

CHAPTER 8

The 1973 Arab-Israeli War

On Saturday, October 6, 1973, Henry Kissinger was staying at the Waldorf Hotel in New York for the mostly ceremonial annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly. He had been confirmed two weeks before as secretary of state, a position he now held simultaneously with his national security adviser posting. At 6:15 a.m., he was awoken by Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary of state for near eastern and South Asian affairs, who burst into his hotel room, shouting that Egypt and Syria were about to go to war with Israel.¹ Kissinger had been assured by the Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, and State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research as well as the Israeli Government that Egypt and Syria were not preparing a massive attack on Israel despite mounting evidence that both had mobilized their militaries.² The DIA's October 3 morning summary concluded: "The movement of Syrian troops and Egyptian military readiness are considered to be coincidental and not designed to lead to major hostilities."³ After receiving Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir's assurances that Israel would not strike the mobilized Syrian and Egyptian forces preemptively, Kissinger phoned Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, and Egyptian Foreign Minister Mohammed Hassan El-Zayyat, telling them that the Israelis had no intention of attacking.⁴ Unable to stop a war the Egyptians and Syrians had planned in strict secrecy months in advance, Kissinger directed his National Security Council deputy, Brent Scowcroft, to assemble the Washington Special Actions Group for its view of the intelligence agencies.⁵

At 2:00 p.m. in Israel, 2,000 Egyptian guns commenced a 53-minute artillery barrage against Israeli positions on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, with 10,000 shells falling in the first minute. Egyptian soldiers, most of whom were unaware that war was coming until that

morning, loaded into rafts and crossed the canal. Eight thousand landed on the east bank and established bridgeheads, allowing ferry transport and pontoon bridges to bring armor and an invading force across. Meanwhile, Soviet-supplied Egyptian MiGs and Sukhois penetrated deep into Israeli airspace, bombing and strafing Israeli airfields at low altitude and inflicting significant damage while suffering few losses. In the north, Syrian forces began their own 50-minute artillery attack before elite Syrian commandos of the 82nd Parachute Regiment captured Mount Hermon, a 9,232-foot lightly defended but critical Israeli electronic warfare outpost in the Golan Heights known as the “Eyes of Israel.” Fourteen hundred Syrian tanks advanced with the objective of driving the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) off the Golan Heights.⁶

After the fighting broke out, Schlesinger’s initial reaction demonstrated how ill-informed he was about the situation on the ground in the Middle East. “If the Israelis didn’t start it,” he said at the WSAG meeting on the morning of October 6 in Washington, “it’s the first time in 20 years.” Like the others in the room, Schlesinger could not discern a strategic rationale for the Egyptians and Syrians to attack a more formidable military opponent, failing to anticipate that Sadat aimed to achieve his strategic goals through limited military action. Sadat understood that the Egyptian military could not conquer Israel or even retake the entire Sinai Peninsula. However, under the protection of the advanced, Soviet-supplied antiaircraft system that Egypt had been building on the canal’s western bank since the Six-Day War—and further strengthened during and after the War of Attrition—, Sadat intended to enhance Egyptian prestige by taking back territory along the Suez Canal’s eastern bank. The system was equipped with the Soviets’ most sophisticated weaponry and radar equipment. The mobile surface-to-air SA-6 missile system, which the Syrians also deployed en masse on their front, proved a particular problem to the Israeli Air Force (IAF). The SA-6 was fast and maneuverable enough to down the subsonic

Israeli A-4 Skyhawks and the faster F-4 Phantoms that composed the bulk of Israel's air-to-ground strike force. In 1973, even the United States lacked effective countermeasures to the SA-6.⁷

Unaware that Kissinger had asked the Israelis not to attack preemptively in the hours before the war began, Schlesinger wondered aloud whether Israeli claims of being attacked were "part of an elaborate cover story. On Yom Kippur, little Israel was set upon by Arab extremists." Pushing his theory further, he told the group that the Israeli Government might have concluded growing Arab pressure on Washington might threaten long-term Israeli interests. Israel might be engineering a crisis to gain U.S. support.⁸

Background

Despite gathering evidence of the Egyptian and Syrian mobilizations, the U.S. Intelligence Community had mostly failed to predict the attack on Israel. When asked by reporters in late October 1973 why, despite its vast funding, the American intelligence community "came up with a big fat zero," Schlesinger defended the American intelligence community: "Intelligence with regard to the intentions as opposed to capabilities is a very difficult task, and one cannot expect to have to bat 1,000 in that area.... We had indications of the movements of forces. In the estimating process, of course, one must make the decision or come to a conclusion whether or not the forces will be utilized." Schlesinger later added further explanation, "We had good intelligence that something was going on, intelligence that we disregarded, partly because we turned to the Israelis, who assured us that they wouldn't dare attack."⁹

In the days leading up to the war, the Israeli Government had been divided about whether the buildup of Egyptian armor, artillery, and infantry across the Suez Canal indicated an

imminent assault or was simply an exercise, as the Egyptians claimed. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir had been concerned about the possibility of an Egyptian and Syrian attack for months but had been reassured by Moshe Dayan, Israeli minister of defense, and Eli Zeira, director of the Israeli Military Intelligence Directorate (AMAN) that Syria, which had also mobilized against Israel, would not risk war without the more powerful Egypt, and Egypt was ill-prepared for conflict with Israel. Born in Kiev and raised in Milwaukee before moving to the British Mandate of Palestine in 1921, Meir rose rapidly to become known in 1973 as the iron-willed, grandmotherly figure that dominated Israeli politics. Although Meir, by her own admission, had little knowledge of military affairs, her defense minister, Dayan, was the iconic military hero of Israel's past military victories. With the repeated assurances by Zeira, Meir and Dayan believed they would receive clear intelligence at least two days in advance of an Arab attack, which would allow sufficient time to mobilize Israeli reserves. Israeli commandos had been installed behind Egyptian lines to be activated in an emergency. Despite mounting evidence that the Egyptians were preparing for war, the director of AMAN refused to activate the system, though he continued to make confident assertions that the Egyptians would not risk war until they had built an air force powerful enough to prevent the formidable Israeli Air Force from achieving quick battlefield air superiority.¹⁰

Given their past military successes over Arab armies, the Israelis had become increasingly convinced of their own invincibility and lulled into complacency until the last moment. With a far smaller population, army, air force, and geographic area than its Arab neighbors, Israel relied on its well-trained, well-equipped army and air force, the legacy of past military victories, the guarantee of American support, and the ambiguity over its strategic capabilities and doctrine to deter its potential foes. In 1973 the Jewish population of Israel was

just over 3 million compared to over 35.7 million Egyptians and 6.7 million Syrians. The Egyptians fielded 260,000 troops, 2,250 tanks, 800 artillery, and 620 aircraft while the Syrians had 120,000 troops, 1,270 tanks, 400 artillery, and 410 aircraft. By contrast, the Israelis maintained a small standing military that relied heavily on the mobilization of reserves to bring its total to 275,000 with 2,000 tanks, 350 artillery, and 488 aircraft. In a crisis, the Israelis could mobilize 200,000 reservists but could not field them for long lest their deployment wreck their economy in the short run. If war came, Israel's strategy was to deliver a quick, decisive blow to the enemy, relying on debilitating air strikes and rapid armored thrusts. The Israelis also relied heavily on their intelligence agencies, the Mossad and AMAN, viewed by American intelligence as providing the best intelligence in the Middle East, to provide the government advanced warning of an imminent Arab attack. Schlesinger later recalled of the Israelis, "They tended to be rather cocky prior to the war."¹¹

Israel's stunning victory in the Six-Day War of June 1967 had caused much of this cockiness, but also led to simmering tensions in the Middle East. Egypt, the most populous and powerful Arab nation, had been humiliated and lost the Sinai Peninsula to Israeli occupation. Syria lost the Golan Heights, and Jordan lost the West Bank. Israel had gained buffer zones but filled Arab nations with a desire to retake their land. In August and September 1967, at the Arab Summit Conference in Khartoum, Arab leaders pledged what became known as the "three noes." There would be no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no peace with Israel. Egyptian leader Gamal Nasser began sporadic artillery attacks and air raids on Israeli positions along the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, which escalated into a War of Attrition with the goal of challenging Israeli's hold on Sinai. When the Israelis struck back with devastating air attacks,

Nasser asked for help from the Soviets, who responded by pouring modern tanks, aircraft, artillery, surface-to-air missiles into Egypt.¹²

Although Nixon feared that an impasse in the Arab-Israeli conflict might damage American standing in the Arab world and undermine détente with the Soviets, internal administration divisions and preoccupation with Vietnam prevented a clear policy in his first term. Nixon viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict largely through the lens of the Cold War, but by the early 1970s Middle Eastern oil had become increasingly vital to the global economy. He had tasked his first secretary of state, William Rogers, with negotiating with the Soviets over an Arab-Israeli settlement. However, the Soviets, Egyptians, and Israelis all rebuffed Roger's efforts to achieve a peace treaty and Israel's withdrawal from most of the territory it had occupied after military victory in the Six-Day War. Confident in their military superiority, the Israelis refused to give up their buffer zones without the Arabs formally recognizing the state of Israel and new borders, and Arab leaders refused to begin any negotiations from a position of weakness.¹³

In summer 1970, Rogers presented a more limited initiative that addressed the Israeli-Egyptian war of attrition. This time, both sides accepted the plan, referred to as Rogers II, and implemented a cease-fire in August. However, complications observing the cease-fire as well as other pressing issues, such as Vietnam, rapprochement with China, and preparation for the much-anticipated U.S.-Soviet summit in May 1972, kept the Arab-Israeli conflict the president's top foreign policy agenda. After the January 1973 Paris Peace Accords ended America's war in Vietnam, Nixon turned again to the Middle East, where he sought to launch a fresh peace initiative during his second term. The president's sense of urgency is evident in handwritten notes he left for National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger on a memo in February 1973, where

he expressed his strong determination to pursue an Arab-Israeli settlement. “This thing is getting ready to blow,” he warned about the conflict. Secretary of Defense Elliot Richardson echoed this during congressional testimony in April 1973 when he argued that basic U.S. security interests rested in the preservation of regional peace and stability, a primary U.S. objective in the Middle East was “an end to the potentially explosive Arab-Israeli conflict.”¹⁴

Perhaps the main reason that neither the United States nor Israel predicted war was that they underestimated Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and did not understand his motives. Both had a low opinion of Egyptian military capability and of Sadat. When Sadat assumed power following Gamal Abdel Nasser’s sudden death from a heart attack in September 1970, he sought a closer relationship with Washington. Sadat wanted the return of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, which Israel had occupied since the 1967 war and hoped to work with the United States to achieve it. Washington, however, had repeatedly rebuffed Sadat’s overtures during secret U.S.-Egyptian talks. Sadat concluded that only a limited war with Israel could give Egypt the credibility to negotiate a withdrawal of Israeli forces from Sinai. He informed top Egyptian commanders on October 24, 1972, and plotted in secret with Syrian President Hafez al-Assad to launch separate attacks on a day favorable to both. To increase the likelihood that the Israelis would be surprised and slow to respond, Egyptian and Syrian military leaders planned their attack for Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish calendar when many Israelis were away on vacation and all television and radio broadcasting ceased.¹⁵

Neither the Americans nor the Israelis thought Sadat capable of using limited war to achieve his diplomatic aims. In April 1973, when the U.S. Government was seeking to determine whether Egypt might start a war with Israel in the near term, Schlesinger, then director of the CIA, wrote to Kissinger, “Given the weak Egyptian military capability against Israel, any

military move by Sadat would be an act of desperation.”¹⁶ At the White House in May 1973, Israeli foreign minister Abba Eban told Kissinger, “Sadat is not bright, but he can think a few moves ahead.” Kissinger responded, “That is not my impression. He shows no capacity for thinking moves ahead.”¹⁷

Sadat prepared for war without informing the Kremlin of his plans until just three days before the invasion, though the Soviets knew of the preparations. The Egyptian leader had evicted most Soviet military advisers the year before—a move the Israelis and Americans wrongly concluded made war less likely.¹⁸ In reality, Sadat had removed an impediment to war. Although the Soviets provided the Egyptians and Syrians with massive military aid to maintain their influence, the Kremlin intended the tanks, planes, and antiaircraft batteries to be primarily defensive, keeping the Arabs in the Soviet orbit without encouraging adventurism. They did not want a repeat of the 1967 Six-Day War, when the Israelis had badly defeated the Soviet-armed Arabs. Unlike in 1967 when the Israelis had used mostly French weapons, the Israelis were now heavily armed with American weapons.¹⁹ A defeat of Soviet allies and arms, by American allies and arms, would thus damage Soviet global prestige as well as its regional interests. In the unlikely event of an Israeli defeat, détente would suffer irreparable harm, and Arab nations would be less dependent on Soviet armaments for protection. Egyptians and Syrians had informed the Soviets of the imminent attack. With that foreknowledge the Soviets withdrew the families of Soviet personnel from Egypt, a move immediately noticed by American and Israeli intelligence. The Soviet withdrawal infuriated Sadat, who had informed Moscow in advance to receive assurances that they would receive Soviet military and diplomatic aid. The emergency withdrawal suggested, correctly, that the Kremlin had little confidence in Arab chances and threatened to reveal to the Israelis and Americans the imminence of war, which Sadat had

worked for months to disguise. The Soviets expected the Egyptians would lose, but they wanted to prevent a rout.²⁰

The Airlift

By the evening of the war's first day, Schlesinger had been briefed that the Egyptians and Syrians had started the war, but he, along with JCS Chairman Admiral Thomas Moorer and CIA Director William Colby, remained convinced the Israelis would quickly reverse the situation. After returning from New York, Kissinger reconvened the WSAG to consider an urgent request from the Israeli assistant military attaché in Washington for weapons and munitions for the IDF. He asked Colby and Admiral Moorer to estimate when the Israelis would push the Egyptians back. Both expected the Israelis would unleash their airpower on the Egyptians the next day with devastating effect and predicted a reverse within a couple of days at most. Moorer said confidently, "In the morning there will be a heavy Israeli air strike and the Egyptians have no place to hide."²¹ Schlesinger concurred, predicting the entire Egyptian operation would prove "an abortive effort.... Whether or not it is a debacle depends on how soon it can be terminated." The Israelis, he said, would first deal decisively with the Egyptians before turning against the Syrians in the north. With a quick Israeli victory inevitable, he found the Israelis request for a large supply of military assistance excessive. "Their only real shortage is in mortar rounds," he said. He recommended delaying resupply, warning that giving military assistance when it was unnecessary "blows any image we may have as an honest broker," inciting Arab anger against Washington and lessening the chances of a satisfactory cease-fire and postwar settlement. He cautioned that Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi might order attacks on Americans in Libya and nationalize oil production.²² The group's main concern was how the Soviets would respond when the Israelis gained the upper hand against their Arab clients, and the defense secretary

agreed to begin positioning military assets, such as moving a carrier task force in Athens to the eastern side of Crete, to signal Washington's resolve to counter any Soviet escalation.²³

After the meeting, Kissinger updated his former deputy, White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig, then with the president in Key Biscayne, Florida. "Defense wants to turn against the Israelis," he said. "Sounds like Clements," Haig responded.²⁴ Both suspected the deputy secretary's experience and continued interest in the oil business shaped his perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Clements had spent much of the 1960s and early 1970s expanding the overseas operations of SEDCO (Southeastern Drilling Company), an offshore oil drilling business he established in 1947. He owned over 1.6 million shares of company stock valued at around \$100 million at the time of the crisis. Expecting a quick Israeli victory regardless of American aid, Kissinger then thought a delay of resupply might complicate postwar negotiations, as Washington would have less leverage with the Israelis, but it would not impact the war's outcome.²⁵

When the Israeli Air Force counterattacked Egyptian airfields and ground forces the next day, however, the Israelis suffered catastrophic losses without inflicting significant damage on the enemy. Having learned from their shortcomings in the Six Day War, when the Egyptian Air Force had been largely destroyed on the ground in a massive preemptive attack, the Egyptians now protected their aircraft in concrete shelters, allowing most to survive the expected Israeli onslaught. The Israeli Air Force's attempt to devastate the Egyptian ground forces crossing the canal also proved ineffectual. Israeli pilots found themselves flying over a sophisticated Soviet-provided air defense system that inflicted critical losses.²⁶

Schlesinger and his colleagues also did not grasp how Soviet equipment would allow Syrian and Egyptian troops, better trained than in past wars, to undermine their assumptions of a

quick Israeli victory. Much of their misunderstanding came from U.S. intelligence and the Israelis themselves—both of which conveyed confidence the Israelis would soon push back the attackers.²⁷ Under their antiaircraft umbrella, Egyptian infantry waited for Israeli armor to counterattack. Rather than flee toward the canal, as Israeli generals anticipated, Egyptian infantry stood their ground, destroying or crippling Israeli tanks that had attacked without infantry support. The Egyptians made heavy use of the Soviet-supplied, wire-guided Sagger antitank missiles at long range and handheld RPG-7 rockets at close range. While the weapons' capabilities were not unique (militaries throughout the world possessed similar antitank armaments), the massive number deployed with the infantry was. When neither the IAF nor the IDF could deliver a quick knockout blow to the advancing numerically superior Arab armies, Meir and Dayan began to fear defeat.²⁸

On the second day of the war, neither Kissinger nor Schlesinger fully grasped the Israelis' plight, largely because the Israelis themselves did not want to admit weakness. Tel Aviv pressed Kissinger and the DoD for equipment on Sunday morning, October 7, proposing to pick up the supplies in the United States with civilian aircraft. The Israeli chargé in Washington, Mordechai Shalev, met with Kissinger on Meir's behalf, and suggested an Israeli jumbo jet, then on its way to New York, could pick up equipment and take it to Israel. After the meeting Eban called Kissinger to tell him that the situation in the Sinai "had not been particularly good" and that the Syrians had taken Mount Heron. Meanwhile, the Israeli defense attaché telephoned an urgent request to DoD for 200 Sidewinders, saying that Israel could pick them up wherever DoD indicated stocks were available.²⁹

That afternoon Kissinger phoned Schlesinger to ask whether the DoD could provide the equipment proposed by the Israelis. Kissinger said he had "been talking to the President all

morning on where we stand,” and he was inclined to provide the aid if the Israelis could pick it up. Schlesinger agreed that Washington could provide the aid without it leaking. But he suspected the Israelis of exaggerating their peril and purposefully delaying their counteroffensive, saying they “seem to be laying back.” He thought they were playing a “subtle game of attempting this time to show they really are vulnerable in view of the feeling around the world that they are just bullies.” Kissinger dismissed Schlesinger’s theory, saying, “I think they really were surprised this time.” Schlesinger demanded: “Then why haven’t they moved in vigorously in the South (against the Egyptians)?” Kissinger said he did not know.³⁰ After speaking with Schlesinger, Kissinger updated Nixon by phone. He told the president, “The Arabs were fighting much better than expected” and the Israelis had been caught unprepared on Yom Kippur. “Like Pearl Harbor, isn’t it?” Nixon asked. Kissinger agreed, but he predicted “by tomorrow, the Israelis will be reversing the tide.”³¹

Kissinger was frustrated that the Pentagon was not moving faster, though his demands for secrecy complicated the aid effort. He told Haig that afternoon, “We are getting frantic appeals for Sidewinders from the Israelis and the Defense Department is giving them the run-around.” Haig said that he could “tell them the President said to do it.” Kissinger vented his exasperation that the delays might lessen his leverage with the Israelis for a peace settlement. “The idea was to have the stuff delivered to an air base and have [the Israelis] come out in El Al and pick them up,” he said. “This is money in the bank. Whatever happens in negotiations, if the Arabs come out ahead, they [the Israelis] will be totally unmanageable.”³²

That evening, the WSAG assumed the Israelis would overcome their early setbacks and reverse their fortunes in the coming days. Schlesinger complained, “We’re completely dependent on the Israelis for information.” Such reliance confused policymakers in Washington, as the

Israelis initially understated their difficulties to avoid appearing weak. Kissinger wondered why the Egyptians were not calling for a cease-fire after taking territory on the canal's west bank, "Why aren't they clinching their gain?" "You're being logical," Schlesinger responded. "You can't ascribe that kind of logic to them."³³ Admiral Moorer and Schlesinger briefed a contingency plan for evacuating 1,800 Americans from Libya if Qaddafi decided to retaliate against them as a result of U.S. support for Israel. Schlesinger warned, "The plan calls for hosing down the Libyan Air Force, and that's a major step. We'd be shooting up an Arab country with all that would mean." They did not want to send in the 82nd Airborne, as Kissinger suggested, "unless we want to take over Libya," Schlesinger said. Clements warned that if U.S. forces acted against Libya, "there will be overrun into other Arab countries." Kissinger said that they would not, unless Qaddafi committed an "overwhelming provocation." In reality, Qaddafi had been furious at having not been consulted by Egypt and Syria before the war and did not provoke the Americans into direct intervention.³⁴

Despite being unenthusiastic about giving Israel supplies he thought unnecessary, the defense secretary found Kissinger's plan to rely on civilian aircraft extraordinarily foolhardy. He began to doubt El Al could pick up the supplies covertly or with anything near the effectiveness of a military airlift.³⁵ He warned Kissinger that afternoon that he could not "guarantee we can do it without exciting attention." He asked the secretary of state, "Are you willing to use US aircraft?" Kissinger said he was not. The effectiveness of the covert aid mattered far less to him than demonstrating to the Israelis a willingness to help early in the conflict, because it would give him leverage in achieving a suitable cease-fire and settlement. The Israelis, he thought, would easily win the conflict without the aid, and there was little sense to give Arab leaders no choice but to turn against the United States. Schlesinger thought Kissinger's covert scheme

would not work, and if Washington had decided to aid Israel, he thought, then the U.S. military should be permitted to do it effectively.³⁶

Despite his reservations, Schlesinger had agreed by the end of the war's second day, October 7, to move forward with El Al to quietly load military supplies at American military facilities. Schlesinger, Kissinger, and the Israeli ambassador to the United States Simcha Dinitz agreed that El Al planes would arrive at Naval Air Station Oceana, load, and then depart in darkness to avoid detection. At Schlesinger's insistence, identifying markings on the El Al planes would be painted over so they would not be recognized.³⁷ However, the first El Al aircraft landed later than expected on Tuesday evening, October 9. The small passenger plane doors made loading the large missile crates cumbersome and slowed the operation. Despite concealment efforts, the press spotted and identified the Israeli plane. Schlesinger later recalled, "Some enterprising CBS cameraman came to the fence and ran a videotape of this Israeli aircraft at a U.S. naval air station picking up material. It was hard for us, at that point, to maintain the fiction that we were not involved with the Israelis." Nevertheless, El Al planes continued to fly from the United States, carrying war supplies to Israel.³⁸

Recognizing that El Al alone, with a fleet of just eight passenger 707s and 747s, would be inadequate for resupply, Kissinger and Schlesinger asked the Israelis to try chartering U.S. civilian aircraft.³⁹ The Israelis, however, had difficulty doing so, because commercial airlines did not want to risk their pilots and aircraft in a war zone or bear the business repercussions of infuriating the Arabs.⁴⁰ At this stage of the war, Kissinger and Schlesinger remained convinced the Israelis would reverse the war, even without U.S. aid.⁴¹

When the WSAG met the following evening, October 8, Kissinger and Schlesinger concluded the Israelis were now on the verge of victory. The secretary of state had received

optimistic, and as would later become apparent, highly erroneous reports of Israeli battlefield success. Dinitz had informed him that the Israelis had shifted to the offensive and were now poised to push the Syrians and Egyptians back to, and even beyond, the 1967 cease-fire lines.⁴² Ecstatic but now concerned aid might backfire, Schlesinger said, “The Soviets are going to see \$2–3 billion worth of their equipment going up in smoke again. At the moment, they do not seem disposed to replace it. If they don’t, Israel has military supremacy. If we replace Israeli equipment losses, it might trigger the Soviets to replace equipment lost by the Egyptians and Syrians. If they are deterred from replacing that equipment it might be desirable for us to hold off replacing the Israeli equipment.”⁴³ The Israelis, he speculated, might cross the canal the next day and begin to “mop up the SAM’s” and advance toward Port Fuad.⁴⁴ As the meeting ended, Schlesinger said confidently, “I think it is going to turn into a duck-shooting contest.” Their assumptions of Israeli military success, however, were all wrong—the tide of the battle had not turned.⁴⁵

The situation on the battlefield had been far direr than Meir’s government had revealed to the Americans. On October 7, Dayan told Meir, “The canal line is lost,” and recommended the Israelis withdraw 19 miles from the canal, abandoning the line of fortifications, known as the Bar-Lev line. Egyptian and Syrian forces were pushing ever deeper as IDF and IAF casualties mounted. Meir and Dayan began to fear that though the Arabs might have begun the conflict with limited objectives, such as retaking some of the territory occupied by Israel after the 1967 war, their early battlefield successes might embolden them to seek to conquer all of Israel.⁴⁶ The collapse of the state, they feared, could be at hand. At a meeting in Meir’s office, Dayan told the prime minister that he thought the time had come for a demonstration of Israeli’s strategic power.

Meir, however, immediately rejected the idea. The United States, she believed, would not allow Israel's defeat.⁴⁷

To get more aid to the Israelis without embittering the Arab world, Kissinger wanted DoD to contract out arms deliveries with commercial airlines. Schlesinger thought such a scheme foolhardy and unworkable, while Kissinger suspected the defense secretary and his subordinates of foot dragging. Kissinger thought that Schlesinger was influenced by his deputy, William Clements, whose background in the oil business caused him to side with the Arabs. He told Haig by phone that Schlesinger was "intimidated" by his politically well-connected deputy. Kissinger and Haig both blamed Schlesinger and Clements for "sabotaging" the airlift. Schlesinger and Clements both denied doing so and blamed the delays and complications on Kissinger's demands that they not use U.S. military aircraft and keep the airlift covert.⁴⁸

The U.S. understanding of the war changed dramatically the next day. Kissinger, however, was surprised on Tuesday, October 9, to learn of the scale of Israeli equipment losses. At 1:45 a.m., Dinitz called to warn that Israel was now a "difficult situation," and he wished to meet in the morning along with the Israeli military attaché. At Meir's instance, he called Kissinger again at 3 a.m. The secretary of state agreed to meet with the Israeli ambassador at 8 a.m. At the meeting, Dinitz told Kissinger that the Israelis had lost 49 planes out of 250 and around 500 tanks out of 1800. Shocked, Kissinger said, "I don't understand how it could happen. Our strategy was to give you until Wednesday evening, by which time I thought the whole Egyptian army would be wrecked." Dinitz responded that the Israelis had underestimated Egyptian numbers and how massively they had been supplied by the Soviets with antitank and anti-air weaponry. They then spoke alone for five minutes without a note taker present. Some scholars have concluded that Kissinger must have received some form of warning that the

Israelis would use any means necessary to avoid defeat. Neither participant recollections nor the documentary record supports the theory that concerns about Israel's possible use of strategic weapons shaped American policymakers' decision to expedite the resupply of Israel. Kissinger himself recalled that Prime Minister Meir was prepared to fly secretly to Washington to meet with Nixon for one hour to request military supplies. Kissinger promptly rebuffed such a visit. He later rejected the notion that the Israelis had warned him that they might use unconventional weapons. In an interview with Meir's biographer, Kissinger said the theory was "Nonsense. Absolute nonsense.... Had they raised that issue, they would have totally ruined themselves. We would have been forced by law to act on what we had not formally acknowledged and what they had not formally acknowledged." He went on to say that such a threat "would have changed the entire equation here to the disadvantage of Israel.... [I]t was never said; it was never hinted at. It didn't happen."⁴⁹

Although Schlesinger might not have had specific communication that the Israelis had considered the unconventional option, he was aware of their capabilities. In a later interview with Meir's biographer, Schlesinger said, "As far as I know, Dayan did something. But he would have been remiss if he hadn't; it was a perfectly natural military precaution. When you're attacked, you put your forces on alert." He added, "There was some evidence that the Russians were beginning to move nuclear weapons into Egypt." Israel sent an implicit warning. He said, "That's very different from saying to the United States, 'if you don't help us, we'll initiate. That would have been a big mistake.'"⁵⁰

At 9:40 a.m., October 9, Kissinger assembled the WSAG for a principals-only meeting, where he explained how drastically his understanding of the situation had changed from what he learned from the Israeli ambassador overnight and earlier that morning. He also told the group,

“Golda wants to come over here for one hour and return. That is unusual for just 100 tanks.”

Kissinger still thought the best solution would be for the Israelis to win by themselves, but they were “scared that if their losses get out, all the Arabs would jump in.” Schlesinger doubted that the Israeli losses were as grievous as they claimed, and while he was open to providing the Israelis with some equipment, he was concerned about sending tanks and aircraft. “If we seem to turn around a battle that the Arabs are winning,” he warned, “we are in trouble. We should be willing to defend the Israeli borders ourselves, but not get involved now.” He agreed that they wanted “to see Syria and Egypt get their knuckles rapped,” but he thought they should accept an Egyptian military presence on the canal’s eastern bank. “We don’t like it,” he said, “but is that enough to risk our new stature with the Arabs?” Schlesinger thought Israel’s military needs had not changed drastically, other than the ammunition shortages. Admiral Moorer wondered whether the Israelis were merely reacting to fears of a war of attrition, as Arab countries poured more equipment into the warzone. Schlesinger suspected, “They are crying wolf maybe because they want to lock us in.” Kissinger said while that might be plausible, he did not think the Israelis would switch from euphoria to despair in a day unless they really were concerned. He thought the best solution would be for the Israelis to push the Egyptians back across the canal but not humiliate them. “We don’t want an Arab debacle. Israel has suffered a strategic defeat no matter what happens.” He added that “a costly victory without a disaster is the best.”⁵¹

The news further darkened the next day, October 10, when Washington learned of a massive Soviet airlift of equipment to Egypt and Syria. Admiral Thomas Moorer informed Schlesinger that the Soviets were sending 15 flights of AN-12s, each of which could carry 22 tons of supplies, to Syria and 20 AN-22s, each of which could carry around 40 tons, to Cairo. Schlesinger responded, “Okay, you are watching the collapse of U.S. foreign policy, Tom.”

Moorer agreed, saying, “It’s just disastrous and we are getting painted right into a corner.”⁵² In his diary, Moorer wrote about his despair at the position the United States found itself in, increasingly locked in as Israel’s sponsor while the Arab world increasingly viewed the Soviet Union as theirs. “It is at best a disaster and at worst a catastrophe,” he wrote. Moorer had instructed that no one on the Joint Staff talk to the Israelis, aside from intelligence people, who could continue their contacts except on materiel policy. ISA would be their main point of contact at the Pentagon.⁵³

Later that afternoon, Kissinger met with Nixon, who said that they should give the Israelis consumables (ammunition, missiles, and electronic equipment). “But the quid pro quo is to tell Golda to call off the Jewish community in this country. If it gets hairy, we may need to do more.” “But not today,” Kissinger said. “The Israelis must not be allowed to lose,” Nixon said. “How about sneaking in planes and tanks?” he asked. Kissinger said that they should wait until Thursday. The president said that they should identify planes and tanks in Europe that they could move to Israel in an emergency. They wanted to stick with Israel now, Kissinger told the president, “so they won’t turn on you during the diplomatic phase.” The Israelis, he said, “have lost their invincibility and the Arabs have lost their sense of inferiority.”⁵⁴

After speaking with Nixon, Kissinger informed Dinitz that the president had decided the Israelis would receive all the consumables they had requested, except for laser bombs, and Washington would replace their aircraft and tank losses. They would be receiving America’s newest tanks, the M-60s as replacements, and they would get 5 F4s for immediate delivery, with the rest to be worked out in a schedule. The Pentagon, he said, should be more amenable to working with them.⁵⁵

On the same day, Washington also discovered that the Soviets had placed seven airborne divisions on alert. Realizing that their assumptions about the war had been wrong and the Israelis were becoming desperate, members of the administration became directly involved in the effort to urge U.S. commercial airlines to transport supplies to Israel under charter agreements. Secretary of Transportation Claude S. Brinegar, Schlesinger, and others sounded out U.S. airline executives, who expressed deep concern about the political and safety risks of transporting the military equipment.⁵⁶

Schlesinger proved correct about the unfeasibility of chartering civilian aircraft when commercial airlines refused to risk their aircraft and pilots by flying military supplies into a war zone. He recalled later that when the administration approached Pan Am or TWA, for example, “Their underlying attitude was: why should they expose their own people when the government of the United States did not want to show its hand and therefore would not announce a national emergency?” Concerned about raising the public profile of assistance to Israel, Kissinger prevented the Pentagon from activating the Civil Reserve Air Fleet program, which would have required airlines to make charters available for defense purposes. Consequently, all the major carriers politely but firmly refused to cooperate, Schlesinger recalled. Schlesinger decided on October 11 to prepare for an airlift using U.S. aircraft. He ordered Military Airlift Command to prepare to use three C-5As to fly war materiel to the Portuguese Azores, small volcanic islands 800 miles west of the metropole, where it could be picked up by El Al aircraft.⁵⁷

Schlesinger and Clements met with Israeli ambassador Simcha Dinitz, on Friday, October 12, at 6 p.m. The defense secretary had spoken with Kissinger by phone just before, promising, “We will go ahead with a package which consists of 30 Skyhawks A-4s, 16 Phantoms, 125 tanks, including 65 M60s and a whole range of other things, 3 Hawk fighters and so on.”

Kissinger asked that Schlesinger tell the Israeli ambassador that the White House had ordered the package.⁵⁸ Schlesinger agreed.⁵⁹ When the defense secretary met with Dinitz, however, he conveyed the aid package differently. He told Dinitz that the United States would supply the Israelis with F-4 Phantoms, but only at the rate of two per day, which would not replace Israel's daily losses. He also warned that the Pentagon was "experiencing great difficulty in mobilizing charter planes" to supply Israel with munitions. Constrained by Kissinger's insistence on using charters rather than military aircraft, the defense secretary could not tell the Israeli ambassador that he believed only an airlift operation by the Military Airlift Command (MAC) would succeed at providing the Israelis with the supplies they needed. Enraged, Dinitz condemned Schlesinger's remarks and left to tell Kissinger.⁶⁰

Dinitz met with Kissinger late that evening to complain about his treatment by Schlesinger. "It's a disgrace," the secretary of state said. Turning to his NSC deputy, Brent Scowcroft, Kissinger asked whether the Defense Department was sabotaging the president's policy. "I think there was no enthusiasm until yesterday," Scowcroft said. Dinitz said he felt he had misled his government by cabling that Nixon had decided on an immediate resupply. "If I had any dignity," he said in disgust, "I would leave here." Kissinger said that he had Haig and Scowcroft call Schlesinger every night to pressure him to move. "Since Tuesday [October 9] morning," he said, "I had no reason to think it wasn't moving. Every day I go to bed knowing twenty planes are authorized, and the next morning I find they are not moving." Dinitz said he did not blame Kissinger but warned the Israelis had based their military operations on the promise of rapid resupply from the United States. If the munitions did not arrive, the Israelis advance would stall. Dinitz, as Schlesinger suspected, was exaggerating Israeli ammunition

shortages to get Kissinger to move on the resupply, though the Israelis really were in need of more combat planes.⁶¹

Kissinger then picked up the phone. “Get me Schlesinger,” he said to an assistant theatrically. With the Israeli ambassador listening, Kissinger demanded to know when American supplies would be delivered. “They based their strategy,” he said, “on the assumption that they would get the ammunition replaced this week, as the President had promised them on Tuesday.” Without the resupply, they could not continue their counteroffensive, which was critical to U.S. strategy for a favorable cease-fire. He suspected Clements of “sabotaging this every step of the way,” saying he might even prefer to send the supplies to the Egyptians and Syrians. The defense secretary responded that Clements would do what the president ordered. “Yeah,” Kissinger responded, “but the way he interprets what the President wants is not necessarily what the President wants.” He found “it hard to believe that every company would refuse to charter unless somebody sort of told them in a half-ass way.” He thought Robert Six, the CEO of Continental Airlines, would agree to help. “Now I know goddamn well he is a great patriot,” Kissinger told the defense secretary, “and if somebody told him we needed airplanes, I just can’t believe he wouldn’t do it, unless you winked at him and said but if it doesn’t happen until next week my heart won’t be broken.” He said that while Meir’s warnings to Nixon about the direness of the situation might be exaggerated, “it is a hell of a responsibility to take.” Schlesinger thought that if they really “turned the screws on these guys, I suspect that we can collect a few aircraft tomorrow.” Schlesinger recommended that if they really wanted to do something fast, they should let U.S. aircraft fly all the way to Israel. Kissinger, however, was hesitant to do that without first talking with the president. Schlesinger also recommended that they load up 10–12 C-130s that they planned to give to the Israelis with war materiel and have them fly all the way

to Israel. Kissinger liked the idea but said he would have to call Dinitz, who was still sitting in Kissinger's office and listening to the conversation.⁶²

Still angry, Kissinger warned, "If a catastrophe happens there is going to be some accounting." The defense secretary was also frustrated: "Well, Henry," it would have been desirable for [the Israelis] to tell us that they were going to run out of ammunition." The secretary of state replied that Israel had been told for days that supplies would be coming but had not received the promised aid. "This whole diplomacy," Kissinger warned, "is going to come apart if they look impotent. It can only work if they look as if they were gaining, not if they look as if they were losing." Aware that Kissinger was seeking to blame Schlesinger for prior delays, Schlesinger added, "Until the night before last it was assumed these guys were going to be able to haul them themselves along with the aircraft that they would round up. It wasn't until yesterday that we—the night before—that we started this search for aircraft on their behalf." Knowing that Schlesinger was right but not wanting to admit it in front of the Israeli ambassador, who already suspected the secretary of state of not being completely honest with him, Kissinger said, "We can reconstruct what went wrong later, but now can we see what we can get going there?" Schlesinger suggested American pilots fly C-130s, already slated to be given to the Israelis, loaded with ammunition to Israel. Kissinger liked the idea and suggested coordinating with the Israeli military attaché.⁶³

With Dinitz still in the room, Kissinger then called Haig: "Al, you know we are now having massive problems with the Israelis because the sons of bitches in Defense have been stalling for four days and not one airplane has moved." He told Haig to call Clements and Schlesinger, to "throw the fear of God" into them. He said that they needed to get charters: "I do not believe for one minute that they can't get charters if they tell these charter companies that the

next time they need a rate change they won't get it." Dinitz interrupted, saying charters would not arrive soon enough: "The only thing now is to get American planes in, without markings." The Israelis, he added, needed 40 additional planes in the next two to three days and apologized for any misunderstanding of the situation. "Our basic misunderstanding," Kissinger said, "was that you were going to win."⁶⁴

Kissinger called Haig again at 12:45 a.m. "He has no excuse," Kissinger said of Schlesinger's apparent inability to deliver aid to the Israelis through charters. "I explained the strategy to him in great detail. But he's afraid of Clements." Haig and Kissinger agreed that it would be unwise to use Military Airlift Command to supply the Israelis. "That would be a disaster," Kissinger thundered. "How can he fuck everything up for [a] week[?] He can't now recoup it the day the diplomacy is supposed to start."⁶⁵ Kissinger was furious that the defense secretary, who had opposed aid to the Israelis before only half-heartedly supporting a covert aid program, now advocated an overt U.S. airlift that might ruin his diplomatic strategy. "We both have been in this business a long time," Kissinger said. "Do you believe that the Defense Department couldn't get civilian charters—that Clements could get on the phone and say listen, you sons-of-bitches, if you ever want to get Defense Dept. business again, you better charter." If the deliveries had been sent earlier this week, Kissinger said, "the Israelis would be rolling now, then we could stop them while they are rolling." Instead, because of the Pentagon's suspected "sabotage," the Israelis would hoard the materiel, delay negotiations, and then strike just as Washington would be seeking a diplomatic solution to the war.⁶⁶

After getting off the phone with Haig, Kissinger spoke with Schlesinger again at 12:49 a.m. Enraged with the Defense Department for not getting ammunition to the Israelis through charters, Kissinger said, "I just think there was massive sabotage." "It's just not true, Henry," the

defense secretary responded. Kissinger said they must do everything besides flying in American planes, as that would interfere with their diplomatic efforts with the Soviets. The Israelis, Schlesinger said, had not explained their needs to their defense counterparts. He doubted that they were short of ammo: “It is impossible, that they didn’t know what their supply was—and suddenly they’ve run out of it.” He asked Kissinger whether he believed they had really run out of the ammunition. “How the hell should I know?” Kissinger thundered. What was important, he stressed, was that they were halting their counteroffensive at the precise moment when he needed them to strike to accomplish support his diplomatic strategy. Incredulous that the Israeli counterattacks were faltering, Schlesinger said, “That’s incredible timing on their part.” “Look,” Kissinger said, “they fucked it up.” The defense secretary said he would investigate their supply situation, but the Pentagon had estimated that the IDF had enough supplies to last 15 days. Kissinger thought such estimates had been based on the Six Day War, but the Israelis were now expending as much ammunition in a single day as they did in the entire 1967 conflict. They did not fully explain their plight until the situation became desperate, Kissinger surmised, because they had themselves not come to terms with their own failings. Schlesinger’s suspicions were justified. The Israelis did not yet experience grave ammunition shortages, and they had not halted their offensive. On the morning (Washington time) of October 12, they were within artillery range of Damascus.⁶⁷

At the Pentagon at around 1:15 a.m., Schlesinger received a briefing on the war and the Soviet resupply efforts. He decided, according to a classified post-mortem report by William M. Beecher, deputy assistant secretary of defense for public affairs, “it was necessary to abandon the pretense of non-involvement implicit in the ‘low profile’ approach and he directed a nonstop airlift from the U.S. directly to Israel.” Schlesinger then invited General Mordechai Gur to meet

with him in the Pentagon in the early hours of October 13 and proposed new arrangements. The United States would fly military aircraft into Israel, but the aircraft would land at night. The Israelis would need to unload the aircraft in two to three hours so that they could depart Israel before dawn to keep American support from becoming broadcast around the world. General Gur agreed, and the secretary instructed three C-5As to be loaded with ammunition immediately. General Casey called the MAC at 3:10 a.m. and relayed the new orders.⁶⁸

Kissinger, however, had not yet abandoned the low-profile approach to resupply, and began the next morning's WSAG meeting intent on frightening Schlesinger and Clements into pushing forward with it. He began menacingly: "The President said if there are any further delays in carrying out orders, we want the resignation of the officials involved." He said that they had promised to provide the Israelis with the ammunition they needed. "That's wrong," Schlesinger said. "We said that they'd get the consumables that were available and they'd attempt to get charters." Kissinger responded that he felt the bureaucracy had been dragging its feet because it opposed supporting the Israelis, and because of that, aid would be delivered after the Israelis had already turned the war around. "What did we screw up?" Schlesinger asked. Kissinger said that they should have forced the charters. "I agree," Clements said, "but we didn't know it was urgent." Schlesinger added that Defense had not "been asked to get in until Thursday night. The Israelis told us they had no shortages." Clements asked what they could do now to help. Kissinger said they should fly in U.S. commercial and charter planes. He wanted the Arabs "to think the Israelis may go wild when they get equipment" explained his overall strategy: "Our problem is to get the war over in a way the Arabs have to come to us, and then turn on the Israelis. If Israel feels we have let them down and the Arabs think they have done it themselves, we are sunk."

Schlesinger and Clements then both advocated abandoning the low-profile approach entirely. Clements proposed to go in “with a massive U.S. airlift. “Kissinger disagreed saying “we will lose all our Arab friends.” Supporting his deputy, Schlesinger asked, “How much different is a US airlift from commandeered charter flights?” Kissinger said he did not want to ruin his diplomatic strategy now by denying the Arabs the option of ignoring U.S. support for Israel, which they would not have if the U.S. began a massive airlift. Kissinger directed the use of the C-5s to transport the military supplies into Israel until they could get charters to provide supplies. He calculated that with their large load capacity, the C-5s could provide the Israelis with needed aid while still hoping to lessen U.S. exposure, as fewer flights would be needed. Fourteen F-4s would also land in Israel by Monday, October 15. The meeting thus marked an important turning point. The principals had agreed to modify, but not abandon completely, the low-profile approach to aid Israel.⁶⁹

Schlesinger and Clements both claimed later that Kissinger later unfairly blamed them for the early resupply delays. Schlesinger recalled that only Nixon’s determination to prevent Soviet-supported Arab states from defeating Israel overcame Kissinger’s concerns about exposing the U.S. hand. The Arab states were using Soviet arms, and if the Israelis lost, it would be a defeat for the United States, according to Schlesinger. Clements also thought the airlift decision ultimately reflected the president’s will at a dire moment in the war: “There was no decision really made until it got very critical and when the president said, ‘do it.’ Henry [Kissinger] had no alternative but to do it.”⁷⁰

Nixon himself in his memoir stated that he had become increasingly concerned with the scale of the Soviet airlift and decided a U.S. military airlift was necessary, but faulted Schlesinger and not Kissinger. He wrote that he directed Kissinger to convey his decision to the

Defense Department but was “shocked when [Kissinger] told me that the Pentagon’s proposal was that we send only three C-5A military transport planes to Israel,” arguing that the small airlift would “cause fewer difficulties with the Egyptians, Syrians, and Soviets. My reaction was that we would take just as much heat for sending three planes as for sending thirty.” Nixon wrote that he called Schlesinger, telling him he understood his caution but would take responsibility if the action alienated the Arabs or for any oil embargo. The president remembered also telling the defense secretary, “Whichever way we have to do it, get them in the air *now*.” Nixon later became furious after discovering that even after Schlesinger had received a direct order, the Pentagon had delayed, deliberating over which planes to use for the airlift. He told Kissinger, “Goddamn it, use every one we have. Tell them to send everything that can fly.”⁷¹

Precisely what Nixon said to Schlesinger is impossible to verify conclusively, as no transcripts have been found of the conversation, but the reluctance to use additional U.S. aircraft was something the president attributed to Schlesinger but more accurately reflected Kissinger’s approach. According to his diary, Nixon spoke by phone with Schlesinger for one minute on October 12 at 3:25 p.m. and not at all on October 13. William Beecher, wrote in a post-mortem that Nixon called Schlesinger on October 12 to say “he had heard Israel was having to curb certain planned counteroffensives for lack of ammunition and he directed that an airlift get underway, at least to Lajes.” Although the defense secretary had been skeptical about whether the Israelis’ situation had become as desperate as they claimed, it had been Kissinger, and not Schlesinger, who had been reluctant to use U.S. aircraft and had sought to continue the low-profile approach long after Schlesinger had deemed it unfeasible. In the same memo, Beecher indicated that even after the president’s call, the MAC did not yet have permission from the Portuguese to land at Lajes.⁷²

The Defense Department was well prepared to begin the airlift when the order came. Air Force Chief of Staff General George Brown and the commander of Military Airlift Command, General Paul Carlton, had anticipated a presidential order for MAC to aid Israel on October 7 and, without direction from OSD, began planning airlift contingencies and prepositioning missiles and munitions at pickup points throughout the United States.⁷³ By October 10, the generals had concluded that civilian aircraft could not hope to compete with the massive Soviet airlift and MAC aircraft might soon be called upon to move war materiel for the Israelis.⁷⁴

The next day Schlesinger had become convinced that the airlines would not agree to charters and directed MAC to prepare three C-5As to fly war materiel to Lajes Air Base in the Azores. The cargo would then be picked up by El Al and flown to Israel. The Portuguese Azores were the only practical option, as America's other NATO allies, fearful of a potential Arab oil embargo, refused to allow the United States to use their territory, or even their airspace, to support Israel, infuriating Kissinger and Schlesinger. Although empty C-5s could easily fly nonstop to Israel from the United States, they would need refueling when fully loaded and headwinds would make the return flight risky. On the night of October 12, Schlesinger was briefed on the "logistical nightmare" MAC would face in seeking to transfer war materiel to the Israelis in the Azores. For El Al aircraft to receive the war materiel, they would have to land at the Azores' civilian airport, located on a different island from the military airbase. The operation would require water ferrying between the islands as well as ground transport on each island. Israel and the United States would both need landing permission. The cumbersome logistics made the El Al shuttle from Lajes to Israel unviable. Schlesinger then understood that only by flying U.S. aircraft all the way to Israel could Washington provide the Israelis with supplies quickly.⁷⁵

On Saturday, October 13, following the morning WSAG meeting when the decision was made to modify the low-profile approach and fly U.S. planes to Israel, U.S. aircraft began to pile up at Dover Air Force Base—15 C-141s and 3C-5As laden with war materiel—waiting for permission from the Portuguese to land. Schlesinger, who wanted the C-5As to fly directly to Israel, was furious over the delay. He found out that the Air Force lacked enough trained crews to refuel the C-5As in flight. He then ordered MAC to stop in Lajes for fuel after receiving landing permission from Portugal. To get Prime Minister Marcelo Caetano's assent, the Nixon administration vowed to push for the removal of an amendment to a pending foreign aid bill that would restrict exports to Portugal that might assist in its wars to preserve its African colonies, finally clearing the way for the U.S. airlift's first flights.⁷⁶ At 4:15 p.m., Kissinger informed Schlesinger by phone that the Portuguese had agreed to allow Washington to use Lajes for the airlift, with both U.S. planes and charters. "Jesus Christ," Schlesinger exclaimed, "that's a surprise."⁷⁷ Crosswinds in the Azores delayed the operation until 7:43 p.m. when a C-141 departed Dover for Lajes, followed several hours later by a C-5A. The winds wrecked any hope of supplying the Israelis covertly. Instead of arriving late Saturday night in Israel, "the planes started dropping out of the skies on Sunday morning," Schlesinger later recalled. "So, the whole population of Tel Aviv turns out by the gates cheering that the Americans have finally arrived."⁷⁸

Schlesinger exerted tight control over the airlift, code-named Operation Nickle Grass, insisting on a detailed briefing on the status of the operation every morning and personally approving most requests for equipment. His involvement ensured that the military gave the airlift high priority. In one instance, the Joint Staff arranged police to escort tanks from Alabama to an airfield in Georgia for shipment to Israel. In another, the Navy prepositioned several aircraft carriers so that A-4 Skyhawks could be flown from the Philippines to Israel in a 16-hour flight

covering over 16,000 miles, two-thirds of the way around the world. The aircraft took off from the Philippines and refueled on an aircraft carrier before flying to Hawaii, the West Coast, and Norfolk, then refueling on another carrier off the Azores and again on a carrier in the Mediterranean before reaching Israel.⁷⁹

The airlift continued for 33 days, with 566 missions transporting 22,395 tons of weapons and ammunition. On October 14, Kissinger told Nixon that he hoped to put an end to the military airlift the next day and have commercial charters replace it. Nixon, however, wanted to press forward with the major airlift. The president told Kissinger, “It’s got to be the works. What I meant is—we are going to get blamed just as much for three planes as for 300.... Henry, I have no patience with [the] view that we send in a couple of planes.” At this point, Kissinger had to support the continuation of the military airlift. In response to American support for Israel, Arab oil ministers from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, met in Kuwait on October 17 and decided to raise oil prices and cut oil production by 5 percent for every month until “the total evacuation of Israeli forces from all Arab territory.” As American aid continued to pour into Israel with Nixon on October 19 sending a \$2.2 billion emergency supplemental request for military supplies, the Arab states imposed complete embargos on the United States. Oil prices over the following six months resulted in long gasoline lines, inflation, and recession.⁸⁰

In the OSD, there was serious concern about basing military assistance on a quantitative regional arms competition with the Soviets. For Nixon and Kissinger, better support for its ally than what the Soviets could give their Arab partners became critical. Kissinger instructed the Pentagon to launch an airlift that exceeded the Soviet airlift by 25 percent. Deputy ASD for Near Eastern, African, and South Asian Affairs James H. Noyes argued that Washington should focus

on Israel's actual requirements rather than pound-for-pound or aircraft-for-aircraft comparisons. Likewise, when it came to the White House's \$2.2 billion supplemental request, Noyes warned that handing them a blank check would weaken U.S. leverage when negotiating a political settlement. A smaller assistance package, such as \$700 million, he argued, would give Washington greater diplomatic flexibility while still easing Israel's burden. Schlesinger had become concerned that the resupply now threatened to deplete American stockpiles, but Kissinger wanted "a bulge now," to give the United States maximum leverage with the Israelis.⁸¹

Throughout the period in which Kissinger sought to airlift supplies to Israel covertly, he seemed to view the Pentagon both as a convenient scapegoat for the slow resupply and as a precise instrument that could be quickly calibrated to support his diplomatic strategy rather than the blunt, often unwieldy instrument of war that it was. Perhaps his experience with Vietnam encouraged this view, as he and Nixon were able to call for sudden bombing raids or ground attacks to support their diplomatic strategy. In Vietnam, however, the U.S. military was already deeply engaged and had the instruments readily available. With the Arab-Israeli War in 1973, the U.S. military was ill-equipped to support the subtle diplomatic approach Kissinger wanted. Even had Schlesinger and Clements fully embraced the idea of a covert airlift, and the evidence suggests they did not, it was fanciful in the extreme to expect that the Pentagon could brow-beat airline executives into conducting a rapid American airlift to Israel and expect that the entire enterprise could keep up with the Soviet airlift without U.S. involvement leaking. Nixon, however, displayed a far greater grasp of the problem. He gave Schlesinger a clear order for the Pentagon to do what it did best: act as the blunt projector of American power.

The Alert

Meanwhile, with the airlift resupplying their materiel losses, the Israelis gained the offensive and threatened to encircle Egypt's elite Third Army, a force of 20,000 soldiers and 200 tanks, along the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, threatening to deliver a crushing defeat to Cairo. At this point, the Soviets invited Kissinger to Moscow on the weekend of October 20 to 21, where the two superpowers reached a cease-fire agreement, resulting in UN Resolution 338. The UN Security Council passed the resolution on the morning of October 22, calling for a cease-fire at the current positions of the belligerents' armies for 6:52 that evening.⁸²

The following day Schlesinger provided his staff with an optimistic assessment of the conflict's outcome. The war had demonstrated the Soviets could not protect their clients, and Arab states must respect Washington's ability to support their ally. The "major lesson to Arabs," Schlesinger said, "was only [the] U.S. can really help you ... [while] Soviet support resulted in getting your ass kicked."⁸³ Schlesinger's triumphalism proved premature. Both sides largely ignored the cease-fire and blamed the other for violating it.

The defense secretary did not know that Kissinger had helped undermine the cease-fire he had negotiated. The secretary of state had given the Israelis permission for some "slippage" with the cease-fire deadline.⁸⁴ After agreeing in Moscow to support a new UN cease-fire resolution, he attempted to inform the Israelis directly to give them time for final military operations to achieve the best possible postwar military dispositions. To his fury, however, the messages sent from his plane failed to reach the Israelis for four hours as he napped. The Soviets claimed an electrical storm disrupted all radio traffic, but Kissinger suspected jamming. In frustration, he sent a cable through the State Department to Scowcroft, asking him to call Dinitz and explain that because of the communication breakdown:

We would understand if [the] Israelis felt they required some additional time for military dispositions before [the] cease-fire takes effect. We still want to shoot for [the] target of 12-hours' time span between [the] security council decision and [the] beginning of [the] ceasefire but could accept Israel's taking slightly longer for reasons stated above. This communication for obvious reasons requires total discretion.⁸⁵

At Meir's request, Kissinger stopped in Tel Aviv, where he further confirmed that the Israelis could continue fighting beyond the cease-fire. "You won't get violent protests from Washington if something happens during the night, while I'm flying," he said. "If they don't stop, we won't," Meir responded. Kissinger added, "Even if they do."⁸⁶

While Kissinger was away in Moscow, Nixon's domestic political situation deteriorated. Over the summer Attorney General Elliot Richardson had become increasingly uncomfortable with White House pressure to curtail Watergate special prosecutor Archibald Cox's work. In mid-October he refused Nixon's direction to fire Cox, who had disobeyed the president's orders to drop his demands for the White House recording system's tapes. In the Oval Office on Saturday, October 20, Nixon tried to persuade Richardson not to resign, arguing the nation could not afford a president appearing weak during a crisis. "Elliot," Nixon said, "[Leonid] Brezhnev would not understand if I didn't fire Cox after this." The president was sorry that Richardson was acting to preserve Cox's independence "and not in the larger public interest." Infuriated, Richardson responded, "Maybe your perception and my perception of the public interest differ."⁸⁷ After the attorney general and deputy attorney general both refused to fire Cox, Solicitor General Robert H. Bork, the third ranking official at the Justice Department, agreed to do it. Rather than end the investigation, what the press quickly titled the Saturday Night Massacre unleashed a political firestorm. NBC Nightly News anchor John Chancellor told viewers, "The country tonight is in the midst of what may be the most serious constitutional crisis in its history."⁸⁸ In the days that followed Nixon was reportedly drinking heavily and could

be heard playing the piano alone in the White House. On Tuesday, Democratic House Majority Leader Tip O'Neill asked Congress to "examine its constitutional duties." A new special prosecutor would be appointed, Nixon surrendered his tapes, and Democrats in Congress increasingly called for the president's impeachment.⁸⁹

To Kissinger's later regret, the Israelis viewed his acceptance of "slippage" from the cease-fire as license to complete their encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army and continue military operations long after the deadline. Israeli military leaders feared that acceptance of a cease-fire would allow the Egyptians to regroup and concluded the IDF would need several more days to accomplish its objectives, which included destroying the Third Army's ability to seize more territory and ensure more defensible lines. Late in the evening on October 23, the Security Council passed Resolution 339, urging the Egyptians and Israelis to return to the positions they occupied when the cease-fire of the previous day took effect and for the UN secretary general to dispatch observers. Kissinger thought that his secret acceptance of Israeli violations of a cease-fire would last only a few hours. Following an alleged Egyptian breakout order, however, Israel tightened its encirclement of the Third Army, threatening to deliver Egypt the humiliating blow Kissinger had hoped to avoid.⁹⁰

The situation in the Middle East took an ominous turn the next day, October 24. Sadat publicly called for another Security Council resolution that would call on American and Soviet forces to guarantee a cease-fire. Given the lingering uncertainties, Kissinger and Schlesinger agreed that the U.S. airlift should continue. At 7:05 p.m., the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, called Kissinger to announce that the Soviet representative at the United Nations would support a resolution, presumably introduced by the Egyptians, for the introduction of Soviet and U.S. troops to enforce the cease-fire.⁹¹

Kissinger told Dobrynin the United States would veto any such resolution before being interrupted by a phone call from Nixon, who was distraught over the political firestorm the Saturday Night Massacre had unleashed. Kissinger recalled that the president “was as agitated and emotional as I had ever heard him.” Nixon asked him gloomily, “Now that you have your ceasefire abroad, how are you going about a ceasefire at home?” He told Kissinger that his enemies were going after him “because of their desire to kill the President. And they may succeed. I may physically die.... What they care about is destruction. It brings me sometimes to feel like saying the hell with it.” Kissinger encouraged Nixon to fight on but did not mention his alarming call with Dobrynin that the distressed president had just interrupted.⁹²

At 9:35 that evening, Dobrynin called Kissinger with a much more alarming message. The Soviet ambassador read a letter from Brezhnev for Nixon.⁹³ The Soviet general secretary proposed that U.S. and Soviet forces jointly enforce a cease-fire, as the Egyptians had proposed. The letter, however, warned ominously: “I will say it straight that if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally.” Interpreting the letter as “one of the most serious challenges to an American president” Kissinger concluded Washington must rebuff the Soviets “in a manner that shocked the Soviets into abandoning the unilateral move they were threatening—and from our information, planning.”⁹⁴

Kissinger conferred with Haig shortly after: “I think we have to go to the mat on this one.” He asked Haig whether he should wake the president. “No,” Haig replied. Kissinger knew, he later wrote, that Haig’s curt reply meant he “thought the President was too distraught to participate in the preliminary discussion.... From my own conversation with Nixon earlier in the evening, I was convinced Haig was right.”⁹⁵

The two spoke again at 10:20 p.m., right before the meeting. Haig asked whether Kissinger had spoken with Nixon. “No, I haven’t,” Kissinger responded. “He would just start charging around ... until we have it analyzed.” They discussed a response to a Soviet airlift of troops into Egypt. Kissinger thought they should not deploy troops until after the Soviets had inserted theirs. Haig feared that they would then face the problem of the Soviets fighting directly. Kissinger thought the Soviets might be taking advantage of the Nixon’s weakness during Watergate. “I don’t think they would have taken on a functioning president,” he said. Haig agreed. Kissinger added, “They find a cripple facing impeachment and why shouldn’t they go in there[?]” When Haig asked whether the meeting would be at the White House, Kissinger responded, “The State Department.” Haig told Kissinger, “He [Nixon] has to be a part of everything you are doing.” Kissinger asked again whether he should wake the president. Haig ignored the question and said, “I wish you would hold it at the White House.” Kissinger agreed. By holding the meeting at the White House, Kissinger would act under his authority as national security adviser rather than secretary of state and thus, more plausibly, under the authority of the sleeping, and perhaps incapacitated, president. A White House meeting would be far easier to justify and defend, moreover, once the press inevitably found out about it.⁹⁶

Beginning around 10:40 p.m. on October 24, seven unelected officials gathered in the White House Situation Room (Gerald Ford had been nominated by Nixon to succeed Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who had resigned on October 10, but had not yet been confirmed by the Senate), seeking a way out of what they considered the most serious showdown with the Soviet Union since the Cuban Missile Crisis. In addition to Kissinger and Schlesinger, the group included Admiral Moorer, Colby, Scowcroft, and Kissinger’s military assistant at the NSC, Commander Johnathan T. Howe. A member of Kissinger’s NSC staff later quipped that the

meeting's principals consisted of "Kissinger, Kissinger, and Schlesinger," as Kissinger's dual roles allowed him to dominate the meeting.⁹⁷

When Schlesinger and Moorer arrived, they found Kissinger "quite upset," searching for the Soviets' motive for making the threat. Perhaps, he speculated, that after the Egyptian military effort collapsed, the Kremlin had invited him to Moscow as a "charade ... with the intention of seizing on any opportunity offered by the Israelis in violation of the Ceasefire." Alternatively, they could have gradually concluded that they could not tolerate the defeat of a Soviet client by U.S.-supported Israel. Conceivably, he continued, the Soviets truly felt deceived by Israelis cease-fire violations. Moorer warned that Soviet military activities suggested the threat had been premeditated, including the continuous alert of seven Soviet airborne divisions, the sudden halt of the Soviet airlift days before the alert (indicating the planes were being readied to transport Soviet troops), and the continuing heavy sealift which might equip Soviet troops when they arrived. If the Soviets deployed troops to the region the next morning, only U.S. troops could contain them, the group concluded. "The Middle East," Moorer warned, "is the worst place in the world for the US to get engaged in a war with the Soviets," because it would not be a NATO war but a unilateral action, they could not count on allied support. Only the airfield already being used for the airlift, Lajes in the Azores, could be relied on for deploying U.S. combat troops along with their weapons and armor. Moorer's notes recorded Schlesinger saying little at the meeting, but, along with Schlesinger's later recollections, suggested that the defense secretary fully supported Kissinger's management of the crisis. The defense secretary speculated that the Soviets might be using the threat of troop deployments to exert some type of pressure on the United States or for an excuse to move their own forces in the Middle East.⁹⁸

Kissinger suspected, wrongly, that Kremlin hard-liners had forced Brezhnev's hand and noted dourly that the Soviets could move in 5,000–6,000 troops to “take credit for stopping the Israelis and regaining their status in the Arab world.” He added, “If they could do this, we should consider telling the Israelis to hit the Third Egyptian Army.” That, Moorer warned, would hand the Soviets justification to intervene directly. Furious about the perilous state they found themselves in, Kissinger blamed the Democrats, Watergate, and the American public: “If the Democrats and the US public do not stop laying siege to their government ... sooner or later someone will take a run at us.... Friday, the [president] was in good shape domestically. Now the Soviets see that he is, in their mind, non-functional.” His entire diplomatic strategy, Kissinger feared, appeared on the verge of unraveling. “If they get in,” he said of a Soviet deployment in the Middle East, “they will never get out.” Despondent, the secretary of state asked, “What did we do wrong?”⁹⁹

Led by Kissinger, the group agreed to take drastic actions to demonstrate U.S. resolve to the Soviets. Kissinger tabled a proposed letter to Brezhnev under Nixon's name. The letter would be sent at 5:40 a.m., warning, “we must view your suggestion of unilateral action as a matter of the gravest concern involving incalculable consequences.”¹⁰⁰ Before sending it, the group, with the president asleep in the residence, agreed to raise the military's global posture to DEFCON 3, the highest readiness level for war with the Soviet Union since the Cuban Missile Crisis.¹⁰¹

Schlesinger shared Kissinger's concern that the Soviets had calculated that after the Saturday Night Massacre, the Nixon administration would be incapable of responding forcefully to Soviet intervention. The alert, he recalled later, “was our way of conveying the message, ‘We are quite capable of reacting; don't you dare do anything.’” When asked about Nixon's role that night, Schlesinger said, “I did not talk to him because ... he was in the residence at the time. But

Al Haig was going back and forth between our meeting ... and the White House, and he would come back from time to time and say, ‘The president has agreed to this’ or ‘The president has not agreed to this.’”¹⁰² Either Haig had left the room periodically as a ruse to convince everyone in the room, aside from Kissinger, that the president was in command or Schlesinger misremembered aspects of the meeting to preserve the fiction that presidential authority had directed the Pentagon to raise the military’s global alert status to DEFCON 3.¹⁰³

Kissinger, Schlesinger remembered, wanted to keep the alert quiet, presumably from the American public since the entire purpose was for the Soviets to notice it and rethink deploying troops.¹⁰⁴ He asked Admiral Moorer whether the alert could be done discretely. The defense secretary looked at the JCS chairman “in amazement” when he said it could. He found such a promise preposterous but speculated Moorer was simply trying to reassure Kissinger at a tense moment. Schlesinger later scoffed, “The notion that we could do all this and place a couple of million people on higher alert status and this would all be kind of kept a secret was just not on. In fact, you start with the reserve forces—we alerted the air defense forces which were largely reserves—so you have people getting a phone call, families getting a phone call saying, ‘Return to base, we have been mobilized and put on alert status.’” The massive activity involving so many people would be impossible to conceal, Schlesinger knew. Leaks were inevitable.¹⁰⁵

At 11:41 p.m., under Schlesinger’s direction, Admiral Moorer issued the order to global U.S. military conventional and nuclear commands to increase readiness to DEFCON 3.¹⁰⁶ The Strategic Air Command readied its strike force of over a thousand aircraft, with many more than usual prepared for rapid take off. American strategic nuclear silos increased their preparedness. Leave and training were canceled, and the military prepared to move rapidly to DEFCON II or DEFCON I. The Soviets, the group feared, might not notice the alert status change in time to

stop them from deploying troops to Egypt and decided to take several additional actions to make it clear that American forces were preparing for direct intervention. Just after midnight, they decided to order the aircraft carrier USS *John F. Kennedy* from west of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean and aircraft carrier USS *Roosevelt* from near Sicily to join the USS *Independence* south of Crete. They also recalled 75 B-52s from Guam and alerted the 82nd Airborne Division to prepare for possible deployment. Reflecting on the contributions of Schlesinger, his “partner at the all-night session,” Kissinger wrote that Admiral Moorer’s and Clements’ “dedication and strength had carried us through the crisis of authority, enabling us to act with rare decisiveness and unity.”¹⁰⁷

The group need not have feared the Soviets would fail to notice a U.S. global alert. They immediately detected it. Many of their assumptions about Soviet motives had been wrong, though they could not know it at the time. The letter had been drafted by several members of the Soviet politburo, but Brezhnev—not the Politburo hard-liners as Kissinger imagined—had added the threat of unilateral action himself as a bluff, hoping to pressure the Americans into enforcing the cease-fire jointly. The Soviet premier had suspected Kissinger of betraying his Moscow agreement by authorizing the Israelis during his stopover in Tel Aviv on his way home to continue their attack on the Third Army, which threatened his personal prestige in the Politburo and internationally. The Soviet Union had not developed serious contingency plans for intervention in the Middle East, and contrary to the fears of everyone in the room, the Kremlin had only a dim understanding of Watergate and how it was affecting American leadership.¹⁰⁸ Lacking similar political and legal restraints to their rule or an independent press to report on their misdeeds, Kremlin leaders could not conceive how a minor incident would force the American president to fight desperately to stay in office. Kissinger, Schlesinger, and the others,

however, were assuming the Soviets had the same grasp of the dysfunction in Washington as they did, making decisions as they were in the absence of a distraught president they were too afraid to wake. Brezhnev, not wanting to ruin détente or reprise Khrushchev's brinksmanship, decided to ignore the alert. Perhaps, he reasoned, the domestic situation had strained Nixon's nerves more than they had assumed. Rejecting the advice of some of his Politburo colleagues to mobilize Soviet forces, he said, "Let him cool down and explain the nuclear alert first."¹⁰⁹

Haig informed Nixon of the overnight developments later that morning, October 25, and Kissinger briefed him in greater detail at 8 a.m. The president approved the actions and the two briefed Congress from 8:40 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. As Schlesinger had anticipated, the press had noticed almost immediately when U.S. forces around the world went to DEFCON 3. To his fury and shock, Kissinger, after three hours of sleep, found out from the radio while brushing his teeth that the entire world knew most of the details about the alert.¹¹⁰ Only Britain had been consulted beforehand, and the other NATO allies were furious about having been left in the dark. Kissinger held a press conference at noon. Furious about reporters' insinuations that the crisis had been overblown and the alert had been ordered to divert the public's attention from Watergate, Kissinger fumed, "It is a symptom of what is happening to our country that it could even be suggested that the United States would alert its forces for domestic reasons."¹¹¹

Kissinger called Schlesinger afterward to tell him he thought the alert had been successful and thank him for his support at the late-night meeting. The defense secretary asked whether he should lower the DEFCON level. They must continue the alert, Kissinger said, until midnight as any relaxation immediately after the UN vote on the cease-fire would cause the alert to look like it had been a pressure play. The defense secretary agreed. The crisis atmosphere abated when the Security Council adopted Resolution 340, which called for a lasting cease-fire, a

return of all forces to positions occupied at the time of the October 22 cease-fire, and UN observers and peacekeepers to monitor the cessation of military activity.¹¹²

At a Pentagon press conference the next morning, Schlesinger addressed the alert in his own abstruse manner. One reporter asked what the Soviets had done to cause Washington's dramatic reaction. Schlesinger answered carefully, "There were a plethora of indicators," including the Soviet alert of their airborne forces, the sudden stand-down of the Soviet airlift, and the doubling of the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean, all of which indicated to him that Moscow might have been prepared to take a unilateral action. Like Kissinger, he avoided mention of Brezhnev's letter, which had begun the crisis, though knowledge of it had leaked to Senator Henry Jackson. Neither wanted to risk reigniting the crisis by blaming Brezhnev. Instead, Schlesinger referred to "certain ambiguous developments," which were the responsibility of the secretary of state, when combined with military indicators "suggested the possibility of a movement that was unilateral on the part of the Soviet Union and we took the normal precautions under those circumstances, adjusting our DEFCON status."¹¹³ In defending the alert and obliquely referencing the mounting domestic political crisis, Schlesinger further justified the strong response: "I think that it was important in view of the circumstances that has raised a question or may have raised a question about the ability of the United States to react appropriately, firmly and quickly, that this certainly scotched whatever myths may have developed with regard to that possibility." His comment revealed his rationale for ordering the alert without first speaking directly with the president: the national interest demanded it. He agreed with Kissinger that unless the group had acted decisively, even without the sleeping president's approval, the Soviets would have concluded that, because of Watergate, they could challenge American interests globally with impunity. Although he hinted that American actions

might have caused the Soviets to back down, he downplayed the seriousness of the crisis, telling reporters, “I think we were very far away from a confrontation.” There would be little point and potentially much harm, he figured, from telling the American public that on the night of the 24th and early morning hours of the next day, the rump National Security Council had discussed the challenges of fighting World War III in the Middle East.¹¹⁴

Neither Kissinger nor Schlesinger anticipated, however, how Nixon, grasping for any means to salvage his presidency, would undermine their attempts to defuse the crisis by seeking to burnish his leadership credentials, amplifying the crisis, and claiming credit for resolving it. In a White House press conference on the afternoon of October 26, Nixon presented an alternative version of the alert and its significance to display his own indispensability. He told the reporters that after he had received information on the evening of October 24 indicating the “Soviet Union was planning to send a substantial force into the Mideast, a military force ... I ordered, shortly after midnight on Thursday, an alert for all American forces around the world.” The reporters, however, were mostly interested in Watergate. Dan Rather from CBS News asked what his thoughts were when “people who love this country and people who believe in you” called for his resignation or impeachment. Nixon responded by stressing his firmness in response to potential Soviet intervention in the Middle East as justification for staying in office. “It was,” he said, “the most difficult crisis we have had since the Cuban missile confrontation of 1962. But ... because I had a basis of communication with Mr. Brezhnev, we not only avoided a confrontation but we moved a great step forward toward real peace in the Mideast. Now, as long as I can carry out that kind of responsibility, I am going to continue to do this job.” In response to another reporter’s question, he confirmed Brezhnev’s letter and said, “it was very firm, and it left very little to the

imagination as to what he intended.” His response, he added, had been just as firm and, because of their relationship, had resulted in a settlement rather than a confrontation.”¹¹⁵

Kissinger was incensed. He knew that it had been he, with Schlesinger’s critical support, who had responded to diplomatic and military indicators of a potential Soviet move by ordering the alert and sending a letter in Nixon’s name to the Kremlin. After viewing the president’s press conference, he called Haig. “The crazy bastard really made a mess with the Russians,” he said. Nixon, he feared, had recklessly inflamed the situation for his own personal gain by publicly humiliating Brezhnev to persuade the public of his own indispensability. Haig agreed: “He just let fly....He got all he had about the Middle East from you. I assumed you had cleared that. I was surprised.” Kissinger asked Haig to call Dobrynin in the president’s name to help avert disaster by arguing that the president had not really meant what he said. “This guy will not take this,” he said of Brezhnev. “This guy over there is a maniac also.” Together, Kissinger and Haig succeeded at preventing a new crisis with the Soviets, who increasingly viewed Kissinger and Schlesinger as more credible spokesmen of U.S. policy.¹¹⁶

The *modus vivendi* the secretary of state and defense secretary achieved during the rump NSC meeting faded quickly over the next several days as the confrontation with the Soviets abated. Schlesinger became increasingly concerned about the state of the surrounded Egyptian Third Army. Fearing the repercussions of allowing the Israelis to starve the trapped army into submission, Schlesinger urged using C-5 aircraft to deliver aid to the besieged Egyptians. Speaking with Haig on October 27, Kissinger said, “You may help me to settle down those maniacs at Defense. He [Schlesinger] is now flapping all over the place—we cannot airlift supplies to Egypt.” The defense secretary, Haig said, now advocated deploying troops to the region “to get oil.” “He is insane,” Kissinger responded. He did not think they could “survive

with these fellows in there at Defense—they are crazy.” According to Haig, Schlesinger said “we could not let people die in the desert and that the Israelis are lying to us and that we must be tougher.” With Kissinger at the apogee of his power, Schlesinger’s musings about aiding the trapped Egyptians or deploying troops to the region stood no chance of actual implementation.¹¹⁷

The October War dramatically transformed American security policy in the Middle East. The war had shattered the myth of Israeli invincibility. Before the war the United States and the Israelis themselves concluded that their superior intelligence capabilities, air force, and army could quickly overcome any combination of Arab nations that waged war against them. On October 6, however, Israel was caught by complete surprise. Yet, Schlesinger and Kissinger both assumed, as the Israelis did themselves, that the Israelis would quickly repulse the attackers. The defense secretary concluded that U.S. aid to the Israelis early in the conflict was unnecessary and risked causing the Arab world to retaliate against Washington. Schlesinger did not believe Kissinger’s plan for covert aid would work, especially after the Soviets began their own massive airlift. For his part, Kissinger found it convenient in conversations with the Israelis to blame early delays on the Israelis, although he had himself initially sought to limit the aid and severely restrict how the Defense Department would deliver it. When Kissinger finally did come to the realization that the Israeli losses had been far more severe than he thought, he became genuinely and unreasonably frustrated with the Pentagon for being unable to quickly deliver aid by pressuring commercial airline executives to deliver arms and munitions to the Israelis. Only Nixon’s intervention provided policy clarity for the secretary of defense. The political firestorm that followed the Saturday Night Massacre, however, caused Nixon, already preoccupied with Watergate, to become dangerously distraught on the evening of October 24, causing neither

Kissinger nor Schlesinger to seek the president's permission before raising the alert level of American nuclear and conventional forces to DEFCON 3. Fortunately for both, Brezhnev had no intention of escalating what had been a bluff, meant to stop the Israelis from continuing their offensive, into a nuclear showdown with the United States.

Over the next months, Nixon gave Kissinger extraordinary latitude to negotiate a peace settlement. With the Watergate scandal growing, the president could not devote much time to the necessary diplomatic maneuvers. Kissinger thus had the authority to negotiate on the president's behalf with the governments of Israel, Egypt, and Syria. Nixon viewed the opportunity for a diplomatic breakthrough as favorable to American interests and potentially helpful to him as he fought for his political life. To support his diplomatic strategy, Kissinger invoked the president's authority with his foreign and intra-administration interlocutors.¹¹⁸ To achieve a lasting settlement, he aimed to convince the Egyptians and Syrians that only the United States help them gain territorial concessions from the Israelis. Although Moscow could give them tanks, artillery, and planes, the Israelis could destroy these with U.S. weaponry. With Israel dependent on U.S. military aid, only Washington had the leverage to persuade the Israelis to cede territory. Kissinger sought to convince the Israelis that only the United States could protect them from their more populous, increasingly better equipped adversaries and from the Soviet Union. The October War had proved military power alone insufficient for deterrence, and even eventual military success had been fraught with danger, as it had risked drawing the Soviets into the conflict. Schlesinger made his own position on the matter clear when he told the press at the end of October: "I think that it is evident that in order to have a long-term settlement, that the relationship between Israel and her neighbors must be based on something far broader than a military preponderance by the state of Israel."¹¹⁹

Endnotes

1. Prime Minister Golda Meir had informed U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Keating in Tel Aviv that “Israel had received information from totally reliable sources that Syria and Egypt are planning a coordinated attack in the late afternoon.” She asked that the United States inform the Soviets and Egyptians that Israel would not attack first, and, though it had called up some reserves, it had not yet begun a general mobilization. Memo, Quandt for Scowcroft, “Arab-Israeli Tensions, 16 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 25, *Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973*, ed. Edward C. Keefer (Washington, DC: GPO, 2011), 287–288 (doc 99).
2. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 464.
3. Quoted in *ibid.*, 464.
4. The evening before, the Israeli charge delivered a message for Kissinger from Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir which described her concerns about the Syrian and Egyptian military preparations Israel had detected at their front lines. The Israelis did not know, however, whether the mobilization was in response to suspected Israeli aggression or for an offensive operation. Telcon, Kissinger and Dobrynin, 6 Oct 1973, 6:40 a.m. (doc 100); telcon, Kissinger and Zayyat, 6 Oct 1973, 7 a.m. (doc 101); both in *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:289–292.
5. Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 512; Kissinger did not inform Nixon about the war danger until two and a half hours after he found out about it. Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 521–523. Kissinger later reflected, “Nixon was ... preoccupied with Watergate and its ramifications throughout the Middle East crisis. This did not keep him from being informed, or from making the key decisions. But it did inhibit the frenetic, restless, penetrating leadership that had characterized his performance in previous crises.” Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 470.
6. Walter Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War: The 1973 Yom Kippur Conflict and the Airlift That Saved Israel* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), 23–26; Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 114–119; Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: William Morrow, 1998), 430–433.
7. For a good description of the capabilities of the Syrian and Egyptian anti-aircraft systems, see Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 15; Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 33. When the Israelis were having difficulty against the SA-6, Admiral Moorer told the WSAG, “We have never been able to get sufficient information about them to develop any good countermeasures.” WSAG, meeting minutes, 8 Oct 1973, 5:55–6:25 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:382 (doc 131); Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Report (IR 76-16), *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: Overview and Analysis of the Conflict*, Sep 1975, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1975-09-01A.pdf>, 31–32.
8. Clements, who would ordinarily attend the WSAG meeting, was in Arizona on vacation when war broke out. Carol Barta, *Bill Clements*, 149.
9. Schlesinger, News Conference by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger at the Pentagon, 26 Oct 1973, 11:00 a.m., *Schlesinger Public Statements 1973*, 3:761; Schlesinger, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff, 1 Aug 1991, OSD/HO, 1.
10. Nixon wrote in his memoir that he was disappointed by our own intelligence shortcomings, and I was stunned by the failure of Israeli intelligence. They were among the best in the world, and they, too, had been caught off guard.” Nixon, *Memoirs*, 920. While Mossad collected intelligence abroad, AMAN provided the Israeli prime minister and military with assessments of Arab capabilities and intentions. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 24. Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 10–11. Dayan had lost sight in his

left eye while fighting with the British against the Vichy French troops in Lebanon during World War II and, as a result, wore a black eye patch that became his trademark.

11. Boyne, *The Two O'Clock War*, 1. Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 5.

12. Arab nations lost 452 aircraft, and over 18,000 Arab soldiers were killed. Israel, by contrast, lost just 46 aircraft and 785 soldiers were killed. Boyne, *The Two O'Clock War*, 296. Peter Hahn, *Crisis and Crossfire*, 54-55. Douglas Little, "The Cold War in the Middle East: Suez Crisis to Camp David Accords," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War, Vol. 2, Crises and Détente*, ed. Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 305–326; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 317–320.

13. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 10–11.

14. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 211–212; Elliot Richardson, *Annual Defense Department Report*, FY 1974, 25.

15. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 10–16.

16. Memo, Schlesinger for Kissinger, 16 Apr 1973 *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:149–150 (doc 50).

17. Memcon, Kissinger, Eban, and Dinitz, 12 May 1973, 9:40–10:40 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:167 (doc 55).

18. Memo, Chief, Trade and Aid Branch, Office of Economic Research, CIA, for Regional Analysis/Free World, OSR, Withdrawal of Soviet Military Personnel from Egypt, 16 Aug 1972, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1972-08-16.pdf>.

19. Hunt, *Melvin Laird*, 477.

20. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 79; Vladislav M. Zubock, *Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 238. Sadat informed the Soviet ambassador to Egypt on October 3, 1973, and Syrian President Hafez Assad informed the Soviet Ambassador to Syria on October 4, though neither told the Soviets of the exact date. The Soviets began an emergency withdrawal. Victor Israelyan, on Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's staff, recalled: "When one of us asked if the urgent evacuation of Soviet citizens might tip off the Israelis and the Americans, he responded, 'The lives of Soviet citizens are more important to us.'" Israelyan wrote later that how the Kremlin learned of the timing of the attack remains a mystery, but it was undoubtedly "some member of the inner circle of the Egyptian or Syrian leadership, who in defiance of strict orders from Sadat and Assad had given—or sold—to Moscow the information about the date and time for the assault on Israel." Israelyan, *On the Battlefields of the Cold War*, 244–246; Zubock, *Failed Empire*, 238.

21. When he had been CIA director and the WSAG had debated the possibility of an Egyptian attack in mid-May, Schlesinger said, "If Egypt should start something, it would be part of a diplomatic move to elicit sympathy when they were whipped by the Israelis." WSAG, meeting minutes, 15 May 1973, 3:20–4:09 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:175 (doc 57); WSAG, meeting minutes, 6 Oct. 1973, 7:22–8:27 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:327 (doc 112).

22. Qaddafi's official title was "Brotherly Leader and Guide of the Revolution of Libya."

23. WSAG, meeting minutes, 6 Oct 1973, 7:22–8:27p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:324–337 (doc 112).

24. Telcon, Haig and Kissinger, 6 Oct 1973, 6:05 p.m., printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 63. Also available on DNSA.

25. Barta, *Clements*, 152–153; *Wall Street Journal*, “Clements to Shun Decisions on Oil Due to SEDCO Stake,” 17 Dec 1973, 4; *New York Times*, “Schlesinger Bars Deputy from Decisions on Oil,” 16 Dec 1973, 33.
26. Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 34–35.
27. A Special National Intelligence Estimate prepared on October 6, 1973, advised: “Heavy fighting is almost certain to be short in duration—no more than a week.... The Israelis have the strength to blunt the Syrian offensive capability within a few days and, as quickly, to push the Egyptians back across the canal.” Special National Intelligence Estimate, 6 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:285–286 (doc 98).
28. For a good description of the Sagger missiles, see Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 16; Rabinivich, *The Yom Kippur*, 40–41. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Report (IR 76-16), *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: Overview and Analysis of the Conflict*, Sep 1975, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1975-09-01A.pdf>, 16.
29. David Tal, “A Tested Alliance: The Yom Kippur War,” in *Israel Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 35; memcon, Kissinger and Shalev, 7 Oct. 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:341 (doc 115) (quote). Israeli ambassador Simcha Dinitz had been in Israel for his father’s funeral. Meir asked him to return to the United States after learning of imminent war.
30. Telcon, Schlesinger, Kissinger, 7 Oct 1973, 1:30 p.m., DNSA. An abbreviated transcript of the conversation is printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 93–94.
31. Telcon, Nixon-Kissinger, 7 Oct 1973, 2:07 p.m., printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 95.
32. Telcon, Haig-Kissinger, 7 Oct 1973, 3:10 p.m, printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 96–97. William Colby said later that he thought Kissinger did not fully grasp that the Pentagon could not instantly move to support his diplomacy. What Kissinger suspected to be intentional delay on the Defense Department’s part, Colby argued, was, in reality, the result of the logistical complexity of transferring weapons to Israel. Colby, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff, 28 Oct 1992, OSD/HO, 16.
33. WSAG, meeting minutes, 7 Oct 1973, 6:06–7:06 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:354–355 (doc 121).
34. *Ibid.*, 558–359; Tal, “A Tested Alliance,” 35.
35. Memcon, Kissinger, Shalev, and Eagleburger, 7 Oct. 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:342n5 (doc 115); telcon, Schlesinger to Kissinger, 7 Oct 1973, 3:45 p.m., DNSA.
36. Telcon, Schlesinger and Kissinger, 7 Oct 1973, 3:45 p.m., DNSA.
37. Alexander M. Haig Jr., with Charles McCarry, *Inner Circles: How America Changed the World: A Memoir* (New York: Werner Books, 1992), 411.
38. Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 5; memo, Vice Adm. Ray Peet for Clements, subj: Critique of the Response to the Middle East Crisis, 5 Apr 1974, folder Middle East 385 1974, box 68, Acc 330-78-0011, OSD Records, WNRC, 3.
39. Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 113.
40. Background Paper, Project 9DD Airlift, box 6, folder Middle East 092-31 Dec 73, box 6, Acc 330-78-0002; memo, Vice Adm. Ray Peet for Clements, 5 Apr 1974, 3.
41. WSAG, meeting minutes, 6 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:294–306 (doc 103); Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 10.
42. Dinitz told Kissinger, “The situation on the front looks considerably better. We have gone over from the containment to attack both on the Sinai and Golan Heights. Our military people think that [there’s] a good possibility we will push the Syrians all the way across the ceasefire line and we are also moving out

the Egyptian forces in the Sinai.” Telcon, Kissinger and Dinitz, 8 Oct 1973, 1:14 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:370 (doc 126).

43. WSAG, meeting minutes, 8 Oct 1973, 5:55–6:25 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:382 (doc 131).

44. *Ibid.*, 383, 386.

45. *Ibid.*, 388.

46. Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 240.

47. *Ibid.*, 246–247.

48. Telcon, Kissinger and Haig, 8 Oct 1973, Kissinger Transcripts, ProQuest History Vault.

49. Elbridge Colby, et al., [REDACTED] of 1973”: Deterrence and Signaling in Crisis,” DRM-2013-U-004480, Apr 2013, CNA, 38–39. As quoted in Francine Klagsburn, *Lioness: Golda Meir and the Nation of Israel* (New York: Schocken Books, 2017), 629.

50. As quoted in Francine Klagsbrun, *Lioness*, 699–700.

51. Memcon, WSAG-Principals Only, 9 Oct 1973, 9:40–10:25 a.m.; 11:55 a.m.–12:20 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:397–403 (doc 135).

52. Telcon, Schlesinger and Moorer, 10 Oct 1973, 10:02 a.m., Moorer Diary entry, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:425 (doc 144).

53. Moorer Diary entry, 10 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1973*, 25:425 (doc 145).

54. Memcon, Nixon, Kissinger, Haig, Ziegler, and Scowcroft, 9 Oct 1973, 4:45 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, (doc 140).

55. A later ISA critique of the response to the crisis concluded: “The Israelis have many contact points in the governmental structure, particularly in the national security structure and in the arms industry. They have utilized these points constantly to apply pressure in a well-organized effort to get what they want when they want.” Vice Adm. Ray Pete for Clements, 5 Apr 1974, subj: Critique of the Response to the Middle East Crisis, folder Middle East 385 1974, box 68, Acc 330-78-0011; memcon, Dinitz, Shalev, Kissinger, Scowcroft, and Rodman, 9 Oct 1973, 6:10–6:35 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:41 (doc 141).

56. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2005), 111.

57. Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 10; memo, ASD(PA) for SecDef, 21 Jun 1974, subj: The October Airlift, folder Israel 091.3, Jun-Sep 1974, box 65, Acc 330-78-0011, 4.

58. Kissinger wrote later that he had made this remark “half-facetiously.” Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 512.

59. Telcon, Schlesinger and Kissinger, 12 Oct 1973, 5:40 p.m., ProQuest History Vault.

60. Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 114; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 512.

61. Memcon, Dinitz, Shalev, Kissinger, Scowcroft, and Rodman, 12–13 Oct 1973, 11:20 p.m. –12:23 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:460–461 (doc 166); Tal, “A Tested Alliance,” 46.

62. Memcon, Dinitz, Shalev, Kissinger, Scowcroft, and Rodman, 12–13 Oct. 1973, 11:20 p.m. –12:23 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:461–463 (doc 166); telcon, Kissinger and Schlesinger, 12 Oct 1973, 11:45 p.m. See abbreviated version of the transcript printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 212–215.

63. Memcon, Dinitz, Shalev, Kissinger, Scowcroft, and Rodman, 12–13 Oct. 1973, 11:20 p.m. –12:23 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:464 (doc 166); telcon, Kissinger and Schlesinger, 12 Oct 1973, 11:45 p.m.

See abbreviated version of the transcript printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 212–215. Kissinger's published transcript does not include most of the text that reveals his suspicion of Clements.

64. Memcon, Dinitz, Shalev, Kissinger, Scowcroft, and Rodman, 12–13 Oct. 1973, 11:20 p.m.–12:23 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:464–466 (doc 166).

65. Telcon, Kissinger and Haig, 13 Oct 1973, 12:45 a.m., ProQuest History Vault

66. Ibid.

67. Telcon, Schlesinger and Kissinger, 12:49 a.m., ProQuest History Vault; Tal, "A Tested Alliance," 46.

68. Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 11–12; telcon, Schlesinger and Kissinger, 13 Oct 1973, 12:49 a.m., DNSA. Later in the morning, Kissinger spoke with Haig, who said Schlesinger "admitted to me he investigated this thing and his people did drag their feet. He's goddamned upset about it, which was the surprising thing." The chief of staff added that the defense secretary feared the United States was getting drawn into the conflict: "I told him these are judgements for Henry and the President to make and you have to do what the President wants done." Telcon, Haig and Kissinger, 13 Oct 1973, 9:35 a.m.; Tal, "A Tested Alliance," 46.

69. Kissinger had spoken earlier that morning with Nixon, who urged, "Do it now!" when he learned that three C-5As were available to fly 60 to 80 tons of supplies to Israel. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 514; memcon, Kissinger, Schlesinger, Rush, Clements, Moorer, and Colby, 13 Oct 1973, 10:45 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:482–486 (doc 173).

70. Clements, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Roger Trask, 16 May 1996, OSD/HO, 20; Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 16.

71. Nixon, *Memoirs*, 927; Evan Thomas, *Being Nixon: A Man Divided* (New York: Random House, 2015), 470.

72. Memo, ASD(PA) for SecDef, 21 Jun 1974, subj: The October Airlift, folder Israel 091.3, Jun-Sep 1974, box 65, Acc 330-78-0011.

73. Boyne, *The Two O'Clock War*, 77.

74. Background Paper, Project 9DD Airlift, folder Middle East 092-31 Dec 73, box 6, Acc 330-78-0002.

75. Memo, ASD(PA) for SecDef, 21 Jun 1974, subj: The October Airlift, folder Israel 091.3, Jun-Sep 1974, box 65, Acc 330-78-0011

76. Clements interview, 16 May 1996, 20; Boyne, *The Two O'Clock War*, 117–120.

77. Telcon, Kissinger and Schlesinger, 13 Oct 1973, 4:15 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:491 (doc 177).

78. Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 13 (quote); LtCol T. L. Moore, "Talking Paper on Alert and Activation of MAC Airlift Flow," 16 Oct 1973, folder Middle East 092-31 Dec 73, box 6, Acc 330-78-0002.

79. *The Reminiscences of Vice Admiral Thomas R. Weshler, U.S. Navy (Retired)*, vol. 2 (Annapolis, MD: U.S. Naval Institute, 1995), 727–728, 730.

80. Telcon, Nixon and Kissinger, 14 Oct 1973, 9:04 a.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:498 (doc 180); Schlesinger interview, 1 Aug 1991, 13; Background Paper, Project 9DD Airlift, 16 Oct 1973, folder Middle East 092-31 Dec 73, box 6, Acc 330-78-0002; memo, ASD(PA) for SecDef, 21 Jun 1974, subj: The October Airlift, folder Israel 091.3, Jun-Sep 1974, box 65, Acc 330-78-0011; Eugene Rogan, *The Arabs: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 369–370. Oil production cut quote found in Daniel J. Sargent, *Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 152.

81. Memo (Declassified), Deputy ASD James H. Noyes for Wickham and Taylor, 7 Oct 1973, subj: folder Israel 091.3 (Jan–20 Oct 1973) 1973, box 69, Acc 330-78-0001, OSD Records, WNRC. Taylor wrote on the paper, “Agree.” Memo, Noyes, 19 Oct 1973 (quote), folder Middle East 385 (X4486) (19 Oct 1973), box 73, Acc 330-78-0001; memos, Wickham for Sumner, 18 and 20 Oct 1973, folder Israel 091.3 (Jan–20 Oct 1973) 1973, box 69, Acc 330-78-0001; BG Taylor Notebook, entry for 19 Oct 1973, folder 020 SD (31 Dec 1973) 1973, box 7, Acc 330-78-0001; WSAG, meeting minutes, 16 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:545, 553 (191); memcon, WSAG Principals, 17 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:585–586 (doc 199); Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 873; Melvin Small, *The Presidency of Richard Nixon* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 289; memcon, WSAG Meeting, 24 Oct 1973 1:05–2:42 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:722–727 (doc 261). CIA Electronic Reading Room.
82. Klagsburn, *Lioness*, 636. 24. Central Intelligence Agency, Directorate of Intelligence, Intelligence Report (IR 76-16), *The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: Overview and Analysis of the Conflict*, Sep 1975, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/1975-09-01A.pdf>, 24.
83. BG Taylor notebook, Staff Meeting, entry for 23 Oct 1973.
84. Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 527.
85. U.S. Embassy Soviet Union Cable 13148 to Dept. of State, 21 Oct 1973, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/octwar-51.pdf>.
86. Memcon, Kissinger and Meir, 22 Oct 1973, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:658 (doc 230).
87. As quoted in Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, *The Final Days* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1976), 70. According to Woodward, Nixon had been speaking with his speechwriter, Pat Buchanan, before meeting with Richardson. Woodward wrote, “The president said that the Cox situation and the Middle East were symbiotic. He had to show strength. If he was weak on Cox, he would have no credibility with the Russians or the belligerents in the Middle East. A Harvard professor must not be allowed to undermine his power.” Ibid.
88. As quoted in John A. Farrell, *Richard Nixon: The Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2017), 521.
89. Ibid. 521. Nixon later reflected on his surprise about the reaction to his firing of Cox: “Although I had been prepared for a major and adverse reaction to Cox’s firing, I was taken by surprise by the ferocious intensity of the reaction that actually occurred. For the first time I recognized the depth of the impact Watergate had been having on America; I suddenly realized how deeply its acid had eaten into the nation’s grain.” Nixon, *Memoirs*, 935.
90. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 569; Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War*, 505–506.
91. Msgs, Brezhnev to Kissinger, 23 Oct 1973 (doc 241); Kissinger to Brezhnev, 23 Oct 1973 (doc 242): both in *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:676–677, 701; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 568–575, 1247; telcons, Kissinger and Schlesinger, 23 Oct 1973, 3:02 p.m., KA11352; 23 Oct 1973, 5:09 p.m. (quote), KA11357: both in Kissinger Telephone Conversations, DNSA.
92. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 581; Kissinger transcripts, ProQuest Historical Vault.
93. Other than what Kissinger wrote in his memoir, no record of the 9:35 p.m. phone call has been found. Msg, Brezhnev to Nixon, undated, *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:735n3 (doc 267).
94. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 583–584.
95. Telcon, Kissinger and Haig, 24 Oct 1973, 9:50 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:736–737 (doc 268); Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 583–584. Nixon later claimed in his memoir: “When Haig informed me about this message, I said that he and Kissinger should have a meeting at the White House to formulate plans for a firm reaction to what amounted to a scarcely veiled threat of unilateral Soviet intervention.

Words were not making our point—we needed action, even the shock of a military alert.” Nixon, *Memoirs*, 938. Haig also wrote that he had informed Nixon beforehand.

96. Telcon, Haig and Kissinger, 24 Oct 1973, 10:20 p.m., DNSA; Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 53; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 586. Some scholars have speculated on whether Nixon was even capable of leading a crisis meeting that evening, and Haig was covering for his boss. After examining the evidence, the historian Robert Dallek asked, “Was he on sedatives that would not allow him to function effectively?” Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 530. Jussi Hanhimäki wrote, “Nixon was clearly depressed from the after-effects of the Saturday Night Massacre a few days earlier and had been drinking; he was in no condition to make informed decisions.” Jussi Hanhimäki, *Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University, 2004), 316. In his memoir, Haig claimed that he did speak with the president after this conversation: “When I passed on the substance of this conversation to Nixon, he nodded in approval but expressed no enthusiasm for attending the meeting in person. As usual, he preferred to let others set the options while he made his decision in solitude.... With a wave of the hand, he said, “You know what I want, Al; you handle the meeting.” Haig went on, however, to reveal that Nixon had not specifically ordered the military alert. “We all knew what he wanted: a worldwide military alert of United States military forces tied to a strong reply to Brezhnev.” Haig, *Inner Circles*, 416.

97. As quoted in Cline, “Policy Without Intelligence,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 17 (Winter 1974–1975): 128. Admiral Moorer made the best record of what State Department Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research Ray Cline later called a “curious little rump NSC meeting” and Schlesinger himself referred to it as “the abbreviated National Security Council” when later briefing reporters. Schlesinger News Conference, 26 Oct 1973, 11 a.m., *Schlesinger Public Statements 1973*, 3:764

98. Memcon, Moorer, CJCS Memo M-88-73, 24–25 Oct. 1973, 10:30 p.m. –3:30 a.m., “NSC/JCS Meeting, Wednesday/Thursday, 24/25 October 1973, 2230–0330,” *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:738–739 (doc 269); Schlesinger interview, 24 Feb 1987, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bJzJXXmqB6w>.

99. The chairman noted his agreement with Kissinger’s frustration over the domestic situation. Memcon, Moorer, CJCS Memo M-88-73, “NSC/JCS Meeting, Wednesday/Thursday, 24/25 October 1973, 2230–0330,” 25:740 (doc 269).

100. Ltr, Nixon to Brezhnev, 25 Oct 1973, delivered to Soviet Embassy, 5:40 a.m. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/octwar-73.pdf>

101. The chairman noted his agreement with Kissinger’s frustration over the domestic situation. Memcon, Moorer, CJCS Memo M-88-73, “NSC/JCS Meeting, Wednesday/Thursday, 24/25 October 1973, 2230–0330,” 25:740 (doc 269).

102. James Schlesinger, interview by Timothy Naftali, Northern VA, 10 Dec 2007, Oral Histories Collection, Nixon Library, 37. Schlesinger recalled the meeting differently when speaking with reporters on October 26. He said that though he did not speak to the president when the alert order was given, “Dr. Kissinger had, I believe, just spoken with the President. The president was in complete command at all times during the course of that evening.” Schlesinger News Conference, 26 Oct 1973, 11 a.m., *Schlesinger Public Statements 1973*, 3:764.

103. Memcon, Moorer, CJCS Memo M-88-73, “NSC/JCS Meeting, Wednesday/Thursday, 24/25 October 1973, 2230–0330,” 25:737–742 (doc 269).

104. Schlesinger interview, 10 Dec 2007, 39. In the interview, Schlesinger confirmed, “He just wanted to Soviets to be aware of it.” Schlesinger oral history, Oral History, Nixon Library.

105. Ibid.

106. Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 530. See Admiral Moorer’s Diary and Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*, 322; National Archives, Nixon Presidential Materials, Kissinger Telephone Conversations, Transcripts (telcons), Chronological File, box 23, Printed in Kissinger, *Crisis*, 346–347. Kissinger later recalled that

the White House described the meeting as a National Security Council meeting, while State Department records refer to it as a WSAG meeting of principals. Kissinger found the WSAG designation more appropriate. *Years of Upheaval*, 586–588.

107. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 597.

108. Zubock, *Failed Empire*, 239; Boyne, *The Two O’Clock War*.

109. Victor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 94, 132, 197, 175; Brezhnev quote in Zubock, *A Failed Empire*, 239.

110. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 591.

111. Kissinger told Nixon, who would give his own press conference the next night, “I would treat the bastards with contempt, Mr. President. They asked me about Watergate. I said you cannot play with the central authority of the country without paying a price.” Telcon, Kissinger and Nixon, 25 Oct 1973, 3:05 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:753 (doc 277); “Kissinger Speaks,” *New York Times*, 26 Oct 1973, 89.

112. Telcon, Schlesinger/Kissinger, 25 Oct 1973, 2:45 p.m., box 23, Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts, Nixon Library.

113. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 595.

114. Schlesinger News Conference, 26 Oct 1973, 11 a.m., *Schlesinger Public Statements 1973*, 3:759–771.

115. “The President’s News Conference of October 26, 1973,” in Richard Nixon, Containing the Public Messages, Speeches, and Statements of the President, 1973, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1975), 896–897 (Nixon quotes), 900 (Rather quote) 899.
https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/ppp/president-37_Nixon,%20Richard%20M./1973/01%21A%21January%201%20to%20December%2031%2C%201973.

116. Telcon, Kissinger and Haig, 26 Oct 1973, 7:55 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:764–765 (doc 285).

117. Telcon, Kissinger and Haig, 27 Oct 1973, 12:28 p.m., *FRUS 1969–1976*, 25:778 (doc 293).

118. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 130.

119. Jim Hoagland, “Israelis Mean to Cheat Us,” 28 Oct 1973, *Washington Post*, A18.