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# Verbatim: Henry Kissinger, the Yom Kippur War, and the Legacy of the United States in the Modern Middle East

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**Verbatim:  
Henry Kissinger, the Yom Kippur War, and the Legacy of the  
United States in the Modern Middle East**

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An Honors Thesis

Submitted for partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation with honors in History from  
Hamline University

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## **Introduction**

Henry Kissinger was at various points in his career a soldier, professor, National Security Advisor, and Secretary of State. One of the most influential diplomats in United States history. Perhaps one of its most influential politicians, though ironically he was never elected to any position in his life. Advisor to presidents and shaper of foreign policy. Even today his legacy is still of import and the subject of debate between the current presidential candidates. Even though he has not held government office for many years, he continues to influence United States foreign policy and domestic politics through his writing and lobbying. But perhaps his influence on the United States and foreign policy was never greater than in 1973 with the Yom Kippur War.

The year 1973 sits in the middle of the Cold War. The Vietnam War was just beginning to wind down and the United States started to normalize relations with the other great Communist power in Asia, China. However, domestically and especially within the White House the focus was on the fallout of a break-in at a Washington hotel by the name of Watergate. This was the backdrop against which Henry Kissinger was appointed Secretary of State of the United States. And with all that was happening, Kissinger's responsibilities and power in this position significantly expanded. The rest of the government, including President Nixon, was focused on the politics of a scandal. And the only one left to deal with an external opportunity or threat, a war in the Middle East, was Henry Kissinger.

Between noon and 1:00pm (Israeli time)<sup>1</sup> on October 6, 1973, on the Jewish high holy day of Yom Kippur, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise military offensive along much of Israel's

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on, all times will be given based on Eastern Standard time to reflect the hours that Kissinger was receiving information or making decisions. For events that deal specifically with a location in another timezone, the timezone referenced will be included as a note.

Southern and North Eastern borders.<sup>2</sup> As Yom Kippur is one of the most important holidays for Jews, Israel was caught by surprise, forcing them not only to hastily summon their military reservists, but also to put out a hasty call to its allies for assistance.<sup>3</sup> As Israel's strongest ally and benefactor, the United States would be reluctantly drawn into a conflict that it did not want.<sup>4</sup> As such the Yom Kippur War would not only prove to be a pivotal conflict for the nations in the Middle East. but it would dictate the course of American involvement in the Middle East and the United States' relationship with each of the countries in that region over the next half century.

Two questions must be asked of how Henry Kissinger relates to the United States' reaction to the Yom Kippur War. First, how much influence did he have in directing US foreign policy during the first days of the Yom Kippur? Second, how did that influence translate to the direction of American foreign policy during that period of time? To do this, I am returning to a examine a collection of documents that have been inaccessible to many historians up to present. These include notes of meetings between Kissinger and other officials and staff, notes and reports sent between department, and telephone transcripts of every call that Kissinger made or received. All of these new sources provide a new parallel narrative to Kissinger's writing that I can then use to compare to Kissinger's version of events, and use to reflect on the historiography of Kissinger and Yom Kippur up to present.

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<sup>2</sup> October 6, 1973 8:29am (EST) Teleconversation between Minister Shalev (Israel) and Henry Kissinger.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East- From the Cold War to the War on Terror*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 138

Both Israel and the United States were caught by surprise in this offensive. Though Kissinger had received various reports that pointed to an attack on October 6, that intelligence was apparently insufficient to provoke any sort of preparation.

<sup>4</sup> Boaz Vanetik and Zaki Shalom, "The White House Middle East Policy in 1973 as a Catalyst for the Outbreak of the Yom Kippur War," *Israel Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011): 66, Project Muse.

From an historian's perspective, this period is rich with information with which to draw an extensive picture of this juxtaposition of the war and the United States' foreign policy interests. But it is also a veritable minefield due to flawed primary sources. Chief among those sources is Kissinger himself. Kissinger published numerous volumes of his memoirs. *Years of Upheaval*, about his time as Secretary of State starting at the beginning of Richard Nixon's second presidential term in January 1973, was published in 1982.

Kissinger's memoirs are puzzling as written history. On one hand they are primary documents about the events they describe- they are reflections from a leading character in those events and they draw on the government documents that Kissinger would have access to. On the other hand, a memoir is interpreted history through the lens of the writer. And there is no doubt that Kissinger had an agenda in how he reflected about his own actions and choices.

However, this memoir continues to be used as the primary source that subsequent historians use to write about Kissinger and the war. Why? Because the government documents that serve as Kissinger's backup sources have been classified for many years and so a path to these legitimate sources requires using Kissinger's memoirs as a medium to that information.

Per government guidelines, all of these documents were classified for 30-40 years. That means that up until very recently, historians have been interpreting Yom Kippur without access to a wealth of essential information. Even though these documents began to be declassified around 2004,<sup>5</sup> for much of the last decade they have been inaccessible to researchers, and even now are in a very unwieldy format that frustrates any easy reading of them. However, a closer

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<sup>5</sup> Portions of these collections of documents first became available due to continuous requests through the Freedom of Information Act. Once a large amount of these documents were declassified, hard copies of them were stored in a number of places like the Nixon archives. Recently, the Digital National Security Archive based at George Washington University has been compiling an online database of all Kissinger phone calls and memoranda available in an online collection.

reading of these newly released sources allows for a retrospective critique of Kissinger's account of Yom Kippur, his role in it, and relative success or failure of the decisions he made.

Through a deeper study of these new sources, a clearer timeline of Kissinger's response to the outbreak of the war can be formulated. This new narrative shows that Kissinger did indeed amass a much greater position of influence as Secretary of State as President Nixon's was absorbed in the fallout of Watergate. The United States' handling of the conflict was directed by Kissinger in consultation with a handful of members of Nixon's staff. Kissinger purposely kept Nixon out of the process of making decisions as he feared that Nixon would not be able to make balanced decisions. Second, Kissinger had this greater range of power as he directed all US foreign policy through his office (and not the White House,) However, he did not use it to promote a radically (or even moderately) new agenda in the Middle East. Instead, he used this position to try to maintain a balance and a return to the status quo in order to maintain positive relationships with Israel and Egypt, as well as the Soviet Union.

## **Historiography**

Henry Kissinger continues to prove to be a frustration to interpret. Kissinger's memoirs have served as the cornerstone texts on United States foreign policy for over the last forty years. They have also served as some of the most influential texts on the study of Kissinger himself. Those scholars that choose to use Kissinger's works to inform their own writing must wrestle with a variety of questions. The first question they face is whether the thoughtful and methodical reasoning Kissinger offers for various important decisions is to be believed. Is the intentionality Kissinger describes real or was it a product of hindsight, and the reality was that he was more

reactionary to the circumstances surrounding him? Another issue with Kissinger's memoirs is the fact that Kissinger writes himself as the central character. Not only is he the central character, but he is the leading character. The scope of this study focuses the next question on one very pivotal period in Kissinger's career: As Secretary of State, did Kissinger essentially run the Executive Branch and dictate US foreign policy while President Richard Nixon was embroiled in the Watergate Scandal?

Foreign policy would be the primary arena of Kissinger's influence and interest. How did Kissinger's philosophies like *realpolitik* play out in real life circumstances? All these questions become especially relevant in a study of Kissinger centering around the year 1973 and the Yom Kippur War. How does one reconcile any challenges to the traditional Kissinger narrative regarding the United States' role in the conflict? Since Kissinger has so dramatically affected the narrative of the Yom Kippur War, it is important to both understand to what extent historians have been influenced by Kissinger in their own work, and the actual role Kissinger played in the United States' involvement in the Yom Kippur War.

Ultimately, a Kissinger historian should be able to objectively examine both Kissinger's personality and his policies. But the reality is that most often any conclusion of Kissinger's foreign policy legacy is colored by a preconception of Kissinger's character and reputation- the two are almost inextricably linked. This focus on Kissinger's personal legacy belongs not only to the historian. Kissinger himself was, and continues to be, focused on his personal and professional reputation.

*Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year* by Alistair Horne is one of the most recent biographies written about Henry Kissinger. Instead of a comprehensive volume on all or most of

Kissinger's career<sup>6</sup>, Horne carves out and examines a single year of Kissinger's time in power, 1973. He draws upon the whole breadth of writing on Kissinger to examine how the broad narrative of Kissinger applies to the single year of Kissinger's career. His study also is influenced by Kissinger's own writing, his past interviews, and Horne's own personal interactions with Henry Kissinger. Horne is very focused on Kissinger's personality; how it influenced Kissinger's leadership style and decision making. Horne certainly emphasizes Kissinger's intentionality; even those parts of his character that seemed erratic were actually meticulously purposed as a means to an end.<sup>7</sup> This conclusion on the intentionality of Kissinger informs how Horne views the rest of Kissinger in 1973. Even during the Yom Kippur War this assumption of an unspoken agenda would be one response to critics who point out various questionable choices made by Kissinger throughout the conflict.

Now, Horne's work falls quite within the positive end of the spectrum of opinions on Henry Kissinger. Horne himself freely admits that his personal interactions with Kissinger have influenced his favourable impression of the man.<sup>8</sup> But Horne's work comes in the context of the preceding scholarly work on the the life and career of Henry Kissinger. Horne cites Walter Isaacson's *Kissinger: A Biography* as perhaps the first clear foundation upon which all current study of Kissinger is based upon.<sup>9</sup>

For Horne, the broad body of study contributed by Isaacson is now being brought current by Niall Ferguson's multiple-volume work<sup>10</sup> on the career of Henry Kissinger. These two works, Isaacson and Ferguson's, provide inductive studies of Kissinger that look at the breadth of

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<sup>6</sup>As had been done by Walter Isaacson and will be done again by Niall Ferguson, in three parts.

<sup>7</sup>Alstair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, the Crucial Year*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009). 30.

<sup>8</sup>Horne, xiii

<sup>9</sup>Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1995).

<sup>10</sup>Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger: Volume I: The Idealist, 1923-1968*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2015), 32.

Kissinger's life and work, document each significant moment in that timeline, and attempt to paint a broad picture of who Kissinger was and is from the small details of each examined episode. This follows more of a deductive train of study and sets Horne's book apart in the midst of Kissinger study bookended by Isaacson's and Ferguson's works.

Horne acknowledges Kissinger's focus, in fact obsession, with his reputation. He writes about his experience interviewing Kissinger, "I sensed him constantly worrying about what I was going to say... worrying (often unnecessarily) over how I saw his image over specific issues."<sup>11</sup> This would become the defining manner in which Kissinger would interact with those studying himself. Even his extensive memoirs are an extension of this. They were a preemptive effort to present his own perspective on events with which he was involved. Kissinger used his own collection of meticulous records to provide what would seem to be an objective foundation for his analyses of United States foreign affairs under his watch.<sup>12, 13</sup>

One of the most prevalent themes of *Kissinger: 1973: The Crucial Year* is Horne's focus on the insecurities of Kissinger that hid behind the blatant ambition normally portrayed by Kissinger biographers. For a journalist, this is most important in forming a story, a narrative, of the character being studied. However, this also is helpful historically in understanding the dynamics of Kissinger in his relationship to President Richard Nixon, his subordinates, and the press.<sup>14</sup> For Horne, Kissinger's insecurity manifested itself in brutal expectations at work with his subordinates. However, according to Horne, these unbearable high expectations culled out the wavering amongst his subordinates and served as a refining fire for those that remained that

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<sup>11</sup>Horne, 32.

<sup>12</sup>Horne, xiv.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1982).

<sup>14</sup>Horne, 34.

would instill respect and loyalty.<sup>15</sup> This brutal work environment, at least according to Horne, had a logic to it and though it was bred out of Kissinger's personality issues, it made for a better functioning organization.

Beginning in the instance of the work environment Kissinger cultivated, Horne differs greatly from the Kissinger vignette painted by Isaacson and the like. Walter Isaacson's *Kissinger: A Biography* was one of the first in depth studies of Kissinger's life. It was published at the pinnacle of Kissinger's career. And though it was published before the remainder of Kissinger's played out, it is still considered a veritable cornerstone of the study of Kissinger. Even as a contemporary of Kissinger's, Isaacson distances himself from any personal contact with Kissinger. He attempts to provide as objective an analysis of Kissinger's policies and their consequences as he can. His criticisms would be the roots of much larger charges against Kissinger.<sup>1617</sup> This goes to illustrate that even during Kissinger's tenure, there were those that attempted to distance themselves from Kissinger to find an objective narrative separate from that given by Kissinger.

Isaacson notes the Kissinger's and Nixon's tempers were both volatile and unpredictable. Though the outlet for each man would prove different- while Nixon would sit alone, brood, and plot vengeance, Kissinger would violently blow up at the source of any frustration to him (or erupt at anything in general).<sup>18</sup> At least according to Isaacson, there was no rhyme or reason to

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<sup>15</sup>Horne, 30

<sup>16</sup>Christopher Hitchens, *The Trial of Henry Kissinger*, (New York: Twelve Publishing, 2012).

Hitchens' is perhaps the most vehement accusation of Kissinger's career. Though he focuses on Kissinger's involvement with the bombing of Cambodia, his criticisms of Kissinger extend into the rest of his work.

<sup>17</sup> John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 152.

Mearsheimer and Walt would also be highly critical of both Kissinger and the United States' relationships with Israel.

<sup>18</sup>Isaacson, 188.

Kissinger's tantrums- no one besides a few select individuals were out of reach of his wrath in the office.<sup>19</sup> While Kissinger's harsh management style may have engendered loyalty in the inner circle of his staff that remained with him throughout the years, this was a serendipitous consequence and not a justification for his behaviour. These aspects of Kissinger's personality would come to define Kissinger's leadership style as he ascended the steps of national politics.

Isaacson tries to chart a more objective path in his analysis of Kissinger and his lack of personal interaction with Kissinger highlights this. The hallmark aspect of Horne's book had been his reliance of anecdotes from his personal interactions with Kissinger to bolster his credibility. This does create an interesting divergence between opinions on the value of Kissinger's contributions to his own story. It is not only the prolific nature of Kissinger's writing that creates such a tension. It is the fact that it has become very much the cornerstone for modern foreign policy history.

The understanding of how Kissinger has impacted the Kissinger narrative (specifically through his memoirs) begins by comparing the way Kissinger is written about prior and following the publication of the various volumes of his memoirs. Some works like Bruce Mazlish's *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy* come from before the publication of a volume of Kissinger's memoirs that would cover the same material.<sup>20</sup> The fact that Mazlish's book was published in 1976, just three years after the events of the Yom Kippur War, is significant in that it gives a look at perceptions of Kissinger just following the end of the war.

Even at the time of Mazlish's book, the perception already existed of the dynamic between Kissinger and President Nixon. Not only that, but it was evident how both of their

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<sup>19</sup>Isaacson, 193.

<sup>20</sup>Bruce Mazlish, *Kissinger: The European Mind in American Policy*, (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 250.

personalities played into the tension between the positive and negative aspects of their relationship. Overall, Mazlish describes this tension as one that had to be overcome, rather than one that benefitted both men.<sup>21</sup> Kissinger was viewed as the subordinate who eventually grew to a point where it seemed as if he had surpassed his boss.<sup>22</sup> While this will be important in context of a discussion on Kissinger in relation to Nixon, it is also important to understand how Kissinger's career success in general was perceived.

Many of Kissinger's professional successes in the diplomatic arena occurred at the same time as President Nixon's personal and professional reputation was floundering in light of Watergate. The only successes that the Nixon White House could count were in the arena of foreign relations. And those efforts were being spearheaded by National Security Advisor (and later Secretary of State) Kissinger. Such similarities with the current Kissinger narrative could be interpreted in two ways: On one hand some argue that Kissinger then ultimately did not have much control over his narrative. But the alternative becomes more plausible; that it was not only Kissinger's writing (memoirs) that had such an impact. His own time in office found him highly influential on how the media and the public not only viewed foreign policy, but how they viewed him as well.

However, more recent examinations of the relationship between Henry Kissinger and President Nixon have shined a light on the more positive aspects of their interactions. Robert Dallek's double biography with its telling title, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, acknowledges the tumultuous relationship between the two men. But Dallek goes on to point out how Nixon and Kissinger's similar professional ambitions and common personality traits were

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<sup>21</sup>Mazlish, 245.

<sup>22</sup>Mazlish, 250.

ultimately the commonalities that trumped their differences and allowed them to successfully work in tandem during their careers. Not only that, but their common trajectories would find them continuing to share the same focuses after their departure from their government positions.<sup>23</sup> Dallek lists both men's laser focus on foreign policy<sup>24</sup> and their isolating personalities<sup>25</sup> as two of the reasons why they were able to work together as well as they did.

What distinguished both Nixon and Kissinger in terms of foreign policy was their adherence to developing a big idea or doctrine about foreign policy. G. Warren Nutter elaborates upon Dallek's point in his book aptly titled *Kissinger's Grand Design* which deal exclusively with Kissinger's foreign policy doctrines centering around détente<sup>26</sup>. Nutter emphasizes that détente wasn't simply an exercise in passivity. Détente was an umbrella policy in the sense that while it emphasized peaceful coexistence between the United States and the Soviet Union in the European and Mediterranean theaters, it was achieved by developing strong deterrents (such as a strong nuclear missile program and nuclear warfare plan.) However, Nutter also emphasizes that Kissinger believed this approach only worked when speaking of what Kissinger dubbed “legitimate orders.”<sup>27</sup> Only stable national governments who had a vested interest in international affairs could function within this paradigm. Nixon shared this pragmatic approach in that he saw peace achieved through a show of power to which governments could respond.

The irony of both Nixon and Kissinger's view of foreign policy was their adherence to a doctrine on foreign policy was rooted in idealism in the sense that it assumed that all manner of international relations issues could be responded to in a similar manner. However, the

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<sup>23</sup>Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power*, (New York: HarperCollins, 2007).

<sup>24</sup>Dallek, 135.

<sup>25</sup>Dallek, 534.

<sup>26</sup>G. Warren Nutter, *Kissinger's Grand Design*, (AEI Press, 1987), 15.

<sup>27</sup>Nutter, 2.

pragmatism of their actual implementation of any such doctrine lacked any such ideal notions such as fairness or morality. Though Alistair Horne argues that this lack of moral value reaches back to the Enlightenment or even to Roman politics.<sup>28</sup> Such an approach raised up national interests as the greatest value of any decision and it looked after the national interest only through a display or use of power. Dallek points this foreign policy mentality that Nutter elaborates and explains it as the factor that brought Nixon and Kissinger closer together but which distanced them from their colleagues and from the public.<sup>29</sup> While Nixon and Kissinger's personal lives were markedly separated from their professional lives, these character aspects would affect how they interacted with others in both spheres.

Seymour M. Hersh in *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* provides a more negative view of the relationship between Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon.<sup>30</sup> On one hand, Henry Kissinger was a constant thorn in the side of the Nixon White House as he constantly was working to expand the influence of his office. On the other hand, Hersh argues that Kissinger and Nixon were complicit in questionable policies regarding foreign policy. He points to the two working to extend the conflict in Vietnam indirectly by continuing to bomb Cambodia even though this campaign had produced few positive results.<sup>31</sup> He also points to how both ignored both Sadat's peace proposals and threats towards Israel leading up to the war in 1973 as key factors for why the Yom Kippur War took place.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Horne, 402.

<sup>29</sup>Dallek, 245.

<sup>30</sup> Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

<sup>31</sup> Hersh, 54.

<sup>32</sup> Hersh, 220.

Walter Isaacson also noted how Nixon and Kissinger's different way of handling foreign policy put them at odds with those around them. However, instead of emphasizing the reliance on brute power or the threat of force as the cornerstone of their foreign policy, Isaacson claims that Kissinger and Nixon's use of intrigue and backroom deals was the true hallmark of their unique style of diplomacy.<sup>33</sup> Isaacson writes that it was in spite of all of their differences that Nixon and Kissinger were able to work together. For him, three common traits of Nixon and Kissinger are evident. They were both highly suspicious and very secretive. They assumed the worst of others' motives. They pitted their enemies against one another in order to gain an upper hand.<sup>34</sup> No matter which character traits brought Kissinger and Nixon closer and allowed them to work together, the consensus seems to be that it was their character flaws and not their strengths that were similar.

Much, if not most, of Henry Kissinger's career is judged based upon his success in foreign policy. He had little to no concern for domestic policy or politics as even his time teaching at Harvard was spent teaching and advising on international affairs.<sup>35</sup> For some scholars, Kissinger defined foreign policy for much of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century- what Kissinger believed of foreign policy would become US foreign policy. George D. Cleva devotes his whole book to the relationship between Kissinger and US foreign policy.<sup>36</sup> For Cleva, Kissinger brought a very different paradigm to counterpoint US foreign policy up to that point.

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<sup>33</sup>Isaacson, 130.

<sup>34</sup>Isaacson, 139.

<sup>35</sup>Isaacson, 74.

<sup>36</sup>Gregory D. Cleva, *Henry Kissinger and the American Approach to Foreign Policy*, (Philadelphia: Bucknell University Press, 1989).

He focuses on Kissinger's writing on the distinction between what he labels the “island nation” and the “continental nation.”<sup>37</sup>

For Kissinger the model of an island nation (an example from at that time would be Great Britain) was counterintuitive to America's goals of global influence and prestige. This notion of the United States as an island hearkened back to American isolationism preceding both World Wars. The notion was that if the United States did not become involved in foreign conflicts, the consequences of those conflicts would not be felt at home. Kissinger suggests that certain strains of political thought had influenced the US to try to remain within this island nation paradigm when indeed the US should be branching out to maintain its influence.<sup>38</sup> The United States could best serve its own interests by taking an active part in regional and international affairs. Kissinger was in turn heavily influenced by the experiences of Prince Klemens von Metternich and British Foreign Secretary Viscount Castlereagh. He lays out a new paradigm for US policy, *Realpolitik*, which he articulates in his doctoral thesis. *Realpolitik* is a more pragmatic, power centric focus where foreign policy is based on objectives of power and influence instead of ideological or perceived moral foundations.<sup>39</sup> Even as early as 1976, these influences were perceived by those that followed Kissinger.<sup>40</sup>

*Realpolitik* would become the hallmark of Kissinger's foreign policy legacy as it dramatically changed the way the United States dealt with international issues which was of particular concern as the United States was still embroiled in the Vietnam War. No longer would such conflict be waged purely in the name of ideology (combating Communism). Instead, any

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<sup>37</sup>Cleva, 48.

<sup>38</sup>Cleva, 13.

<sup>39</sup>Isaacson, 655.

<sup>40</sup>Cleva, 12.

action by the United States should be governed purely by national interests. During the Yom Kippur War this meant ignoring Israel's immediate concern of military and national survival. Instead, by keeping the United States from wading into the conflict for just a while longer, Kissinger hoped to pull other Middle Eastern nations under the United State's umbrella of influence. Nixon's own doctrine for foreign policy was crafted by Kissinger.<sup>41</sup> This power centric focus to foreign policy would mirror the moral ambiguity that Kissinger brought to his political dealings in Washington.

The second defining aspect of foreign policy brought forth by Kissinger was détente. Détente was in effect a state of stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union centering around their interactions in Europe and the Mediterranean.<sup>42</sup> It was in effect a relationship of non-aggression; even more than that it was the closest thing to mutual agreement on movements towards peace that had existed since the beginning of the Cold War.<sup>43</sup> Détente was seen and continues to be viewed as one of the greatest shifts in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup>

This cooling off of tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was just beginning to take effect in 1973 would weigh heavily upon Kissinger's (and to some extent upon Nixon's) mind at the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. In Kissinger's mind, the war was a no-win for all the players involved. Not only would it cause more regional turmoil, it would also draw in the superpowers and threaten to spread into a great conflict if left untended.<sup>45</sup><sup>46</sup> In

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<sup>41</sup>Dallek, 181.

<sup>42</sup>Horne, 344.

<sup>43</sup>Horne, 25.

<sup>44</sup>Horne 153.

<sup>45</sup>Horne, 263.

hindsight, détente would be blamed in part for tying the hands of the superpowers from taking any effective action to stop the outbreak of hostilities between Egypt, Israel and Syria.<sup>47</sup>

The United States and Kissinger feared growing Soviet influence with the Arab countries like Egypt and Syria. However, in the years and months leading up to the Yom Kippur War, this perceived Soviet influence would be tested. Sadat tried to both open diplomatic channels with the United States and to obscure any military plans from international oversight. To accomplish both, he removed Soviet military advisors from the country in 1972 and in 1973 continued to eject other Soviet officials.

For the Soviet Union, this created instability in the region and especially with the countries that would be involved in the war. While the Soviet Union still had strong ties with Syria, its weakened ties with Egypt gave it uneven influence with the two principle Arab countries involved in the conflict. Thus, when Kissinger asked Soviet diplomats to attempt to restrain Egyptian or Syrian offensives leading up to the war, the Soviet Union was hard pressed to deliver, even if it wanted to, because it did not have the control in the region that it had had previously. However, at the same time the United States still perceived that the Soviet Union did have this influence. So when the Soviet Union was not able to restrain its client states, it put a diplomatic and political pressure on the Soviet Union's relationship with the United States.

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<sup>46</sup> Galia Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Yom Kippur War," *Israel Affairs* 6 no. 1 (Autumn 1999): 127, Academic Search Premier.

<sup>47</sup> Isaacson, 537.

## Context

The comparative lack of foreign conflicts that the United States faced during much of 1973 only highlighted the turmoil taking place within the country during that year. The greatest domestic tension facing the United States and the Nixon administration was the Watergate Scandal<sup>48</sup>. Throughout the year, President Richard Nixon continued to try to control the fallout, both legally and in public opinion. However, a growing number of members of the Nixon administration were implicated in the scandal.

As the year went on, a greater amount of President Nixon's time and attention was focused on this growing domestic and personal crisis, while external events and conflicts continued to be ignored. At the same time a portion of Nixon's staff and a growing number of federal departments were consumed by Watergate<sup>49</sup>, thus immobilizing the executive branch (and other groups like the Justice Department) in terms of other domestic issues and especially regarding foreign policy. This vacuum was increasingly filled by the Defense Department, the Pentagon, but especially the State Department (with a newly installed Secretary, Henry Kissinger<sup>50</sup>.)

Since 1969, Henry Kissinger had held the post of National Security Advisor, working within the Executive Branch on foreign policy issues closely related to general national security (the reopening of communication with China is largely credited to him<sup>51</sup>.) However, even as he succeeded William Rogers as the new Secretary of State<sup>52</sup>, Kissinger held onto the position and

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<sup>48</sup> Kissinger, 72.

While Kissinger's analysis of events documented in his memoirs may be suspect, a broad timeline of events is reliable and can be verified with external historical sources.

<sup>49</sup> Kissinger, 243

<sup>50</sup> Kissinger, 423.

<sup>51</sup> Kissinger, 63.

<sup>52</sup> Kissinger, 420.

power of National Security Advisor, effectively giving him a position and power within two large areas of the federal government (both heavily influencing foreign policy.) While Nixon had begun his second term with the same determination that he had had in his first term to directly control all aspects of foreign policy<sup>53</sup>, Watergate would force him to rely more and more on lieutenants like Kissinger to maintain the workload. Even as this was an unwanted abdication for Nixon, it was very much unnoticed by him as well in the sense that it was not intentional. As Nixon continued to curl in upon himself to escape public and legal scrutiny, subordinates with agendas (like Kissinger) were only too happy to fill the vacuum.

Henry Kissinger had been active in government for many years, stemming back to his time as a professor at Harvard. However, he had not been able to gain a position of significance in the preceding Kennedy and Johnson presidential administrations<sup>54</sup>. The quick series of promotions within the Nixon administration gave Kissinger the platform to test and carry out the policies he had formulated as an academic. Notions such as *realpolitik*<sup>55</sup> (a pragmatic approach to diplomacy, compared to an idealistic or moralistic one, having the sole aim of advancing national interests) were no longer the subjects of which to write books. Instead, *realpolitik* could now be tested by Kissinger as he dealt with foreign states such as China or the Soviet Union. With his dual posting as National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, these policies could be carried out, to some extent, both diplomatically and militarily. Initially, this would be done under the auspices of Nixon himself. But as President Nixon's direct involvement in the West

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<sup>53</sup> Kissinger, 4, & 78.

<sup>54</sup> Isaacson, 109.

<sup>55</sup> Isaacson, 653.

Wing dwindled, Kissinger would begin to make more and more unilateral decisions that would drastically affect foreign policy<sup>56</sup>.

Richard Nixon had not intended to bestow so much power and influence upon Kissinger. In fact, like his predecessors Lyndon Johnson and especially John F. Kennedy, he began his tenure trying to keep the meddling Kissinger out of any position that had too much influence.<sup>57</sup> Kissinger was known for resisting authority that tried to curb his ambition. In fact, Nixon had hoped to run an administration that could point to many foreign policy accomplishments. While this was important to Nixon professionally, it was also deeply personal. His defeat to John F. Kennedy in a previous presidential election had highlighted his comparative lackluster military service and apparent foreign policy experience in light of the younger Kennedy who was not only celebrated as a war hero, but also as the son of a United States Ambassador (His father, Joe, served as the ambassador to the United Kingdom while the younger Kennedy was growing up.) The reality was that the young President Kennedy came into office with just as much experience as Nixon perceived in himself. However, lukewarm public opinion towards Nixon during the initial presidential campaign and then into his first term as president pushed him to seek out greater public appeal. Watergate would sour those attempts during his second term. Sadly, if not for Watergate, Nixon's foreign policy accomplishments in Vietnam and China would have been remembered as even greater than his predecessor Kennedy, to whom he continued to compare himself.

The Paris Peace Accords that aimed to end the conflict in Vietnam were signed in January<sup>58</sup>, thus easing tensions with Vietnam's northern neighbor, China. This move worked to

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<sup>56</sup> Isaacson, 491.

<sup>57</sup> Isaacson, 129.

<sup>58</sup> Hersh, 556.

end a wildly unpopular conflict in Asia and showed Nixon as a pragmatic leader who preferred to cut the United States' losses in a conflict with an unclear objective.<sup>59</sup> The reopening of diplomatic relations with China had started the year earlier, culminating with President Nixon's personal visit to the country.<sup>60</sup>

Even as the United States' relationship with one communist state began to defrost, the US's relationship with the Soviet Union also continued to thaw in what is known as a period of détente. Following the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, both the United States and the Soviet Union had begun to realize the calamitous power of the nuclear arsenals under their possession. The de-escalation following the crisis led to increased communication between the respective leaders of the two states and a series of discussions and treaties between the two superpowers.. Most notably among these were SALT I and II, as well as START I and II (the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks and the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaties respectively.<sup>61</sup>)

Even as tensions were de-escalating between the United States and the Soviet Union in the fall of 1973, other tensions in the Middle East that had been simmering since the Six Day War of 1967 would eventually reach a sudden boiling point. The Middle East had remained a conflicted area since the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of WWI. Following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the region had been in a state of perpetual conflict erupting into a number of all-out wars in the ensuing years. Most of the time in between the end of the Six Days War in 1967 and the beginning of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 was spent in a perpetual military conflict known as the War of Attrition<sup>62</sup>. Following defeat in the Six Days

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<sup>59</sup> Ferguson, 438.

<sup>60</sup> Ferguson, 726.

<sup>61</sup> Hersh, 147.

<sup>62</sup> Kissinger, 201.

War, Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Liberation Organization began a three year offensive against Israel that included continuous artillery bombardment, airstrikes, and raids. This effort was intended to weaken Israel and to compensate for the Arab states' diminished reputation following the Six Day War.

The War of Attrition faltered following the death of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser and the ascension of Anwar Sadat to the presidency. This was in part due to the fact that the War of Attrition had up to that point failed to produce any concrete successes for the Arab states involved. It was also because as Anwar Sadat succeeded Nasser, he sought to build a more defined relationship with the United States while still grappling with Egypt's historically strong ties to the Soviet Union.<sup>63</sup> The continuous conflict between Egypt and Israel strained the United States' ability to engage with Egypt while it struggled to reconcile its desire to exert influence over Egypt with its close relationship with Israel.

The political dynamics in the Middle East shifted slowly but decidedly in the decade before the Yom Kippur War. On an international level, the United States and the Soviet Union slowly stopped using conflicts between the Arab countries and Israel as proxy conflicts to advance their agendas in the region and on the international level. As the direct conflict between the superpowers diminished, instability in the Middle East became undesirable as it could be the spark that reignited large scale conflict that could eventually turn nuclear.<sup>64</sup> Up to this point the Arab countries, especially Egypt, were squarely under the influence of the Soviet Union who supplied these countries with supplies, weapons, money and military advisors.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Kissinger, 201.

<sup>64</sup> Isaacson, 540.

<sup>65</sup> Kissinger, 202.

On the other side was the United States who had a historical connection to Israel as the first state to recognize the State of Israel's sovereignty in 1948.<sup>66</sup> While evidence of the American government's actual support for Israel is not as abundant as what is perceived, the American public's attitude toward, and politicians' connection with, Israel maintained a strong bond between the two countries that was obvious inside the United States and to the international community. The United States had been reluctant to supply too many arms to Israel out of fear of alienating more moderate Arab countries like Saudi Arabia upon whom the United States relied for oil.

While these series of tacit alliances had remained relatively constant since 1948, the 1970's would be a time when the foundation under those relationships would begin to shift. While public opinion continued to clamor for support of Israel, diplomatically, politically, and militarily, Israel was often left disappointed by its patron. From voicing support for Israel in the United Nations or the Security Council or in supplying the weapons needed to maintain its air force and air superiority over its neighbors, the United States was not enthusiastic about advertising its relationship with Israel and was reluctant in the help that it did provide.<sup>67</sup>

The same reluctance existed between the Soviet Union and Egypt. Egypt continued to lobby for updated weapons (especially aircraft) that the Soviet Union was continuing to develop. However, the Soviet Union saw that it was only due to their subpar weaponry that Egypt and its allies had not launched any more offensives against Israel. Updated arms would encourage Egypt to attack Israel and upset the delicate stability that the Soviet Union preferred in the region at that

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<sup>66</sup> Trevor N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars 1947-1974* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 41.

<sup>67</sup> Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East- From the Cold War to the War on Terror*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2009), 140.

time. Both Israel and the Arab countries would sense this wavering support from their patron superpowers. Israel would not abandon the United States for the Soviet Union, but it would begin to leave American leaders out of the strategic and military decisions it was making. Egypt on the other hand would be more vocal in its frustration with the Soviet Union after pleading for more support, eventually leading to Sadat expelling Soviet military advisors on the eve of the Yom Kippur War. In attempting to prevent an escalation of conflict in Middle East by withholding support, both the United States and the Soviet Union unwittingly alienated the states under their influence and created pressure in those Middle East countries to break the stalemate.

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The close association between Egypt and Syria placed pressure on Israel from two fronts. Egypt and Syria had been closely connected since 1958 when the two had been united as the United Arab Republic.<sup>69</sup> While they were no longer politically connected as a single state, they would continue to collaborate even as both were closely associated with the Soviet Union. While Egypt and Syria were purportedly equals in this relationship, Egypt's vastly larger population and superior military made it the dominating partner in this arrangement. This would become even more evident in the aftermath of the 1973 war in which Egyptian president Sadat left Syrian President Hafaz al-Assad in the dark about Egypt's offensive plan of which Sadat expected the Syrian military to be a key player.

On the other side was the State of Israel with its prime minister Golda Meir. Meir was born in the Ukraine but moved to Wisconsin as a child. She had immigrated to Israel even before its establishment as a sovereign nation. She had been involved in the Israeli government during

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<sup>68</sup> Dupuy, 388.

<sup>69</sup> Kissinger, 848.

the war of 1948 and during the Six Days War in 1967. Having witnessed these previous conflicts, Meir was alarmed by the suspicious activity leading up to the Arab offensive in October of 1973. However, she, like many in the Israeli government, was hesitant for Israel to appear in any way to be the aggressor in a military conflict. Tension had already been building between Israel and its European allies who had been instrumental in supplying Israel with up to date weaponry that had provided a clear edge over the surrounding Arab militaries.

Israel had been used to being forced into a position of making unilateral decisions without consulting with its allies and benefactors. On occasion the imminent threat of annihilation forced Israeli leaders to quickly make political and military decisions that would cause international tension. The Six Days War was a prime example of this. After receiving intelligence that Egypt, Syria, and Jordan were preparing to amass their armies to attack, Israel launched a preemptive strike. While this war would prove successful for Israel as it took over the Sinai peninsula, the West Bank, Golan Heights, and other territory (including the city of Jerusalem,<sup>70</sup>) there were a number of unintended consequences of this war that would have an effect up until 1973 and beyond.

The crushing defeat of Arab armies by Israel would engender a sense of inferiority in the command structures of those militaries. Arab leaders would continue to look for ways to prove their armies equal to that of the Jewish State, thus heightening the instability caused by a potential conflict always on the horizon. The defeat of the Arab states also affected benefactor states like the Soviet Union who saw the downfall of a strategic partner as a reflection on its standing in the bigger picture of the Cold War.

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<sup>70</sup> Kissinger, 196.

Even as their military standing continued to be in question, the Arab countries also were gaining influence and leverage through oil exports. Though Egypt and Syria were not major oil exporters in the region, they could count on the support of countries like Saudi Arabia and Iraq when it came to a conflict with Israel. This influential bloc would be able to use the threat (real or implied) of an oil embargo to distance Israel from its allies. European countries like Great Britain and France who supplied weapons to Israel (and didn't have any major abilities to produce their own oil) would back off from supporting Israel in order to ensure their countries' steady supply of oil.

The United States did not face as great of a dilemma in this regard. It had some oil producing capabilities of its own. It had other oil suppliers that were not directly in conflict with Israel. And its position as a global power allowed it to engage in more questionable political choices in the eyes of the Arab states (who ultimately answered in large part to the Soviet Union.) While the United States did not completely back off in its support of Israel, it spent most of the 1960's and 1970's deciding if the partnership with Israel had produced any tangible profit, politically, diplomatically, economically, or militarily. At the very least American presidents began to exert pressure on Israel to not antagonize its hostile neighbors and refrain from launching any military offensives.<sup>71</sup> This was true at the end of September of 1973 and into that October. However, it was not merely due to the influence of the United States that Israel failed to look out for a fight from its Arab neighbors.

Even as Israeli intelligence and American assets were perceiving evidence of a potential Egyptian and Syrian military buildup, Israeli leaders and their advisors were misinterpreting the

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<sup>71</sup> Kissinger, 652.

information they were receiving. While Presidents Sadat and Assad were careful to have their commanders obfuscate the movements of their militaries, there were unavoidable signs of mobilization leading up to the beginning of October, 1973. Though this information was being gathered by Israeli intelligence agencies<sup>72</sup>, the leaders of Mossad (the Israeli clandestine service) and Aman (security intelligence) brushed off this information (as did many army and air force commanders) and recommended that Prime Minister Meir refrain from mobilizing Israeli forces for fear of provoking Egypt and Syria. Golda Meir followed this assessment and neither mobilized troops nor launched a preemptive strike.

The United States was seeing much of the same intelligence that Israel was receiving.<sup>73</sup> Though tensions in the Middle East were not a high priority in the latter part of 1973, Secretary of State Kissinger was still in communication with many of the key players in the future conflict when it came to other issues and policies he was pursuing. He too urged Meir not to provoke the Arabs and secured assurances that she would not launch an early offensive.<sup>74</sup> Reigning in Israel was a concern not just of Kissinger, but also of Nixon and the administration. Just as both countries were receiving the same intelligence, they also were both fairly resolute in wanting Israel to remain the non-aggressor. However, the United States' reasons for this were vastly different than Israel's. In fact, Kissinger's motivations and policies would differ from those of Nixon. This would become evidence at the start of the war. As Nixon was indisposed to deal with the conflict in his own way, Kissinger had the latitude to carry out foreign policy as he saw fit.

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<sup>72</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, "The 'Special Means of Collection': The Missing Link in the Surprise of the Yom Kippur War," *The Middle East Journal*, 67, no. 4 2013, 534.

Nasser's son-in-law was a major Israeli intelligence source reporting on Egyptian aircraft locations and conditions.

<sup>73</sup> Kissinger, 459.

<sup>74</sup> October 6, 1973 6:55am Teleconversation between Minister Shalev and Secretary Kissinger.

The attack initiated by Egypt and Israel on October 6, 1973 took place along the Suez Canal and the Golan Heights. The Egyptian army crossed the canal and overtook the Israeli Bar Lev Line<sup>75</sup> which was a series of defensive forts along the canal. In the three years following the War of Attrition (1970-1973) the number of Israeli units along this line had been scaled down with only a few units holding the forts themselves and a handful of tank groups set up a couple miles behind this line to quickly respond to any single incursion along the canal.<sup>76</sup> A multi-front attack along the canal overwhelmed these forces, pushing them back as reserves were hastily called up. Not only was the Egyptian ground force far more numerous than the Israeli force, a supply of Soviet missiles protected the tanks and infantry from the Israeli air force.<sup>77</sup>

On the northern front, Syria invaded along the Golan Heights it previously had controlled before the Six Day War. Again, the Israeli air force was thwarted by Syrian missiles supplied by the Soviet Union.<sup>78</sup> As Egyptian and Syrian armies entered Israeli territory, Israeli reserves were hastily called up. Throughout this entire military conflict, a different series of events were taking place in telephone conversations between leaders and diplomats of various countries, trying to prevent this fighting and then trying to stop the fighting.

## **Methodology**

The Nixon White House recordings, and more specifically the infamous Watergate Tapes, have heightened the perception of Richard Nixon as perpetually paranoid. A number of the tapes were subpoenaed and contained incriminating information about White House staff

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<sup>75</sup> Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement: The Inside Story of the Yom Kippur War*, (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2009), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Kissinger, 458.

<sup>77</sup> Kissinger, 497.

<sup>78</sup> Kissinger, 498.

involvement in the Watergate Scandal that eventually implicated President Nixon himself.<sup>79</sup> The White House recording devices were shut off once their existence was divulged to the public during the Watergate hearings, incidentally shortly before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. Thus verbatim records of the Nixon administration exist for only a little more than two years of his presidency.<sup>80</sup>

If a mere two years of recordings and transcripts could tag Richard Nixon with such a reputation for paranoia, how infinitely greater must the paranoia of Henry Kissinger be whose transcripts of calls and conversations stretch over the numerous decades that he was involved in government service. Both Nixon and Kissinger ostensibly implemented such records as a way to review important meetings and interactions with staff, other government officials, and foreign notables. However, the other unspoken purpose of such records was to hold accountable each man's staff and subordinates, and in Kissinger's case his superiors which included Nixon himself, accountable.

Many governmental officials have kept detailed records of their interactions to some degree or another. However, the methods of both Nixon and Kissinger differed greatly from others who had been in their position. The taping systems installed in the Nixon White House were voice activated and recorded all verbal communication, whether the participants were aware of it or not. On Kissinger's end, certainly no other National Security Advisor or Secretary of State possessed such a detailed record of his tenure in those positions. Whatever these records may reflect about the personalities of the two men, and Kissinger and particular, they are an historical treasury of information Henry Kissinger's decisions and interactions.

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<sup>79</sup> Kissinger, 1180.

<sup>80</sup> The voice activated recording tapes were not installed until early 1971 and were shut off during the Watergate hearings in 1973.

Henry Kissinger's records fall mainly into two categories: telephone transcripts and his memoranda of conversations,<sup>81</sup> though there are a sprinkling of other similar primary documents. These have been divided into two separate archives by the National Security Archive project through The George Washington University.<sup>82</sup> However, physical copies of these records can be compiled and ordered by date and time to draw an accurate timeline of Kissinger's conversations during the buildup to the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent conflict.

Though the Kissinger telephone transcripts and memcons began to be unclassified in 2006, the database in which they are held is still quite unfriendly for historical research. There is no online chronological organization or simple subject search mechanisms to assist in wading through the thousands of pages of documents in the two collections.<sup>83</sup> This compilation of relevant document and the chronological organization had to be completed by hand.

This process was further complicated by the reality that the collections are still being updated to an extent. While few documents are actually being added to the collections, hundreds of documents already within the collection still have important sections of conversations still classified and censored. Each time another such section is declassified, a new version of that file is added to the database, thus creating a mountain of duplicate (though slightly different) documents that further discourage academic inquiry into such a convoluted collection of data. This lack of a full collection of primary documents to assist in reanalyzing Yom Kippur is not just limited to Henry Kissinger's role. Uri Bar-Joseph describes the same problem occurring in

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<sup>81</sup> His staff, and now historians, use the moniker "memcons."

<sup>82</sup> Initial access to these records is through <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/> but the database is hosted online for academic institutions through ProQuest's Digital National Security Archive.

<sup>83</sup> In a phone conversation with a technical research staff member, he admitted that not only was the archive not set up properly to facilitate easy searches (there was no search mechanism to simply bring up all the available documents in the archive in a list,) it was not something that was currently being addressed, though the archive overseers were aware of the issues.

Israeli history where access to primary sources has been constricted because of government classification paired with a lack of organization in the documentation that has already been available to the public.<sup>84</sup>

Even as the dearth of primary documentation (before declassification) discouraged many retrospective inquiries into this aspect of the Yom Kippur War, this additional roadblock has also slowed such study, though much of this information is now declassified. As with any such historical incursion, this is tentative with the understanding that the amount of available documentation is continually shifting.

This examination draws on the transcripts from October 6, 1973, the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, to the couple of weeks following the beginning of hostilities. Certain records from the months before and after the start of the conflict can offer a solid foundation to understand the context of the first few days of the conflict. However, a close reading of the activity in just those first few days can elucidate the finer political and foreign policy intentions of Secretary Kissinger.

Because of the unwieldy nature of the digital archive in which these documents are kept, it was necessary to work with hard copies of the documents in order to more easily organize them. First, the documents had to be downloaded en masse from the database (though this could only be done document by document as the database had no way to extract documents on a macro scale. Once these hundreds of pages of documents were in paper form, they were then organized by date and time. A second pass through the papers involved marking relevant records addressing the two questions of inquiry: Kissinger's relationship to Nixon, including his level of

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<sup>84</sup> Uri Bar-Joseph, "Main Trends in the Historiography of the Yom Kippur War: A Thirty-Year Perspective," *Journal of Israeli History* 24, no. 2 (2005): 252.

influence in the White House, and Kissinger's conversations with US and international leaders that shed light on his agenda in the Middle East.

The sheer number of documents available to sort through in this investigation necessitated a narrowed focus to the first two days, October 6 and 7, of the war. These two days included Kissinger's attempts to prevent a war, his conversations with international leaders to respond to the outbreak of fighting, and his conversations with Nixon and his staff about the President's role in the conflict. The third and fourth days of the conflict are equally important, but the third day saw Nixon entering the equation in force as he ordered Kissinger to send supplies and equipment to Israel.

These parts build upon one another in the narrative of the war, but it would take a far greater study to deal with the sheer amount of information now available in declassified documents to fully analyze the implications of all of those conversations. The first two days are important in studying how Kissinger acted without being fully constrained by Nixon. Since Nixon did not enter the equation until the third day of the war, these first two days show Kissinger's political and diplomatic agenda if left to carry on to its greatest extreme.

### **Kissinger's Position and Influences as Secretary of State**

Just as the collections of Kissinger files have been divided into two categories, this study of Kissinger and the Yom Kippur is divided into two subjects of focus. First, Secretary Kissinger played a heightened role in crafting the United States' response to the military conflict in the Middle East. President Nixon's conspicuous absence at various points in the conflict elevated

Kissinger into a position whereby he was the face of the government and spoke for the president in ways that a Secretary of State normally would not.

Depending on one's perspective, Kissinger could arguably be described as taking on the additional roles of ambassador, intelligence chief, communications director, congressional political liaison, and most importantly chief of staff. With this in mind, understanding Kissinger's role relative to his appointed position is important for noting the reach and impact of his choices. This relationship with Nixon and with other officials can be traced through the conversations Kissinger has with those subjects and with others about those individuals.

Second, the Secretary of State brought a shifted view of foreign policy than if President Nixon had been directly involved in negotiations from the beginning. Thus, Kissinger's views of, and relationship with, Egypt, Israel, Syria, the Soviet Union and Europe would all steer the United States in a certain direction. This period is arguably the point in which Henry Kissinger attained the greatest influence and broadest portfolio of responsibility in government. Politically and in regard to foreign policy, his policy of *realpolitik* could be tested to its extreme.<sup>85</sup> Whether *realpolitik* governed Kissinger's decisions during this clash or not, Kissinger's goals centered on *realpolitik* and détente had replaced Nixon's goals. With Kissinger's conversations records now ordered chronologically, it is easier to trace the movement of Kissinger's conversations and his thinking as the conflict wore on while also aligning it to what was occurring in the Middle East and within the rest of the government of the United States.

Conversations about a possible Egyptian and Syrian attack on Israel began circulating in the months before the Yom Kippur War actually occurred. Members of the Israeli intelligence

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<sup>85</sup> The Yom Kippur War threatened to collapse the Middle East into a deathtrap of instability. At the same time it heightened tensions with the Soviet Union to the point of potential direct engagement.

community were the first to notice signs of an impending conflict,<sup>86</sup> but even members of the United States government heard of this possibility before the region blew up in October.<sup>87</sup> In his role of National Security Advisor, Kissinger knew about such a report, but no records show any discussion of this in the West Wing with President Nixon. However, it should be noted the report predicted that such an attack would take place within a few weeks of the report's publication. This was based off of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's feints where he would put the military on alert and run exercises but would then recall those activated units. This would continue throughout the months leading up to Yom Kippur. Therefore, it would be understandable for Israel (and the United States,) to suspect that any buildup of Egyptian forces was an undisputable sign of an impending Egypt or Syrian attack. However, this does nothing to explain any lack of reaction once an attack was already underway, which is what happened on Yom Kippur.

Early in the morning of October 6, 1973, Secretary Kissinger made a phone call to Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin. Kissinger informed Dobrynin that he believed that a conflict between Israel, Egypt and Syria was imminent. (Either Egypt and Syria or Israel would launch an attack)<sup>88</sup> He also inquired if the Soviet Union knew anything about this. Dobrynin deflects these questions and no resolution is reached, but Kissinger lets him know that the United States is doing everything to restrain Israel and is also in contact with Egypt and Syria to prevent any conflict. He asks Dobrynin for the Soviet Union to do the same. At the end of the conversation he also included a message from President Nixon that both powers have the responsibility to restrain the respective countries under their influence.

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<sup>86</sup> Uri Bar Joseph, 533.

<sup>87</sup> Cline, Ray S. "Growing Risk of Egypt Resumption of Hostilities With Israel." May 31, 1973.

<sup>88</sup> October 6, 1973 6:40am Teleconversation between Dobrynin and Secretary Kissinger.

The interesting thing about this final part of the conversation is that this request from Nixon is not actually from Nixon as there had been no discussion between Nixon and Kissinger about a possible conflict in the day or days before the beginning of the conflict and the conversation with Dobrynin.<sup>89</sup> It would not be until approximately two hours later that Kissinger would notify Nixon's staff about what was happening along the Israeli borders.<sup>90</sup> Even though President Nixon's staff received the delayed report at this time, there is no evidence of when this information was communicated to Nixon himself as it is some time later that Nixon gets on the phone to consult with Kissinger about the situation.<sup>91</sup> This conversation lacks substance as Nixon simply asks questions to which Kissinger repeats the information that he has already given to Nixon staff. There is no clear order given by Nixon to Kissinger about the posture the United States should take in responding to the conflict, nor any instructions to Kissinger about what he should do in his role as chief diplomat.

Henry Kissinger calls again to update the chief of staff Alexander Haig exactly two hours after his first call of the day to him.<sup>92</sup> Haig informs Kissinger that the president is sitting with him so Kissinger gives both of them a review of what has happened. Again, this conversation is incredibly one-sided with Haig only repeating what Kissinger is stating or stating his agreement with Kissinger's assessment. Though Nixon is apparently on the call as well, he provides no guidance or orders at that time, besides a terse domestic analytical statement of the conflict.<sup>93</sup> Even towards the end of the conversation when Haig is stating what the president is planning to

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<sup>89</sup> Kissinger's first direct conversation with the President about the Middle East War is at 9:25am on October 6.

<sup>90</sup> October 6, 1973 8:35am Teleconversation between Alexander Haig and Kissinger.

<sup>91</sup> October 6, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between the President and Henry Kissinger.

<sup>92</sup> October, 6 1973 10:35am Teleconversation between Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger. Haig states, "I am sitting with the president."

<sup>93</sup> October, 6 1973 10:35am Teleconversation between Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger. For two pages of text Haig only gives curt replies to Kissinger's long winded summary.

do during the next day, Kissinger offers his own strongly worded opinion that the president should not return to Washington D.C. as Nixon is considering. In light of Kissinger's previous conversation with Haig, both appear to be working to keep the president out of a highly visible position in the Middle Eastern conflict. While Nixon does not provide any clear instruction to Kissinger at this time, Nixon does express his wish that United States naval forces near to Israel be prepared to engage or assist.

This most interesting aspect of this conversation is a single reply that Haig relays to Kissinger from Nixon. Previous to this, Haig has expressed the president's wish to return to the White House to monitor the conflict. Kissinger then expresses his concern with that plan, and he suggests that the president wait until at least the afternoon since a United Nations Security Council meeting hasn't even been called. General Alexander Haig then states that the president agrees with this suggestion and that "[the president's] problem is if it is an all out war for him to be sitting down here in this climate would be very, very bad." Who would it be bad for? Possibly Nixon could be referring to his relationships internationally, preventing the appearance of the United States not doing enough to protect the interests of its allies or preserve stability. However, if it is true that Nixon was already distanced from foreign affairs and engrossed with the fallout of Watergate, his more pressing concern would certainly be the domestic political climate and public opinion.

Between these two calls between Kissinger and General Alexander Haig, there is a phone call directly between Secretary Kissinger and President Nixon.<sup>94</sup> But this conversation offers no new information from Kissinger other than what he has already conveyed in multiple

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<sup>94</sup> October 6, 1973 9:25am Teleconversation between President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger.

conversations before talking to the president. In fact, this conversation shows the president as passive, asking on a smattering of questions about how Kissinger is handling the situation, only at one time does he venture to make a half-hearted order.<sup>95</sup> Ironically this order, to let the press and foreign governments know that Kissinger had informed the president of the situation, was already carried out previous to this. This is exactly what Kissinger had ordered Haig to do in their previous conversation.<sup>96</sup> The fact that Nixon has Kissinger do something that Kissinger has already done without Nixon knowing shows just how much Nixon has been distanced from the operations of the State Department and his own staff.

All information being conveyed to Nixon from Kissinger is being funneled through chief of staff Haig. The third call between Kissinger and Haig on October 6 is at 4:15pm. Unfortunately, this is one of their first conversations that has a large section that is still classified, but if the surrounding conversations Kissinger has had are any indicator, this is further analysis of the progress of trying to work with the Soviet Union and Great Britain to convene a United Nations Security Council meeting to beginning a ceasefire between Israel, Egypt and Syria. Kissinger tells Haig to let Nixon know that the Soviet Union still have not replied regarding this.<sup>97</sup> Kissinger again invokes Nixon as the impetus for him returning to the State Department in Washington to continue to oversee the conflict.<sup>98</sup> This sort of invocation of the president is not uncommon in situations in which it is not necessary for the president to be fully briefed on the

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<sup>95</sup> October 6, 1973 9:25am Teleconversation between President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger.

Nixon does attempt a weak opinion, "We ought to take the initiative. Can't we get the Russians to? I think we ought to take the initiative and you ought to indicate that you talked to me."

<sup>96</sup> October 6, 1973 8:35am Teleconversation between General Alexander Haig and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>97</sup> October 6, 1973 4:15pm Teleconversation between General Alexander Haig and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>98</sup> October 6, 1973 4:15pm Teleconversation between General Alexander Haig and Secretary Kissinger.

Kissinger says, "I will say the president has instructed me to go back to Washington. And I will say the president will have something to say at a later time."

situation but where everyone is in accord on the United States' position on an issue (or at least the White House is united in a decision.) The sequestration of a President during an international conflict such as this is only logical if the president's subordinates feel strongly that his involvement will hurt the situation drastically more than it would help. However, if the constitutionally mandated leader of the country is being kept of such decisions that have great political, diplomatic, and legal consequences, it comes close to being a quiet and temporary coup d'etat, that is if the executive had no knowledge or part in keeping himself out of the process of making these decisions which could prove to benefit Nixon as he would have plausible deniability and also a more popular figure (Kissinger's) as the face of the United States' response.

Kissinger continues this practice of dictating Nixon's perceived involvement to the press throughout October 6 and in the days following in conversation with chief of staff Alexander Haig.<sup>99</sup> If the chief of staff's office up until this point had not functioned as a cabinet level position, this is the point where the chief of staff's office begins to rise in importance. Today the position is seen as one of the most powerful in the world.

Secretary Kissinger finally receives some forceful direction from President Nixon around 7:10pm on October 6. Though this directive still is relayed through Haig, the president does seem to have some goal for wanting to push a ceasefire resolution through the United Nations. Thus concludes Kissinger's interactions with Nixon (or more accurately with Nixon through his chief of staff.)

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<sup>99</sup> October 6, 1973 6:05pm Teleconversation between Haig and Kissinger.

The next morning, October 7, begins again with another conversation between Kissinger and the chief of staff. President Nixon is only mentioned by Haig when he tells Kissinger he is “about to go to see the boss.”<sup>100</sup> A detailed report is given by Kissinger to Haig about the state of the conflict on the ground along the Israeli and Egyptian border, followed by a discussion about how to handle interactions with the Soviet Union, and lastly a question about how to approach the United States’ relationship with Israel but also its other national interests in the region. This last part of the conversation will be important in the context of Kissinger’s agenda for the region. But since this information does not reach Nixon in any noticeable way (Kissinger and Nixon’s staff keep it from Nixon), it is irrelevant to understanding Kissinger’s position in relationship to Nixon.

Shortly after this conversation, Kissinger speaks directly to the President, updating him about the Soviet Union’s lack of communication stalling the ceasefire efforts in the United Nations. This conversation has three important points that show Nixon’s reaction to the conflict as it begins its second day. First, Nixon’s initial contributions to the conversation are weak at best. He agrees that Kissinger must hold off on pushing a ceasefire resolution in the United Nations Security Council for fear of having no support from the other members if the United States moves too fast. He also agrees that relying on the Soviet Union (Brezhnev) to push a balanced ceasefire resolution. If the Soviet Union did not do that, Kissinger predicted that one of the Arab countries would put forth a simple ceasefire proposal that would not favor Israel, and any ceasefire that clearly was not beneficial for one of the sides would simply create a stalemate

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<sup>100</sup> October 7, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between Secretary and General Alexander Haig.

<sup>101</sup> October 7, 1973 10:18am Teleconversation between The President and Secretary Kissinger.

The second important note is that the President states that “[Public relations] is terribly important. Even if we don’t do anything... Let Scali (the White House Press Secretary) go out... he can do a lot and prattle and cause no problem.” This is the first evidence of President Nixon’s foreign policy understanding which was noticeable lacking up to this point in the conflict. Nixon’s lack of investment in foreign policy during the conflict was conspicuous in light of how invested he had been in the China deal, reopening relations with Beijing. Finally, ending the conversation, Nixon makes his first notable diplomatic observation and directive. He tells Kissinger to “keep one step removed” (from a meeting of the four permanent representatives to the UN Security Council. So that “we can use you for the power punch.” This conversation shows the first clear signs of the Nixon who was known for his foreign policy experience and focus. However, at the same time it makes the lack of these traits earlier on in the conflict even more conspicuous.

This involvement by the President again quickly goes by the wayside as Kissinger has five conversations in quick succession where he invokes Nixon as the power behind the actions he is taking. But the details he describes were never discussed at length in the previously reviewed conversations with the president.<sup>102103104105</sup> Another important conversation takes place between Kissinger and White House press secretary Ron Ziegler earlier in the day whereby Kissinger again is very heavy handed in dictating the sequence of events surrounding the United States’ response to the war, including that the President was kept more aware of the situation

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<sup>102</sup> October 7, 1973 4:20pm Teleconversation between Ron Ziegler (White House Press Secretary) and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>103</sup> October 7, 1973 4:25pm Teleconversation between British Ambassador Earl of Cromer and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>104</sup> October 7, 1973 4:40pm Teleconversation between Ambassador Dobrynin and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>105</sup> October 7, 1973 4:50pm Teleconversation between United National Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and Secretary Kissinger.

than he actually ways.<sup>106</sup> Henry Kissinger has one final direct conversation with President Nixon during October 7 at 10:30pm. This last conversation contains a single statement by Nixon that perhaps sheds the most light on the impact of Watergate on how Nixon handled foreign policy thereafter. Kissinger begins discussing the military condition on the ground in Israel. He admits that the force of the Syrian and Egyptian attack surprised him, but he downplayed the direness of Israel's condition as he says they hadn't committed their reserve forces yet. Nixon interjects that "The thing to do now is to get the war stopped. That would be great (sic) achievement. One of the greatest achievements of all. People in this country would think... really tough."<sup>107</sup>

Watergate's effect on the Nixon White House is really only seen up to this point in the lack of Nixon's presence in the conversations with world leaders before and during the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. However, at this point, the implications of success or failure in the Middle East have a political value for Nixon and he weighs this possibility over the phone with Kissinger. The section of conversation after this statement is still classified in two different releases of this transcript. The exchange that directly follows that line could shed even more light on Nixon's thinking in the moment, but for now that remains elusive to historical analysis.

Even within only the first two days of the Yom Kippur War a clear pattern is drawn of Nixon's aloofness at the beginning of the conflict that may or may not have been orchestrated by Kissinger, along with the assistance of others like the chief of staff and others. Once the president does become directly involved, he begins as a passive character, reacting the updates passed along by Kissinger, but providing no true direction as the chief executive ought to at this point. His final statement on the evening of October 7 is focused on the domestic political

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<sup>106</sup> October 6, 1973 10:10am Teleconversation between Ron Ziegler and Henry Kissinger (HAK).

<sup>107</sup> October 7, 1973 10:30pm Teleconversation between The President and Secretary Kissinger.

ramifications of a successful end to fighting in the Middle East. Plagued by congressional investigation into Watergate, such a success would provide an increased margin of public support (or sympathy) that could keep Nixon's beleaguered administration afloat.

For Kissinger, all of these signs would point to an absent chief executive. His call logs show that Kissinger's response to this was to direct all information and direction regarding the conflict through his office in the State Department. Having just left his previous position as national security advisor, to some extent it does seem logical that Kissinger was the individual best able to direct the US response to the war. On the other hand, the sheer number of individuals he was in contact with in the government and in foreign government (and the content of those conversations) clearly show him expanding his range of influence beyond any range that would logically be found in his portfolio as either national security advisor or secretary of state (or both.)

### **The Consequences of Kissinger's Decisions**

With Kissinger in this elevated position of authority and influence, the consequences of his choices grow greatly as he is the most influential American official to interact with all of the players in the Middle East conflict. To understand the net value of Kissinger's impact on the outcome of the war as it affected the United States, one must analyze Kissinger's agenda for the region and then compare it to the actual outcome of Kissinger's decisions.

This analysis also begins early in the morning of October 6 in the same call between Kissinger and Soviet ambassador Dobrynin. The limited information available to Kissinger is apparent as Kissinger prods Dobrynin to understand the Soviet Union's involvement with Egypt

and whether Dobrynin knows that Egypt and Syria (according to Israel) are preparing to attack Israel. The potential loss for the United States (at least Kissinger's mind) must be greater than that of the Soviet Union, because Kissinger commits to communicating with both sides of the imminent conflict, whereas Dobrynin plays ignorant and does not discuss what the Soviet Union knows about Egypt's plans, nor whether the Soviet Union is doing anything to prevent a conflict.

<sup>108</sup> This could be because no clear directions have been passed down from the Kremlin, or it could be because the Soviet Union feels that there is no clear proactive response that will improve its position of influence with the Arabs. Thus, playing coy and refusing to get involved is the preferred option.

Kissinger's next phone conversation is with the Israeli Head of the Bureau of the Chief of Staff Avner Shalev. He again confirms that Israel is expecting an attack by Egypt and Syria<sup>109</sup> while again urging Israel to refrain from any decisions that would make it appear to Egypt or Syria that Israel had any intention of attacking first. A conversation with a government official on the other side, with either Egypt or Syria, does not take place until almost an hour later. Kissinger intentionally only communicates with these countries through the Soviet Union for the beginning of the conflict. This either illustrates Israel's closer relationship with the United States when it came to working for stability in the Middle East, Israel's higher capacity to restrain itself to prevent any unintentional signs of aggression directed at Egypt or Syria, or Kissinger suspecting that Israel did have offensive intentions before Egypt and Syria attacked. A combination of the first two is most likely.

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<sup>108</sup> October 6, 1973 6:40am Teleconversation between Dobrynin and Sec. Kissinger.

<sup>109</sup> Contrary to the very firm narrative that Israel was taken completely by surprise on Yom Kippur, Head of the Bureau of the Chief of Staff of the Israeli military Shalev betrays no surprise or lack of preparation on Israel's part, only a confirmation that such an expectation of war is present.

Henry Kissinger's first communication with an Egyptian or Syria representative on the morning of October 6 takes place at 7:35am with a call to Egyptian foreign minister Mohammed Hassan El-Zayyat. The Soviet Union has clearly not done anything on their side to signal that they were communicating with their client states, Egypt and Syria, to prevent those countries from starting a war with Israel. Kissinger takes it upon himself to act as the intermediary between Israel and Egypt and pass along assurances from Israel to Egypt that Israel had no intentions of attacking. However, he received no such assurances from Zayyat, only an assurance that Zayyat would relay such messages to President Anwar Sadat. Shortly after this he again calls Israeli General Shalev to confirm that this message has been passed both ways, from Israel to Egypt and now back the other way.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout these initial exchanges with Israel, Egypt and the Soviet Union Kissinger's modus operandi has been geared towards containment and prevention. Possible conflict brings to mind the fallout of the 1967 Six-Day War and the subsequent War of Attrition, both of which had strained the relationship between the Arab countries and Israel. Any forward momentum in the region towards peace had to move away from the antagonistic bend.

Kissinger has another call, this time with Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban. This conversation's most important point is when Kissinger refers to a conversation the two had had the night before about a potential conflict.<sup>111</sup> This conversation merely adds to the other evidence that neither Israel or the United States lacked evidence that Egypt and Syria were attacking soon. This evidence went back for months<sup>112</sup>, though a series of false alarms made Israel, and by extension Kissinger, complacent to a new buildup of Egyptian and Syrian forces on Israel's

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<sup>110</sup> October 6, 1973 7:45am Teleconversation between Shalev and Sec. Kissinger.

<sup>111</sup> October 6, 1973 8:25am Teleconversation between Eban and Kissinger.

<sup>112</sup> May 31, 1973 Report: Growing Risk of Egyptian Resumption of Hostilities With Israel.

borders. Both of these are important as they point to the fact that both Israel and the United States had the pertinent information to begin planning for any attack, and any lack of response was thus based off of a willful choice to ignore certain strains of intelligence that had been present for a long time before October 6.

At 8:29am Kissinger receives a call from Israeli General Shalev that Egypt and Syria have launched their attack, and that the information came while the Israeli cabinet had been in session. Kissinger's response again is to urge restraint. But it is also notable that Kissinger does not question Shalev that it was the Egyptians and Syrians that commenced hostilities. The analysis that Kissinger gives to each country that he talks to about who started what shows his agenda for each subject.<sup>113</sup>

Secretary Kissinger's next call is to the United Nations Secretary General. As the conflict wore on, intervention by the United Nations and the Security Council would be required. If the United States and the Soviet Union could not prevent a war, it would be up to the collective international community to broker a cease-fire. The Secretary General would have greater influence once this diplomatic side of the conflict was addressed, so keeping him informed and open to the United States' perspective was important to Kissinger. While before Kissinger's aim was to restrain both sides to prevent a conflict, once the conflict had started Kissinger moves to implementing swift ceasefire, though this offers greater challenges than preventing a conflict in the first place would have. This act of preventing a conflict and then quickly ending a conflict is entirely possible coming from a position of complete neutrality. However, implementing a ceasefire creates the obstacle of having to consider who has the upper hand at the time the

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<sup>113</sup> For a while, Kissinger avoids discussing with Egyptian officials who should be blamed for commencing hostilities. While both sides most assuredly operate under the knowledge that Egypt was the aggressor, it would not help the relationship between the two countries to acknowledge that or push the implications of that.

ceasefire is proposed and when it is actually administered. For instance, if a cease fire occurs while Egypt was in control of a large swath of Israeli territory, Egypt would be in a stronger position to keep that territory in any postwar negotiations. This could work vice versa as well if Israel had the upper hand. Such an arrangement would not be agreeable to the loser which would almost assuredly mean the loser would veto any such peace agreement wherein they lost a significant amount of anything in the negotiations.

Kissinger's begins the day by working to maintain this neutrality, but he must first address the United State's historically close ties to Israel, and the strategic partnership already present between the two. While Egypt and Syria would have to lobby the United States simply to side with their version of events in a UN debate over a ceasefire, Israel begins on another level by lobbying the United States immediately for supplies like ammunition and aircraft. The disconnect occurs in that while Kissinger treats Israel like an ally (even a reluctant one on the part of the United States) it does not treat Egypt or Syria like an enemy. This distinction puts pressure on the supply situation as there are greater consequences for supplying an ally with weapons to inflict damage on a country of ambivalence than on a country that with whom the United States already had a rocky, even antagonistic, relationship. Any assistance to Israel would hurt a relationship with Egypt and Syria.

Later in the afternoon of October 6, Kissinger has a conversation with the British Ambassador to the United States, Lord Earl of Cromer, and outlines what he has done to address the conflict. Great Britain would be an important player in working out a ceasefire as it was a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a heavily influential member of the European community as much of the Middle East had once been a part of Great Britain's

protectorate. It is in the conversation where it is possible to see the outcome of how Kissinger handles the tension in working with the two sides fighting in the war. According to this conversation, Kissinger not only has to ask Israel as an ally and friend not to launch a preemptive strike on Egypt or Syria, he also threatens steep consequences in the relationship between the United States and Israel.<sup>114</sup> On one hand the relationship is strong enough between the United States and Israel that Israel does not immediately break off contact after what is objectively a very rude and arrogant threat to make to an ally. But at the same time it illustrates how the United States was consistently frustrated by Israel's unilateral decisions.

This boldness in dictating to Israel the US's expectations of its ally in preventing a conflict also perhaps stems from Kissinger's extreme confidence that Israel could successfully respond to any offensive made by any or all of Israel's Arab neighbors. Kissinger conveys to US Senator Mansfield in a summary of events that he expects an imminent Israeli counterattack that will result in Israel retaking its territory and even counter-invading into Egypt and Syria.<sup>115</sup> If Kissinger believed so much that Israel would prevail, the benefit of appearing sympathetic to the Arab countries would vastly outweigh the cost of antagonizing Israel.

While Kissinger was not afraid to put pressure on Israel to prevent a conflict. He did fear angering them in arranging a ceasefire, because the details of a ceasefire could possibly be detrimental for Israel and it could lose territory.<sup>116</sup> In the same conversation, Kissinger and Haig talk about the implications of sending supplies to Israel and that there would most likely come a time when the United States would have to in order to prevent an Arab victory. Even this early, an Arab victory is an undesirable option for Kissinger who believed that it would mean that it

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<sup>114</sup> October 6, 1973 4:25pm Teleconversation between Lord Earl of Cromer and Secretary Kissinger.

<sup>115</sup> October 6, 1973 4:45pm Teleconversation between Senator Mansfield and Kissinger.

<sup>116</sup> October 6, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between Secretary Kissinger and General Alexander Haig.

would be impossible to work out any lasting peace. Even further than that, Kissinger claims that a change based on that shift in regional dynamics would turn and appear to stem from the United States' own domestic issues— that the United States was too embroiled in its own internal problems to secure a desirable resolution in the Middle East.<sup>117</sup>

Even with this very negative view of the potential of Egypt and Syria gaining the upper hand, Kissinger tried to maintain communication with Egypt especially in an effort to treat it like an equal in maintaining peace and preventing a conflict. Kissinger has a number of calls with Egyptian foreign minister Mohammed Hassan El- Zayyat in the morning of October 6. These conversations are cordial even though they take place on the cusp of a war. In the first conversation of the morning, Kissinger language is even handed in describing how the United States would respond to an attack by either Egypt or Israel. Zayyat promises to relay Kissinger's message to the Egyptian government and Sadat. However, this message does not reach Sadat.

When Kissinger contacts Zayyat again at 8:15am, Zayyat states that he cannot give the message to Sadat as the president is in the operation room. A strange claim from Zayyat that a conflict has already begun that involves an Israeli naval incursion forces Kissinger to cease pursuing his message of restraint and return to contact the Israelis to find out if there is any truth to Zayyat's claim that Israel had sent naval units into the Gulf of Suez.

While the conversations between Kissinger and Egyptian officials remain cordial, Kissinger becomes convinced throughout the day that Egypt and Syria did indeed initiate the conflict<sup>118</sup> and this affects how Kissinger responds to the conflict. In light of the fact that Egypt

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<sup>117</sup> October 6, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between Secretary Kissinger and General Alexander Haig.

“I think if the Arabs win they will be impossible and there will be no negotiations. A change would be ascribed to our own domestic crisis.

<sup>118</sup> October 6, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between Dobrynin and Kissinger.

launched the attack and while at the same time believing that Israel will win the war, Kissinger's strategy to accommodate Egypt centers around protecting it from the consequence of losing after attacking and specifically losing territory to Israel during any ceasefire negotiations.<sup>119</sup> This seems to be the best way to appease Egypt without leaning too heavily to the side of the Arab countries thereby preventing any future long term peace agreements.

Kissinger also realizes that just as Egypt and Syria are now fully invested by launching this attack, Israel too is in an untenable forward position in which it has to make a change and move away from.<sup>120</sup> This comes in another discussion about supplying Israel with much needed weapons and aircraft. Earlier on, dialogue begins as such:

Haig: Interesting report. The Israelis are shocked by the confidence of the Arabs

Kissinger: Yeah, that's right.

Haig: This might make easier negotiations.

Kissinger: Depends on how we conduct ourselves. We must be on their side now so that they have something to lose afterwards. Therefore I think we have to give the equipment...

The forethought to the response to Israel and Egypt indicates that Kissinger fully knew the implications of not becoming involved in the conflict. However, after all of Kissinger's communication and negotiating, ultimately a consensus is tentatively reached on a UN resolution for a ceasefire. Kissinger assured the Soviet Union that the ceasefire would take place at a time when the Israeli, Egyptian, and Syrian armies were back to their original positions before the conflict. The kind of ceasefire for which he was advocating was one where both sides returned to

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<sup>119</sup> October 6, 1973 8:48pm Teleconversation between Foreign Minister Zayyat and Kissinger.

<sup>120</sup> October 6, 1973 8:48pm Teleconversation between Foreign Minister Zayyat and Kissinger.

"My profound conviction is that if we play this the hardway, it's the last time they're going to listen. If we kick them in the teeth they have nothing to lose. Later if we support them they would be willing to help with Jewish emigration or MFN or other stuff

their positions before the start of the war, thus negating any gains of either side and ending the conflict where it began. Kissinger also worked to appease the European community, especially Great Britain and France, that the ceasefire would not anger the Arab states to a point that the Arabs would restrict the flow of oil to Europe and the United States. In light of Kissinger's other bold moves in influencing international affairs (his reopening of relations with Communist China is the greatest example) this lack of forward movement seems to go against his usual practice. For instance, with opening diplomatic relations with China, the backroom deals that Kissinger brokered produced a landscape-shifting result. The United States connection to China would limit Soviet influence in Asia. However, in this case, the status quo seemed to be the only objective for Kissinger. In light of this, all of the influence and additional powers he had gained as a result of Nixon's virtual absence were apparently wasted. This would be true if this outcome contradicted Kissinger's overall agenda in foreign policy. This is where is policy of *realpolitik* is especially important. If *realpolitik*, valuing national interest over any other priority, including ethical or moral ones, was the modus operandi for Kissinger, then his response to Yom Kippur must be examined in light of this.

What was the United States' interest in the context of the Middle East? Kissinger lays this out clearly in two points in a meeting with Ambassador Huang Chen of China.<sup>121</sup> Ultimately, while the focus is on preventing Soviet influence in any region, the underlying goal is stability. In light of détente, the United States also had a thawing relationship with the Soviet Union. So while Kissinger did not want to see an expansion of Soviet influence anywhere, this goal did not

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<sup>121</sup> Saturday, October 6, 1973 9:10-9:30pm Memcon: Secretary Kissinger and Ambassador Huang Chen. "Our strategic objective is to prevent the Soviet Union from getting a dominant position in the Middle East. That is our basic objective. Israel is a secondary emotional problem having to do with domestic politics here. Our objective is always, when the Soviet Union appears, to demonstrate that whoever gets help from the Soviet Union cannot achieve his objective..."

have to be carried out as antagonistically as it had in the past. Equity and balance between the two superpowers was desired, even necessary for any ceasefire. This meant that there had to be equity and balance between Israel, Egypt and Syria as the client states of the United States and the Soviet Union. However, since both superpowers were working to serve their own interests by protecting the interests of the client states (they thought) were under their influence, both used different tactics in the United Nations and in communicating with their client states. In light of how Kissinger handled the first few hours and days of the Yom Kippur War clearly show that this balance mattered above anything. Kissinger was able to maintain that balance without fully alienating Egypt, Syria, or Israel. Though the process to return to this balance would bring the United States and the Soviet Union close to a full confrontation.

## **Conclusion**

If Henry Kissinger's major contribution to the Yom Kippur War was maintenance of the status quo, what is the relevance and importance drawn through this review of the primary source timeline of the Yom Kippur War? On one hand, this can be a small step in rehabilitating Kissinger's reputation from simply being a master manipulator and dealmaker. The surprise attack of Egypt and Syria did not allow for the usual backroom dealing in which Kissinger engaged which relied on extended time to slowly push for his agenda. However, this also solidifies Kissinger's idea of *realpolitik* as the governing principle of his career.

The expanded powers Kissinger was implicitly granted due to the power vacuum left by Nixon would have allowed him to drastically alter United States foreign policy, especially

towards Israel. Kissinger could have either unabashedly supported Israel with military supplies and political support in the United Nations. He also could have turned his back on Israel and showed a great deal more favor upon Egypt, beyond pushing for a ceasefire that saved the Egyptian Third Army from being surrounded and destroyed by Israel. But neither of these extremes fully suited the United States' interests in the long run. Long term peace was the only path that had any possibility of preventing the superpower that was the United States from becoming entangled in a Middle East conflict where both sides were antagonistic towards the US. In only two days, Kissinger had talked to the leaders of every major player in the Middle East conflict. In these conversations he was able to lay the foundation of stability (after failing to stop a war in the first place) that would only come to term once the United Nations Security Council had helped negotiate a ceasefire. Though Kissinger's intent was not to antagonize either side in the conflict, the fallout of the Yom Kippur War on the United States showed that there still was no way a superpower could win in the region. The Arab oil embargo that occurred shortly afterward was in retaliation for the United States airlift of supplies and aircraft to Israel before the ceasefire.

The United States' policies would not only affect its relationship with Egypt, Syria and the other Arab countries, they would also affect the balance between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East and around the globe. In stark and simplified terms, the Soviet Union had a great deal of influence and sway over Egypt and Syria as its client states while the United States was closely aligned with Israel. This is grossly simplified, but it is from this dichotomous playing field that the nuances in the relationships amongst all of these states grow.

The Soviet Union did not have the influence over Egypt that it did over Syria, and it did not have the influence over both countries that the United States perceived it to have.

For the United States' part, it did not unconditionally support Israel as the Soviet Union and many European countries perceived. Its attempts to appease Egypt, Syria and the other Arab states was intended to gain more allies in the Middle East besides Israel. This discrepancy between perception and reality when it came to how each country perceived the influence of the other would lead to miscommunication that would put the two superpowers on the brink of a head to head confrontation that had the potential to turn nuclear. Such a conflict would move out of a proxy war with both sides supplying and directing those countries under their influence to a direct military conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union.

These were the stakes facing Kissinger as he was influencing foreign policy for the United States. Kissinger's actions would first have an impact domestically. His continual attempts to keep Nixon out of a position to make decisions for the first days of the war would further distance Nixon from full executive power. It would also continue the practice of Nixon's subordinates withholding information from him and making decisions without his direct input. It was breaks in the chain of command such as these which further weakened Nixon's position and led to his resignation as his political capital dried up.

On the international stage, Kissinger's actions, intentional or not, pushed two superpowers to the brink of war. While Kissinger remained popular at home (his approval rating was one of the highest in the administration,) his decisions abroad would be scrutinized to almost the same degree as other foreign leaders like Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir. The United

States would eventually successfully broker a peace treaty between Egypt and Israel, but this would be after years and would lead to further angering of the other Arab states.

There was certainly only so far that Kissinger could push the US response without Nixon's support. The questionable authority he had in dictating the government's reaction to foreign nations and to domestic press would have ceased to exist if Nixon (or the press) had understood the full length Kissinger's unauthorized power had extended. Watergate was as crippling for Kissinger as it was for Nixon in some ways. The level of public distrust not only limited what guarantees he could make to foreign governments about the United States' involvement in the conflict, but he also would have had to spend a significant amount of time lobbying for support from the legislative branch to guard against negative public opinion. A number of Congresspeople and Senators would introduce resolutions of support of the President and the administration's position in the Middle East.

The status quo may have been all that was required at the time of the Yom Kippur War. Though the weeks of fighting produced no physical gains for either Egypt, Syria, or Israel, it did shift something in the dynamics of the region so that less than 5 years later, the Camp David Accords would become a reality. Egypt would be the first Arab country to make peace with Israel. While there is no evidence that Henry Kissinger foresaw this exact endgame, his strategic thinking may have at the very least kept in mind the possibility that doing little at present could allow for a greater shift in the future.

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October, 6 1973 10:35am Teleconversation between Alexander Haig and Henry Kissinger.

October 6, 1973 4:15pm Teleconversation between General Alexander Haig and Secretary Kissinger.

October 6, 1973 4:25pm Teleconversation between Lord Earl of Cromer and Secretary Kissinger.

October 6, 1973 4:45pm Teleconversation between Senator Mansfield and Kissinger.

October 6, 1973 6:05pm Teleconversation between Haig and Kissinger.

October 6, 1973 8:48pm Teleconversation between Foreign Minister Zayyat and Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 9:35am Teleconversation between Secretary and General Alexander Haig.

October 7, 1973 10:18am Teleconversation between The President and Secretary Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 4:20pm Teleconversation between Ron Ziegler (White House Press Secretary) and Secretary Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 4:25pm Teleconversation between British Ambassador Earl of Cromer and Secretary Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 4:40pm Teleconversation between Ambassador Dobrynin and Secretary Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 4:50pm Teleconversation between United National Secretary General Kurt Waldheim and Secretary Kissinger.

October 7, 1973 10:30pm Teleconversation between The President and Secretary Kissinger.

Saturday, October 6, 1973 9:10-9:30pm Memcon: Secretary Kissinger and Ambassador Huang Chen.