were unable to have any serious impact on the political and military events. The slogan was frequently heard that the Arabs had to sell their oil; the only alternative was to drink it.[16] In short, they could not credibly threaten an oil embargo. But they could and they did, and it had a major impact on the world economy, resulted in the transfer of huge revenues to key oil producers, and brought the crisis home to

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[14] In Galen Jackson, ed., *op. cit.*

[15] Quoted in Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 579-580.

[16] Nixon himself made comments to that effect on occasion. For example, see Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Meeting with his Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board," June 5, 1970, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 24: *Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula, 1969-1972; Jordan, September 1970* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2008), 80.

American consumers in a dramatic way. One day before the oil embargo was declared, Kissinger proudly told the members of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG)—an assemblage of many of the top national security officials in the US government—that the Arab foreign ministers whom he and Nixon had met on October 16 had made no mention of oil.[17]

Like the Cuban missile crisis, the October 1973 war did not lead to a full-scale superpower confrontation. But that is no reason to conclude that management of the crisis, and especially the diplomacy in the months preceding the crisis, could not have been much better. Much of the fault, I believe, lies with the Israeli stubborn refusal to believe that Sadat was serious about wanting to move the conflict into a US-led negotiation. Kissinger was more willing to test Sadat's intentions, but felt that there was no urgency, since the balance of power was so clearly on Israel's side. And when Brezhnev did try to warn Nixon that war was coming, Kissinger saw this as a ploy to get the United States to put one-sided pressure on Israel.[18] Thus, an opportunity to prevent the October 1973 war may well have been lost. We will never know how different the Middle East might have been if the "peace process" had gotten underway in mid-1973 instead of after the October war. But having lived through the crisis at close hand—and having devoted much of my time subsequently to thinking about and working to achieve Arab-Israeli peace—I think we would have all been better off if the war had been avoided.

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[17] Minutes of a WSAG Meeting, "Subject: Middle East," October 16, 1973, in *FRUS, 1969-1976*, Vol. 25, 577.

[18] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 297-300.