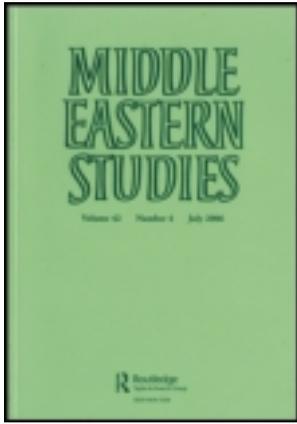


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### 'The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming': American Management of the Crisis Associated with Ending the October 1973 War

Yehuda Blanga <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Middle Eastern Studies , Bar Ilan University , Ramat Gan , Israel  
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# ‘The Russians are Coming, the Russians are Coming’: American Management of the Crisis Associated with Ending the October 1973 War

YEHUDA BLANGA\*

On 23 October 1973, a few hours after he landed in Washington, DC following his trip to Moscow and Jerusalem, Henry A. Kissinger, US secretary of state, received a report that the fighting in the Middle East had resumed. The ceasefire, which had been reached in agreement with the Soviets and had been translated into United Nations Security Council Resolution 338, had been breached; the Israelis and Egyptians each blamed the other for the renewal of fighting.<sup>1</sup> In order to put an end to the violence and ensure quiet on the war front, Kissinger, after consulting with United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, decided that the solution was to send a multinational force to the area. The idea was to rely on the United Nations observers who had been deployed along the Suez Canal and had been evacuated from their positions to their headquarters in Cairo and Jerusalem when the war began.<sup>2</sup>

Now Kissinger needed the Soviets’ consent to his proposal. In effect, the secretary of state wanted to maintain the cooperation and mutual understandings that the two countries had formulated when he was in Moscow on 20 October. These understandings revolved around a ceasefire between Israel and the Arabs and the negotiations that would ensue, under the auspices of the two superpowers, at the end of the hostilities. At 9:45 am, Kissinger spoke with the deputy head of the Soviet mission, Yuri Vorontsov,<sup>3</sup> and emphasized the American support for the proposal to send United Nations observers to the region in order to oversee the implementation of Resolution 338. Within two minutes, Vorontsov returned with a response that, according to Kissinger, was ‘clearly alarmed’.<sup>4</sup> This was a personal message from Brezhnev to the secretary of state, informing him that, according to information received from Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Israel had violated the Security Council resolution and resumed firing along the Suez Canal front on the morning of 23 October. The Soviet leader had verified the information and asserted that Israel was again publicly challenging the Security Council and its resolutions. He described the Israeli action as ‘flagrant deceit’, but added that he was certain that the US government would do

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\*Middle Eastern Studies, Bar Ilan University, Ramat Gan, Israel. Email: [Ublanga@gmail.com](mailto:Ublanga@gmail.com)

everything in its power and exert its significant influence with the Israelis to put an end to the fighting. Brezhnev's idea was that Washington would tell Israel to pull back to the positions it held when the ceasefire was accepted. In the meantime, he suggested that the Soviet Union and the United States jointly formulate a draft resolution, which would be submitted to the Security Council for urgent approval. The resolution would have two main points. First, it would reaffirm Security Council Resolution 338 of 22 October and call for both sides to pull back to the positions they held when the ceasefire resolution was adopted. The second point (which was, in effect, Sadat's suggestion) emphasized the need for the urgent dispatch of United Nations observers to oversee the ceasefire between Egypt and Israel. Sadat and Brezhnev suggested making use of the observers who had been stationed along the Suez Canal before the war and who had been transferred to Cairo when the war broke out.<sup>5</sup>

Brezhnev's proposal put the Americans in a 'serious predicament', as Kissinger put it. Contrary both to Israel's position and the available intelligence reports, the secretary of state had the impression that it was Israel that had instigated the renewed hostilities. He believed there was no way that the encircled Egyptian Third Army would launch an attack in order to seize territory and create a 'new reality' on the battlefield after Egypt had obtained a ceasefire that saved it from a humiliating defeat.<sup>6</sup> The Israeli military operation posed a serious challenge to the United States' credibility on two fronts. On one side, the Soviets charged that Israel had violated the terms of the ceasefire (which had been arranged in Moscow in negotiations with Kissinger) only a short time after Kissinger had left Jerusalem. On the other side, for the Egyptians and moderate Arab countries, the violation of the ceasefire cast a long shadow over the image of the US government as the only actor that could rein in Israel and, functioning as a credible and even-handed mediator, restart negotiations in the region. It is important to note the obvious fact that the Egyptians were helpless in the face of the Israeli military onslaught, which had been conducted using American weaponry. In these circumstances, even if indirectly and against its will, the United States found itself associated with Israeli conspiracy and deceit, a situation the US government could not accept.<sup>7</sup>

Aside from the urgency of the Soviet demarche and the question of American credibility, Kissinger had to deal with a much more fundamental question. The violation of the ceasefire and the resulting military and political situation affected the core of US policy during the crisis, since the start of the war on 6 October; namely, the need to maintain an even-handed policy. The secretary of state viewed Security Council Resolution 338 as responding to the needs and interests of all the parties concerned – Israel, the Arabs, the Soviet Union, and the United States – because it expressed the balance that the Americans espoused. The principle behind the 'balanced policy', as explained by Kissinger during a State Department staff meeting on 23 October, was that each side had to feel that the arrangement granted it some sort of gain, inasmuch as it was impossible to 'conduct a permanent relationship on the basis of unconditional surrender'.<sup>8</sup>

According to Kissinger's method of calculating gains, the Israelis' rescue from defeat and achievement of another victory over the Arabs was a gain in and of itself for them. Admittedly, it had been achieved at great cost, but it had led the Arabs to recognize that they had to conduct direct negotiations with Israel. The Arabs' major

accomplishment, as Kissinger saw it, was that they had retrieved their lost honour; even though Israel had won the war, the Arabs had not suffered a total and humiliating defeat, as had been the case in June 1967. In addition, because Security Council Resolution 338 re-affirmed Resolution 242, the Arab countries now had another basis for demanding an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 4 June 1967. Finally, the secretary of state noted that the Arabs' most important gain was that they had dented the Israelis' arrogance, which was based on confidence in their superiority over their neighbours. That is, the Arab military operation had brought Israel to the realization that only a combination of military might and diplomacy could provide a real guarantee of the security Israel sought.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast to the achievements and gains, moral and material, registered by both the Israelis and the Arabs, Kissinger found it difficult to identify any real benefit for the Soviets. In effect, this round of fighting, too, had been a setback for the Soviet Union, mostly because the Arabs suffered heavy losses of equipment and weapons they had received from the Soviet Union over the years. At the same time, the secretary of state hedged his statement and noted the paragraph of Security Council Resolution 338 that called for direct negotiations between Israel and the Arabs to be conducted 'under appropriate auspices'. Since the talks in Moscow had concluded that this sponsorship would be American-Soviet, if both sides were willing, the Soviet Union could view itself as a partner in the mediation efforts and the political process in the Middle East and as a country that still had influence in the region.<sup>10</sup>

A review of the balance sheet of gains and losses that Kissinger described to his staff led him to conclude that the war had brought the United States a number of important achievements, more than those registered by the other parties involved, and that the US would occupy a key position at the centre of the picture in the post-war Middle East.<sup>11</sup> The next day, in a different forum, he commented on the situation, in his picturesque language: 'We have come out in the catbird seat. Everyone has to come out to us since we are the only ones who can deliver'.<sup>12</sup> Kissinger pointed out that, on the one hand, Israel had learned that it could no longer rely solely on its military might and that in every war it was dependent on American assistance and support, without which it would suffer defeat.<sup>13</sup> Israel's resultant reliance on the United States gave the administration more room for political manoeuvring on all issues related to an agreement with the Arabs. On the other hand, noted the secretary of state, every reasonable Arab leader who is interested in reaching an agreement with Israel is now aware that the key to such an agreement lies in Washington and that the United States cannot be ignored in attempts to resolve the conflict. On the Arab side, the line that Kissinger wanted to pursue with regard to a diplomatic settlement would highlight their need to move closer to the Americans rather than showing them a cold shoulder, especially in light of the Arab threat of an oil embargo against the United States. In addition, the US administration should not act under pressure and extortion, but according to a settled and clear policy.<sup>14</sup>

Here we should note that Kissinger's outline of the gains related directly to the list of objectives that were brought before the Washington Special Actions Group (the 'Washington Group') during its meeting on 14 October.<sup>15</sup> Under the rubric 'Where do We Want to Go: Our Objectives', the Washington Group had outlined five objectives it sought to realize. The first was putting an end to the war in a manner that would provide diplomatic impetus to the start of negotiations for a final-status

agreement between Israel and the Arabs. The Americans hoped that they would be able to present a new peace initiative after Israel improved its military situation vis-à-vis Syria and Egypt. The second objective was to prevent Jordan from joining the Egyptian–Syrian camp and to deter Saudi Arabia from using its oil as a weapon, as a way for the two countries to demonstrate their support for the Arab war effort. A third, but no less important objective was to prevent a decisive military victory by either side. The logic behind this principle was that the humiliation of one side would do nothing to help the political process and would only hasten the next war. Therefore, contrary to their previous position, Nixon and Kissinger instructed the Defence Department to send massive amounts of American military aid to Israel, starting on 14 October. The goal of this assistance was to prevent the Egyptians and Syrians, who had received aid from their Soviet patron, from achieving a victory that would push Israel back to the borders of 4 June 1967. On the other hand, when the tables turned in Israel's favour, the United States focused on preventing another Arab defeat. The fourth objective was to minimize, as far as possible, additional damage to the relations between the United States and the Arabs. Finally, despite the fact that the war and its fallout had the potential to harm the American–Soviet détente, that easing of tension should be preserved as far as possible, even while the US took a firm position vis-à-vis the Soviets.<sup>16</sup>

To summarize, the combination of the information, objectives, and interests that were presented at the State Department staff meeting and at the special session of the Washington Group reveals the motives that prevented the United States from standing by and accepting the rout of the Egyptian Third Army. As noted, the basis of this decision was that the destruction of the Egyptian force would have destroyed the entire edifice of American policy that had been constructed during the war with regard to US interests and the country's status and role in the Middle East in the aftermath of the war. First of all, as previously noted, the political credibility that the United States had built up with the Soviet Union and the Arabs, as an actor with influence over Israel and as a fair and even-handed mediator, would disintegrate. Second, the destruction of the Third Army would have been a replay of the defeat of June 1967 and perceived as a humiliation of the Egyptian army and President Sadat. It would probably lead to latter's forced exit from the Egyptian political stage and create a new and wider opening for the Soviet Union to make military and political inroads into Egypt and lead to a new round of fighting. Hence no useful political process could come out of the destruction of the Third Army.<sup>17</sup>

It is clear that, from this stage onwards, the US administration evinced total opposition to the destruction of the Third Army and began to pressure the Israeli government to end the fighting. To Kissinger, who had breached the ceasefire by firing the first shot was not important; what was important was that the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) had gained ground and had placed the very existence of the Egyptian Third Army in jeopardy. Therefore, as we will see below, the secretary of state attributed great importance to halting the IDF advance, preventing the destruction of the Third Army (to the point of warning Israel not to do so), and restoring the ceasefire.<sup>18</sup>

To deal with the violation of the ceasefire, Kissinger chose to work with the Israelis using the give-and-take method. On the one hand, in his talks with the Soviets about re-formulating the ceasefire resolution he took a pro-Israel position. Despite the

Soviet demand that all forces return to the positions they held when the Security Council adopted Resolution 338, the United States insisted that the pullback be to the positions held when the ceasefire came into effect. On the other hand, in an attempt to prevent a crisis with the Soviet Union regarding the besieged Third Army, Kissinger asked the Israeli prime minister, Golda Meir, to order a withdrawal of 'a few hundred yards' as a demonstration of Israel's readiness to return to the military positions it held on 22 October. Meir refused; no pullback would take place, she said, in part because it was impossible to determine the original ceasefire line, given that it had not been mapped and that no observers had been sent in to the area. Kissinger refused to give in; at noon he discussed the matter again with Simcha Dinitz, the Israeli ambassador in Washington. However, despite the repeated appeals, Israel held fast to its position; the rebuff left the Americans at a dead end.<sup>19</sup>

While Kissinger was weighing his next steps, a new message from Brezhnev, this time addressed to President Nixon, arrived at 12:36 pm. In it, the Soviet Union repeated the charge that Israel had violated the ceasefire and expressed its astonishment, in light of the Israeli 'treachery' in breaking the agreement that had been reached just two days earlier. Brezhnev asked that Israel be forced to comply with the ceasefire and implement Security Council Resolution 338 immediately. He guaranteed that Egyptian President Sadat and Syrian President Hafez al-Assad would respect the principles of the resolution and went on to suggest that the Soviet Union and the United States act in concert and take 'the most decisive measures . . . without delay' in order to enforce the ceasefire. As in his message to Kissinger, Brezhnev repeated his confidence that the United States would do everything it could to bring about the implementation of the understandings that had been reached in Moscow and of the Security Council resolution. In the meantime, in the circumstances, Brezhnev added, in rather harsh tones, that 'too much is at stake, not only as concerns the situation in the Middle East, but in our relations as well'.<sup>20</sup>

If we look at the two Soviet missives, the first to Kissinger and the second to Nixon, it is difficult to understand why the Secretary of State viewed them with such gravity (especially the first). Clearly the Soviet Union did not want to escalate the situation; in neither message, for example, did it announce its intention to take unilateral action. On the contrary, in the first, more specific, message, the Soviet leader suggested employing the United Nations observers, rather than a joint Soviet-American force, to oversee the ceasefire; this idea coincided with Kissinger's own position. Moreover, apart from the seemingly ominous tone at the end of his note to President Nixon, both documents clearly convey the Soviets' desire to cooperate with the Americans to bring the war to an immediate end. This cooperation, which began with Kissinger's invitation to Moscow, continued through the feverish and productive talks in the Kremlin and concluded with the joint draft for Resolution 338. We may conjecture, based in part on the positions raised during the meeting of the Washington Group, that the Soviets wanted to take a hard line with the Americans in order to keep the Egyptians from seeing them as a paper tiger. However, the Soviets ascribed just as much importance to maintaining détente as the Americans did, and both sides recognized this. Pushed by the situation on the ground – the grave situation of the Egyptian forces and, in particular, the worsening state of the Third Army – the Soviets wielded their readiest method to put pressure on the United States

– threatening *détente*. They saw this as the surest way to restore the ceasefire and achieve full implementation of Resolution 338, including the sections regarding the post-war negotiations to settle the conflict.

At 1:10 pm, about half an hour after he received the note from Brezhnev, Nixon replied to the Soviet leader. The US president informed the Soviet leader that the United States would assume ‘full responsibility’ for getting the Israelis to terminate the hostilities and had already asked the Israeli government to suspend the fighting at once. Meanwhile, Nixon urged Brezhnev to follow the same line with the Egyptians. He ended his note in a conciliatory tone that responded directly to the harsh conclusion to Brezhnev’s note: ‘You and I have achieved an historic settlement over this past weekend and we will not permit it to be destroyed’.<sup>21</sup>

Nixon’s soothing note had two goals: preserving *détente* and ensuring continued American–Soviet cooperation. The president was concerned by the possibility of unilateral action by the Soviets, whether military – sending forces to the region – or diplomatic – submitting a draft resolution to the Security Council that the United States would certainly veto. Consequently, Kissinger called the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Anatoly Dobrynin, at 1:55 pm, and suggested drafting a joint statement that would reaffirm the ceasefire of 22 October and demand that the Israeli and Egyptian armies ‘be returned to the positions they occupied at the time the cease-fire became effective’. The secretary of state likewise noted that the observers who were already in the Middle East, including those in Cairo, could be sent to the battle zone in order to oversee implementation of the ceasefire.<sup>22</sup>

At 2:26 pm, Brezhnev sent a second note to Nixon (the third of the day). The Soviet note was, in effect, official assent to the joint Soviet–American demarche that Kissinger and Dobrynin had devised an hour earlier. Brezhnev wrote that the Egyptians would be willing to lay down their arms immediately if Israel, too, accepted the ceasefire. He asked that this information be passed along to the Israeli leadership, along with emphasis, in ‘the most explicit form’, on the need to put an immediate end to the hostile acts. He further suggested that the Security Council be convened urgently so that they could work together and in full cooperation to implement the understandings that had been reached between the secretary of state and the Soviet ambassador.<sup>23</sup>

The American–Soviet agreement sought to keep the IDF from completing the encirclement of the Third Army and, even more so, destroy it as a fighting force. This was, in fact, the Israeli plan. When the Israelis found out about the new diplomatic initiative, Prime Minister Meir sent Kissinger a strongly worded note. She told him that Israel could not accept repeated Soviet–Egyptian ultimatums, which then gained American support; Israel would neither accept the resolution nor implement it. From the Israeli prime minister’s point of view, the new draft resolution looked like an ‘Egyptian–Soviet imposition’. She regretted the fact that the United States was choosing to cooperate with Egypt and the Soviet Union.<sup>24</sup> Kissinger, on the other hand, read the Israeli response as the venting of deep-seated frustrations that were the result of fierce fighting over the course of three long and arduous weeks. However, as previously noted, the United States could not stand by and watch Israel humiliate Egypt. What gave substance to the urgent need to bring the hostilities to an immediate halt and made the Americans aware the depth of Egypt’s – and Sadat’s – predicament, was an unexpected and urgent note from the Egyptian president to Nixon, sent at 3:15 pm.<sup>25</sup>

The Egyptian note raised two important points. First, Sadat asked the United States to 'intervene effectively', even to the point of using armed force, in order to ensure full implementation of the Security Council resolution of 22 October. This was an extremely strange and surprising request, not only because Cairo and Washington had not had diplomatic relations since June 1967, but also because of the implicit suggestion that the US employ force against Israel, its ally in the Middle East, which had just suffered one of the most gruelling wars in its history. According to Kissinger, though, just as the US could not respond positively to Egypt's request, nor could it allow Israel to complete the encirclement and destruction of the Third Army.<sup>26</sup>

The second point that arose from the note was the direct link the Egyptian president drew between the results of the war and the diplomatic process that would follow it. Sadat put special emphasis on American credibility – its ability to make good on its guarantees of Resolution 338 and on other guarantees it might offer in the future. The Egyptian president added that he viewed the US administration as fully responsible for the recent developments (meaning Israel's violation of the ceasefire) and, consequently, cast doubt on the Americans' ability to fulfil their commitments.<sup>27</sup>

The mere fact that Sadat communicated with Nixon directly encouraged the administration to do its utmost to end the fighting as soon as possible. As noted, Egypt and the United States did not have diplomatic relations; nonetheless, contact between the two countries was maintained throughout the war via back channels. This took the form of regular contacts between Secretary of State Kissinger and the Egyptian national security advisor, Hafez Ismail, which dated back to the talks between the two in February and May 1973. But a formal note from the president of Egypt to his American counterpart, while the war was still raging, added a dramatic element to the diplomatic game. Besides hinting at an Egyptian desire to turn over a new leaf in bilateral relations and setting a basis for such relations, Egypt demanded immediate involvement by the United States. Since the latter had assigned itself a central role in the diplomatic process aimed at a peace accord and wanted to strengthen its ties with the Arab world, Sadat's note constituted the incentive, were one required, to restrain the Israeli military and enforce the ceasefire.

This is why, in his the reply to Sadat, Nixon emphasized the American commitment to work towards a diplomatic agreement between Israel and Egypt. Nevertheless, in order to eliminate any ambiguity, he made it plain that the only thing the United States could guarantee was that it was fully committed to advancing a process that would lead to a diplomatic agreement. Though he did not make any promise about the nature of the future accord, Nixon wrote that he had instructed Secretary Kissinger to urge Israel to accept the ceasefire and he was now asking Sadat to do the same. He also expressed his hope that implementation of Security Council Resolution 339 would serve the interests of both sides. In fact, at approximately 7:00 pm, shortly before Nixon's note was sent off to Sadat, the Security Council approved a second ceasefire resolution. This resolution, which was the combined work of Kissinger, Vorontsov, and Dobrynin, ordered the sides to return their military forces to the lines of 22 October and requested the United Nations secretary-general to dispatch an observer force to the lines between the Israeli and Egyptian forces in order to oversee implementation of the resolution.<sup>28</sup>

However, before Resolution 339 was passed, the IDF managed to complete the encirclement of the Third Army, which could no longer receive any reinforcements or supplies. The condition of the Egyptian army deteriorated; the new situation on the ground provided Israel with a strong bargaining chip, but also produced heavy American and Soviet pressure on it.<sup>29</sup> The Soviet leadership issued a communiqué that expressed its 'furious protest against the criminal actions of the government of Israel'. The Soviets stated that, under cover of a sham acceptance of the ceasefire, 'the Israeli storm troopers criminally attacked' Egyptian civilians and soldiers, thereby 'defying the nations of the world'. The Soviet Union accordingly demanded that the government of Israel halt the fighting and pull back to the lines held by the sides at the time Resolution 338 was adopted. In addition, as it had done during previous Arab–Israeli wars, the Soviet Union warned Israel that, should it not comply with the ceasefire resolution, it would face 'the most serious consequences, which would be caused by the continuation of its aggressive actions against Egypt and Syria'.<sup>30</sup>

The United States, for its part, wanted to end the war before a crisis broke out between the superpowers, to maintain the cooperation with the Soviets, and to strengthen its ties with Egypt. This is why it agreed to the text of the new resolution (339), despite Israel's opposition.<sup>31</sup> Nor did Kissinger lessen his efforts to bring about an Israeli withdrawal. He informed Dinitz of Sadat's urgent call for a ceasefire and the Soviet pressure on the matter and suggested that it would be preferable for Israel to pull back on its own rather than be forced to do so.<sup>32</sup> However, the Israeli government stuck to its guns and refused to pull back to the ceasefire lines of 22 October. The Israeli explanation was that it had been Egypt that resumed the fighting, which resulted in further Egyptian territorial losses. Nonetheless, Prime Minister Meir told Kissinger of her sincere commitment to hold fire if Sadat would do the same, 'regardless of all the advantages' Israel might gain from a continuation of the fighting.<sup>33</sup>

Meir's reply put the US administration 'in a tough position', especially because the Third Army and the city of Suez were encircled and cut off from any possibility of resupply, a situation that threatened a humanitarian crisis.<sup>34</sup> Despite the stalemate, Kissinger asked Dobrynin to pass on the Israeli message to Sadat. During his conversation with the Soviet ambassador, the secretary of state said nothing about an Israeli withdrawal, not even when asked about it, and focused on the need to end the fighting.<sup>35</sup> Kissinger, however, viewed the Israeli desire to implement a ceasefire in an entirely different fashion. In his view, Israel had advanced a 'seemingly defensive proposal', but was really interested in forcing the surrender of the Third Army. His immediate need was to do everything possible to forestall this eventuality, inasmuch as now, with the Third Army surrounded, it was no longer possible to avert a crisis with the Soviet Union and Egypt. The immediate consequence of encirclement would be an Egyptian attempt to break out, so that even if the Israeli forces held their fire, the fighting would resume immediately. 'Israel's decision', Kissinger said, 'guaranteed a major crisis in which, if pressed to an extreme', the United States would be forced to keep its word and cooperate with the Soviets, fulfilling its commitment in the Moscow talks. Consequently, the US administration directed most of its diplomatic energies towards implementation of the ceasefire, as per Security Council Resolution 339, as a first step in dealing with the problem of the trapped Third Army.<sup>36</sup>

During the early hours of 24 October, General Ensio Siilasvuo, commander of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in the Middle East, called Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defence minister, in order to coordinate the precise time at which the ceasefire would come into effect. The Israeli government agreed to a ceasefire at 7:00 am, on condition that the Egyptians, too, gave their express consent. After that agreement had been obtained, the Israeli forces on the Egyptian front received an order to hold their fire at the appointed hour. Shortly before the appointed hour, however, Israeli forces were ordered to capture the city of Suez. The military operation ran into difficulties; in addition to the heavy human toll, it dragged the two global superpowers into their most serious crisis since 1962.<sup>37</sup>

At 8:00 am on October 24, Kissinger received an urgent message from Ismail, the Egyptian national security advisor, informing him that Israeli forces had gone on the offensive against the Third Army. In light of the Israeli violation of the ceasefire, Ismail asked Kissinger to see to it 'that practical and effective measures are taken to oblige Israel to comply with the ceasefire resolution'.<sup>38</sup> When the secretary of state raised the Egyptian charges with the Israeli ambassador, the latter denied them and asserted that, after the ceasefire had come into effect, Egyptian soldiers of the Third Army had attempted to break out of the pocket and that Egypt had also airdropped supplies to it. The Israelis were not advancing, Dinitz promised, but merely firing back in self-defence. Kissinger lost his patience; he did not believe that Egypt would institute offensive actions after seeking a lifeline for the Third Army. He explained to the Israeli ambassador that, despite the administration's great fondness and support for Israel, under no circumstances would it enter a confrontation with the Soviets.<sup>39</sup>

At almost the same hour as the conversation between Kissinger and Dinitz, the White House received a note from Sadat. This was a desperate plea from the Egyptian president to his American counterpart, asking Nixon to get Israel to halt its assault on the Third Army, as he had promised he would do. Sadat also asked Nixon 'to intervene even [with forces] on the ground to force Israel to comply with the cease-fire'. Sadat reminded the American president that the Israeli actions at the front were impeding the realization of the goal shared by the Americans and the Egyptians, namely, a final resolution of the conflict.<sup>40</sup>

Kissinger wasted no time. At 9:32 am, only ten minutes after the end of their previous conversation, he called Dinitz again with the details of the Egyptian communication. To put more pressure on Israel, the Secretary of State also shared with the ambassador the Soviet suspicions of an American-Israeli cabal and the American concern that Sadat had sent a similar note to the Soviets, who would respond by sending armed forces to the region. When Dinitz explained that it was not Israel that bore responsibility for the violation of the ceasefire, Kissinger rejected the ambassador's statement<sup>41</sup> and told him forcefully that, despite America's sympathy for Israel and the friendly ties between the two countries, 'there's a limit beyond which we can't go and one of them is we cannot make Brezhnev look like an idiot'.<sup>42</sup> After Kissinger again pressed Dinitz to stop the fighting with the Egyptians, the latter suggested that the American military attaché in Tel Aviv visit the battlefield to evaluate the situation and be persuaded that Israel was respecting the ceasefire.<sup>43</sup>

The American diplomatic efforts were aimed not only at Israel but also at the Egyptians and Soviets, in order to cool the air and prevent a crisis. Kissinger updated Dobrynin concerning the pressure he had put on Israel to halt the fighting

immediately and about Nixon's pledge to Sadat to prevent further offensive action by the Israelis. He emphasized the great importance Washington attached to the Soviet–American understandings and its sincere intention to respect and enforce the agreements that had been reached with Moscow. In addition, Kissinger shared with Dobrynin the emerging agreement between Israel and the United States to dispatch several American officers from the office of the military attaché in Tel Aviv to the front in order to ensure that Israel was not engaged in any offensive actions.<sup>44</sup>

However, the Soviet Union did not have great hopes for the American diplomatic efforts. At 10:19 am, Dobrynin forwarded to Nixon, via Secretary of State Kissinger, a message from Brezhnev.<sup>45</sup> The note repeated the Soviet leadership's doubts that the United States could be trusted to honour agreements, and especially its ability to force its ally to accept the ceasefire. After all, wrote the Russian leader, Israel resumed its attack on the Egyptian army only a short time after the passage of Resolution 339 by the Security Council and after Nixon had promised that the United States would take responsibility for getting Israel to stop shooting. Brezhnev accordingly wrote that it was now Nixon's task to make it plain to the Israelis that they must honour the ceasefire and 'immediately stop their actions of provocation'. He also expressed his hope that the two superpowers would remain faithful to the agreements they had reached over the past several days.<sup>46</sup>

Kissinger, who saw that the edifice of American credibility, which he had worked so hard to build up, was crumbling, replied to Dobrynin that the US administration was in direct and constant contact with the Israelis. He again noted the vigorous demand that Israel cease its actions near the Suez Canal and help the military attachés from Tel Aviv reach the front. Above all, the secretary of state emphasized that the Israelis had been told, in no uncertain terms, 'that a continuation of these operations will mean a total re-evaluation of our relations, including supplies'.<sup>47</sup>

While Kissinger was focused on the Soviet front, Nixon had replied to Sadat at 9:52 am:

Immediately upon receipt of your message, I have instructed Secretary Kissinger to make urgent representations to the Israelis that the continuation of offensive military operations would have the most serious consequences in terms of US/Israeli relationships. . . . I want to assure you that the US is unalterably opposed to offensive Israeli military action and is prepared to take effective steps to end them. . . . Secretary Kissinger is getting in touch with Mr. Ismail later today about the possibility of direct conversations between our two sides about post-war diplomacy.<sup>48</sup>

In this note, Nixon made another contribution to the emerging relationship between Washington and Cairo. Apart from the strengthening of mutual trust, thanks to the American willingness, expressed at the highest level and in unequivocal terms, to oppose all offensive action by Israel, its ally in the Middle East, the last sentence of the note was extremely significant. It expressed the need to shift American–Egyptian ties to a direct channel and to lay the groundwork for the day after the war, both for a resolution of the Israeli–Egyptian conflict and for the renewal of the ties between Egypt and the United States.

Indeed, Nixon was not doling out false promises regarding his contacts with the Israeli leadership. Since the early hours, the White House had been exerting pressure on Israel to honour the ceasefire. That pressure reached its height at 10:35 am, when the White House chief of staff, General Alexander Haig, told Dinitz that the president took a grave view on Israel's continuation of the fighting. Haig emphasized that were the hostile acts to continue, Nixon 'will consider disassociating himself from Israel'.<sup>49</sup> The pressure finally achieved the desired result and Israel caved in. Within about half an hour, the US president was able to send a second note to his Egyptian counterpart, informing him that Prime Minister Meir had ordered all Israeli combat forces to initiate no offensive action, to remain in defensive positions, and to return fire only in self-defence. In return, Nixon again asked Sadat to have the Egyptian forces hold their fire too, and apprised him of the suggestion that the American military attachés be dispatched to the front to ensure that Israel was complying with the ceasefire agreement.<sup>50</sup>

However, despite the clarifications and attempts to lower the tension, the American efforts failed because, as the hours passed, Cairo grew ever more desperate and felt the noose tightening around the Third Army. A short while after another call by Kissinger to Ismail,<sup>51</sup> a new Sadat message arrived at the White House. The Egyptian president accused Israel of violating the ceasefire and carrying out deliberate attacks on the western side of the Suez Canal. Sadat asked that Nixon be informed of his consent to the immediate dispatch of American observers or military units, in order to enforce Security Council Resolutions 338 and 339, and added that he had 'formally' made a similar request of the Soviet Union. The Americans were also informed that Egypt had requested a meeting of the United Nations Security Council to discuss Israel's continuing violations of the ceasefire and to request that the United States and Soviet Union send troops to the Middle East.<sup>52</sup>

Sadat's letter created a new dynamic to American Middle East policy in general and to its efforts to end the October War in particular. For Kissinger and his colleagues in the senior echelons of American decision-making, it produced a crisis on top of another crisis, threatened Soviet-American détente, and led to the US military being put on the highest state of alert since the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. There were two main reasons for the American reservations about Sadat's step. First, the Egyptian president had totally ignored all of the American attempts to still the waters (including Kissinger's willingness to visit Cairo on 7 November) and had agreed to a process that the United States had not suggested and vehemently refused to carry out. The Americans had no intention of sending armed forces to the Middle East, certainly not in cooperation with the Soviets. Second, after having waged a fierce diplomatic campaign throughout the war and chalking up impressive gains, and notably a reduction of Soviet influence in the region, the United States had no intention of allowing the Soviet Union a chance to reassert its influence in the Middle East.<sup>53</sup>

Whereas the Americans understood Sadat's note, including the Egyptian appeal to the Security Council, as portending a crisis, the Soviet response to the Egyptian moves was slow and deliberate, with no signs of urgency – at least at the outset – or of a desire to exploit the window of opportunity that had opened. Moreover, when Kissinger met with Dobrynin at 4:12 pm and informed him that the United States would veto any resolution that called for the permanent members of the Security

Council to send troops to the region, the Soviet ambassador replied, according to Kissinger's own account, in a calm and conciliatory manner.<sup>54</sup> It was only three hours later, when the Security Council convened in response to the Egyptian request, that Dobrynin informed Kissinger of the Soviet intention to support a request to send Soviet–American military forces, or Soviet units alone, to the Suez front in order to enforce the ceasefire. Kissinger responded firmly that the United States would veto any draft resolution to that effect. He urged the Soviet ambassador to help see to it that the two countries avoided disagreement on the subject and cooperate in order to prevent passage of such a resolution. The secretary of state added that if the Soviet Union wanted ‘confrontation, we will have to have one’. He concluded, ‘We are going to veto and it would be a pity to be in a confrontation’.<sup>55</sup>

The dramatic development vis-à-vis the Soviet Union led Kissinger to make a number of diplomatic moves in order to form a united front against the moves taking shape in the Security Council. In addition to instructing the United States ambassador to the United Nations, John Scali, to veto the Egyptian proposal, Kissinger updated the British and Chinese regarding the contacts with the Soviets and asked them to support an American veto. Ambassador Dinitz also received a call in which Israel was requested to display special caution in its military operations against Egypt, given the sensitive situation.<sup>56</sup> Finally, the secretary of state sent a message to Sadat on Nixon's behalf, in which he explained that the United States was opposed to the dispatch of military units to Egypt, including American and Soviet troops, to enforce the ceasefire, and that the United States would veto such a proposal. The main reason for the American opposition, which was also the reason presented to Sadat at the peak of tension between Washington and Moscow, was the danger posed by a confrontation in the Middle East between the two nuclear superpowers. Nixon asked his Egyptian counterpart to stick with the Security Council resolutions of 22 and 23 October and request the dispatch of a United Nations observer force to oversee implementation of the ceasefire. The American president emphasized the United States commitment to bring about a diplomatic settlement in the Middle East, but at the same time affirmed the American insistence on avoiding ‘an unnecessary confrontation which would but make more difficult and dangerous an already complex situation’.<sup>57</sup>

As noted, Kissinger interpreted the Soviet Union's unexpected stance in advance of the Security Council debate as a reflection of its diplomatic failure during the war and its declining stature throughout the Middle East, especially in Egypt. Now, the secretary of state believed, the Soviet Union was trying to improve its position; hence the United States should not compromise or be flexible, but rather take a rigid stance.<sup>58</sup> He did just that with Dobrynin, when the latter told him, at 8:25 pm, that the Soviet United Nations ambassador, Yakov Malik, had asked the Security Council to have the two superpowers send military forces to the Suez Canal front. In response, Kissinger urged Dobrynin to display responsibility and restraint. However, he also hinted at the threat to détente when he warned that the Soviet move constituted a shift ‘from the closest cooperation . . . to a very dangerous course’.<sup>59</sup>

Indeed, Kissinger viewed Malik's speech as a significant step towards a confrontation between the two superpowers. About 30 minutes after the conversation with Dobrynin, Scali reported that Malik had spoken harshly of the United States, launched a frontal attack on Israel, and declared that Sadat's request was ‘entirely

justified'. In addition, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations called for all the members of the Security Council to sever diplomatic relations with Israel and placed the onus for the Middle East situation squarely on Kissinger's shoulders. The proof, according to Malik, was that the secretary of state had visited Tel Aviv just before the collapse of Resolution 338. This statement was an unequivocal expression of the Soviets' doubts about Washington's declared desire to bring about the implementation of the ceasefire, as well as their scant trust in the Americans. These sentiments stood out even more when Malik claimed that the Americans were capable of imposing their will on the Israelis, but the latter continued to ignore the ceasefire and Security Council resolutions. Nevertheless, added Scali, the Soviet ambassador had not buried all chances of compromise; though he had criticized the makeup of the United Nations observer force, his words suggested that the Soviets would agree to its being dispatched to the front, as the United States had recommended.<sup>60</sup>

While Kissinger was conducting a round of consultations about the increased hostility of the Soviet position, Dobrynin passed along a message from Brezhnev to Nixon (the fifth). This produced a sea change in the American attitude to the events in the Middle East. After laying out, in the first paragraph, Israel's continued refusal to heed Security Council Resolutions 338 and 339, in part by seizing additional territory on the west bank of the Suez Canal, Brezhnev continued with a solution that, he believed, could end the war between Israel and Egypt.

Let us together, the Soviet Union and the United States urgently dispatch to Egypt Soviet and American military contingents, with their mission the implementation of the decision of the Security Council of August [October] 22 and 23 concerning the cessation of fire. . . . It is necessary to adhere without delay. 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. We cannot allow arbitrariness on the part of Israel.

We have an understanding with you which we value highly – that is to act jointly. Let us implement this understanding on a concrete case in this complex situation. It will be a good example of our agreed actions in the interest of peace. We have no doubt that all those who are favor of détente, of peace, of good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States will only welcome such joint action of ours. I will appreciate immediate and clear reply from you.<sup>61</sup>

The reactions to Brezhnev's note at the highest levels of the US administration were harsh, reflecting a drastic deterioration in the relations between the two super-powers. Nixon described Brezhnev's message as 'the most serious threat to the US-Soviet relations since the Cuban Missile Crisis';<sup>62</sup> while Kissinger, who viewed the note as a Soviet ultimatum, wrote in his memoirs that the content of the letter was 'one of the most serious challenges to an American President by a Soviet leader'. In addition to the Soviet ultimatum and threat, Kissinger inferred from the note that Egypt's sorry military state had placed the Soviet Union in great stress and tension. He deduced this from the Soviet Union's willingness to send military forces to the front unilaterally, despite Washington's position, and from the fact that the note had been sent at 4:32 am Moscow time.<sup>63</sup> Consequently, as will be seen below, the

American leadership believed that a firm and extreme response was required to prevent the Soviet Union from carrying out its threat. We may ask, though, whether a rigid and unyielding American response to the Soviet message was indeed necessary.

When he addressed the crisis of October 1973 in his books *Years of Upheaval* and *Crisis*, Kissinger quoted 'the operative parts' of Brezhnev's note. He believed these were the sections that underscored the Soviet leader's call to send a joint Soviet–American military force to the region. Kissinger also emphasized the nature of the threat implied by an American refusal to cooperate, namely, unilateral Soviet action.<sup>64</sup> However, careful scrutiny of the contents of the note, especially the last section, which Kissinger did not publish, raises serious doubts about the perceived threat. First, Brezhnev wrote to Nixon requesting a joint effort by their two countries. Although the urgency and alarm in the Soviet demand stand out in the beginning of the second paragraph, they are nonetheless closely associated with a specific and detailed offer for Soviet–American cooperation. On the other hand, regarding the unilateral dispatch of a Soviet force, Brezhnev wrote explicitly that the Soviet leadership would need to weigh such a move, but he certainly did not declare that it would follow through on the idea. In other words, Moscow was likely to consider unilateral steps, but not at all certain it would carry them out.<sup>65</sup>

Second, a reading of the fourth and last paragraph cannot miss the conciliatory tone, which Kissinger ignored for reasons that are unclear. In his note, Brezhnev repeatedly emphasized his desire to cooperate, maintain the peace and détente between the two superpowers, and implement the Soviet–American understandings that had been reached as a result of the fruitful talks with the secretary of state in Moscow. The Soviet leader doubtless understood the very real danger to Soviet–American relations should the Third Army be destroyed and wanted to avert a crisis, not trigger another one.<sup>66</sup>

Support for the view that the American secretary of state gave Brezhnev's note an unsympathetic reading can be found in Dobrynin's account of the episode. In his memoirs, the Soviet ambassador in Washington wrote that the message had, admittedly, been couched in belligerent terms; but, he added, it had been misunderstood – the Politburo had no intention whatsoever of sending combat units to the Middle East. First, this would have been a 'reckless' step both militarily and diplomatically; second, the Soviet Union did not have the ability to do so. Moreover, added Dobrynin, even if the Soviet Union had had the means to dispatch forces to the Middle East, it would never have done so, knowing only too well that that would have led to direct confrontation between the two superpowers.<sup>67</sup> To this must be added Ambassador Malik's Security Council remarks, which, as noted above, attacked the United States and supported Sadat's request but did not rule out sending a United Nations observer force to the front.

As previously noted, Washington viewed Brezhnev's note as an attempt by Moscow to impose a diktat that would bring the war to an end on terms favourable to it. It was clear that the United States could not accept such a situation, since its agreement to Moscow's terms would have restored the Red Army's presence in Egypt and that country's return to the Soviet sphere of influence. Moreover, American acceptance of Brezhnev's proposal would have led to the collapse of the Middle East strategy that the State Department had charted and the loss of the Americans diplomatic gains notched during the war. Kissinger therefore began devising a

vigorous plan of action 'that shocked the Soviets' and eventually caused them to drop their idea.<sup>68</sup>

Along with his desire to react forcefully to the Soviet position, the secretary of state also believed that a symbolic withdrawal of Israeli forces would be an appropriate and immediate solution to the crisis facing the US administration. However, when he raised the idea with Dinitz once more, the latter did not believe Prime Minister Meir would agree to it. In a reply that was calculated to caution as well as intimidate the Israelis, Kissinger noted that although the United States was opposed to Brezhnev's proposal, 'this is not impossible' that the Soviet Union would send troops unilaterally to the war zone and these would go into action against Israel.<sup>69</sup>

It must be noted that Brezhnev's note added another piece to the worrisome intelligence picture about the seriousness of the Soviet intentions to carry out their threat to deploy forces to the Middle East. Information that reached the CIA indicated that the Soviet Union had halted its airlift to the Middle East during the early hours of 24 October, although the United States continued its airlift to Israel. For the Americans, there could be only one possible meaning to this sudden step: the Soviets needed as many cargo planes as possible in order to transport their airborne divisions, already on heightened alert, to the region, as soon as the order to do so was given. The Americans also noted that units of the East German army had been placed on alert and that the Soviet Navy had increased its presence in the Mediterranean Sea to a record 85 vessels. Twelve ships, including two amphibious craft, were in the port of Alexandria.<sup>70</sup> Finally, senior American echelons began to suspect that the Soviet Union had stationed nuclear weapons in Egypt.<sup>71</sup>

At 10:40 pm, the Washington Group gathered in the White House situation room for a meeting that lasted until 3:00 am on 25 October.<sup>72</sup> Those attending, besides Kissinger, were Secretary of Defence James R. Schlesinger; William Colby, the director of Central Intelligence; Admiral Thomas Moorer, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; White House chief of staff Alexander Haig; General Brent Scowcroft, the deputy assistant to the president for National Security Affairs; and Kissinger's National Security Council military aide, Jonathan T. Howe.<sup>73</sup> A short time before the meeting began, Kissinger spoke with Dobrynin and told him that the United States would take a very dim view of a unilateral Soviet move before it had been able to convey its reply to the last note. He also asked him not to pressure the US administration for a speedy reply. Dobrynin, in this and other conversations during the course of that night, did not demand an immediate answer and did not set Kissinger a time limit.<sup>74</sup>

The deliberations at the late-night meeting dealt with three topics (sometimes simultaneously): the Soviet Union, Israel, and Egypt. Regarding the Soviet Union, the most important of the three, the Washington Group endeavoured to formulate a policy to respond to the Soviet proposal to dispatch a joint military force to Egypt or, even worse, to the possibility that the Soviet Union would do so unilaterally. But before the decision-makers could begin discussing this Damoclean sword that hung over them throughout the session, Kissinger wanted to understand what had led to the radical change, as he saw it, in the Soviet stance, and whether Brezhnev's note was part of a carefully thought-out strategy. His surprise was all the greater in light of the fact that 24 October had passed more or less in quietly, with no unusual events that might have portended the future.<sup>75</sup>

In an attempt to answer this question, Kissinger reviewed three possibilities. One, the Soviets had planned it all out in advance, in effect starting on 13 October, when the war began turning in Israel's favour. If so, his invitation to Moscow, too, 'went through the charade'. Two, the Soviet leadership had not had a deliberate plan but had arrived at this position gradually, after realizing that its Arab clients were losing this war, too. In light of the approaching victory by Israel, the US client, the Soviet Union could not acquiesce in further damage to its status and decided to react. The third possibility was that Moscow believed that Israel was misleading it, continuing the hostilities and seizing additional Egyptian territory on the false pretext that it was the Egyptians who were refusing to lay down their arms. Kissinger was sceptical about the first scenario, which would have meant the end to détente; hence he assumed that the Soviets' motives were a combination of the second and third hypotheses.<sup>76</sup>

Pursuing Kissinger's analysis, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Moorer, offered a military perspective on a number of points that, he asserted, might point to premeditation on the part of the Soviet. First, the seven Soviet airborne divisions had been placed on full alert. Second, the number of Soviet cargo flights to Egypt had been cut sharply and suddenly, a move that suggested the need to use the planes to transport combat units to the front.<sup>77</sup> Third, despite the previous observation, the Soviets were continuing their seaborne supplies to Egypt at full strength; it was quite possible that the ships were transporting military equipment, including arms, for use by Soviet airborne forces that would be landed near the battle zone.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to the multiple evaluations of the Soviets' motives by Kissinger and Moorer, General Haig had few doubts. Based on the sequence of events, the White House chief of staff concluded that the Soviet leadership was determined to send forces to the war zone, had already made the decision to act unilaterally, and would do so in broad daylight, that is, within a few hours. Haig noted, too, that whether the ultimatum was part of a calculated plan or the result of frustration, it was motivated by the Soviet realization that it had lost its influence and status in the Middle East. The secretary of state supplemented Haig's presentation with his own assessment that the hawkish elements of the Soviet leadership had 'prevailed over Brezhnev' and that the main impetus behind the change in Soviet policy was the events of 16 October, when Israel turned the tide on the Egyptian front and its forces crossed the Suez Canal heading west.<sup>79</sup>

All the members of the Washington Group agreed that a much more significant element in the timing of the Soviet ultimatum was Nixon's political situation. On Saturday night, 20 October 1973, Attorney General Elliot Richardson and his deputy, William Ruckelshaus, resigned their posts rather than comply with the president's demand to fire the special prosecutor investigating the Watergate Affair. The sudden development, dubbed the 'Saturday Night Massacre', caused a public outcry and amplified the calls for Nixon's impeachment.<sup>80</sup>

The broad consensus of those at the meeting was that the domestic American political crisis and the president's dysfunction were the main impetus for the Soviet note. That is, Moscow interpreted the deterioration of Nixon's position as weakness, such that the administration would be unable to respond to the swift chain of events in the Middle East, especially the diplomatic and military moves it was initiating. In fact, shortly before the Washington Group began its meeting, Kissinger confessed to

Haig that the Soviet leadership viewed Nixon 'as a cripple facing impeachment' and, having found itself a golden opportunity to renew its presence in Egypt, had understandably jumped at it.<sup>81</sup>

An hour after the meeting began, and well before the American reply had been sent to Moscow, the members of the group decided to take a concrete and demonstrative first step against the Soviet Union, in order to express the seriousness of the American opposition to the threat implied by Brezhnev's note. At 11:41 pm, the US armed forces were placed on Level 3 alert; this meant that more than 2.5 million Americans were placed in readiness, and a call-up of reserve forces, which began immediately.<sup>82</sup> This step was taken without Nixon's approval, at the sole initiative and responsibility of those at the meeting. (Nixon was informed of the move a short while later). Concurrently, Kissinger sent a message to Dobrynin via General Scowcroft, requesting that the Soviet Union refrain from taking unilateral action as long as the US administration had not yet replied to the last note; were such action to take place, 'it would have the most serious consequences'. The Soviet ambassador's calm response that Moscow was still waiting to hear from Washington left Kissinger with the distinct impression that the Soviet Union was playing a game of nerves with the Americans. This impression reinforced the Americans' sense of being threatened, a feeling that grew stronger as the meeting progressed and more information about military preparations in Soviet bloc countries streamed in. One such item mentioned eight Antonov 22 transport planes that had been sent to Budapest, which could be used to carry out Brezhnev's threat and fly 5,000 soldiers to Egypt every day.<sup>83</sup>

The security situation as pictured by the American decision-makers, along with their assessment that the signal sent by the higher state of alert would not be perceived in time, spurred the Washington Group to take an additional series of military steps. At 12:20 am, the 82nd Airborne Division was placed on alert. Five minutes later, the order was given for the aircraft carrier *John F. Kennedy* to sail from Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea and for the aircraft carrier *Franklin Delano Roosevelt* to redeploy from Sicily to Crete, where it would join the aircraft carrier *Independence*. At 1:45 am, the commander of all the US forces in Europe, who had just conducted joint manoeuvres with NATO forces, received an order cancelling the American troops' return to the United States. Finally, instructions were issued to return 75 B-52 bombers from Guam to the continental United States. In addition to raising the military alert level, the Washington Group continued work on the US response to Brezhnev's note, which it decided to deliver to the Soviets in the early morning of 25 October. The point of the delay was to buy more time, to complete the military preparations, and to ensure that these steps would be thoroughly understood by the Soviet Union.<sup>84</sup>

In fact, at 1:45 am, wanting to find out whether Moscow had detected the American signals, Scowcroft called Dobrynin again and emphasized that Moscow should wait to receive Washington's official answer before acting. The Soviet ambassador's reply was the same as before: he had informed Moscow of the American need for more time and he would be available for consultation if necessary. Kissinger, who had expected a soothing statement, saw that the level of tension was rising and the threat of a confrontation between the two superpowers was becoming more tangible.<sup>85</sup>

The second focus of the Washington Group's deliberations was Israel. Kissinger viewed the offensive on 23 October and the violation of the ceasefire as the 'straw

that broke the camel's back' for the Soviets and that had produced their decision to exploit the situation and send forces to Egypt.<sup>86</sup> Shortly after the meeting began, at 11:00 pm, Dinitz and Kissinger met at the White House. The latter informed the Israeli ambassador of the American opposition to the dispatch of military forces to the Middle East and asked the ambassador to secure the reply of the Israeli leadership in Jerusalem to the Soviet message. The secretary of state tried to extract Israeli concessions from Dinitz during this conversation, too. But Prime Minister Meir and Defence Minister Dayan viewed the very request to ease the stranglehold on the Third Army and pull back the Israeli forces as an indication of an American readiness to 'fold' and, therefore, as dangerous. Israel's intractability on this issue had two roots. From a military standpoint, Israel viewed relaxing the noose as fraught with danger, given that, should the fighting be renewed, its forces would be facing two reinforced armies, the Second and Third, on both banks of the Suez Canal. From a psychological standpoint, David Elazar, the chief of the Israeli General Staff, held that the war had been won by the encirclement of the Third Army; the American were now trying to 'prevent Israel's victory' by forcing it to ease the pressure on the Third Army, while 'saving the Egyptians from catastrophe'.<sup>87</sup>

However, so as not to leave Kissinger totally unsatisfied, Meir and Dayan suggested a bilateral withdrawal and exchanges of territory. That is, the Israeli forces would be pulled back to the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, up to ten kilometres from the canal, while the Egyptians did the same on the western side. In the end, the two armies would be separated by a demilitarized strip ten kilometres wide on either side of the Canal, in which international observers and inspectors would be stationed. Kissinger immediately rejected the proposal, on the grounds that the Egyptians would never agree to it. He did not believe there was any chance that Sadat would agree to withdraw from territory his forces had won after heavy fighting and return the Egyptian army to the positions it occupied on the eve of the war, and thus to the stalemate that had prevailed since June 1967. In effect, the secretary of state had received a reply with which he could do nothing, because the Israeli government held fast to its position and was unwilling to make further concessions that might lessen the Soviet pressure somewhat.<sup>88</sup>

The third main topic of the deliberations by the Washington Group was, as noted, Egypt. Here the assembled officials were looking for a way to get Sadat to withdraw his request for American and Soviet troops to be sent to Egypt – a request that had created the opening for the Soviet Union to declare its intention of examining the possibility of unilaterally dispatching a Soviet military force, if the United States declined to send a joint force to the region. Five minutes before midnight, Kissinger sent Sadat a note, on Nixon's behalf, in which he emphasized two important points related to the American position in the crisis. The first point was the vigorous American opposition to the dispatch of a joint American–Soviet force to Egypt. Nixon asked his opposite number to rethink his request, given the likely consequences for Egypt were the two nuclear superpowers to confront each other on Egyptian soil. The second point was that should Egypt persist in its request for troops to be dispatched, and all the more so should the Soviet do so unilaterally, the attempt to begin a political process aimed at an agreement and to renew diplomatic relations between Cairo and Washington would be impacted negatively. The United States would be forced to cancel the secretary of state's planned visit to Cairo, scheduled

for 7 November 1973. Although he hinted at a certain setback to the improving relations between the United States and Egypt, Nixon promised that his administration would bring its influence to bear on Israel in pursuit of full implementation of the Security Council resolution.<sup>89</sup>

At 5:40 am on 25 October, estimating that the Soviets had had sufficient time to detect the American military moves, Kissinger sent off Nixon's reply to Brezhnev, as it had been worded by the Washington Group. The note, which the secretary of state characterized as 'a very tough reply', emphasized the need for continued cooperation between the two countries and called for coordinated and judicious action. It noted that no information had been received suggesting a serious breach of the ceasefire, and that sending a non-military observer force (which could include American and Soviet representatives) to the war zone, for a limited time, would be the most effective manner of dealing with the problem. The note also emphasized that the United States was willing to do everything in its power to bring about implementation of the ceasefire, and, in that context, mentioned the ongoing frequent contacts between Washington and Jerusalem to verify that the Israelis were implementing the Security Council resolutions of 22 and 23 October.<sup>90</sup>

The reply to Brezhnev repeated the fierce the US opposition to unilateral Soviet action. It emphasized that the United States would look harshly upon such a step, which could have unforeseen consequences and would certainly not benefit either superpower. Moreover, a unilateral Soviet move would constitute a violation of the understandings the United States and the Soviet Union had reached in Moscow in 1972, as well as Article II of the Agreement on the Prevention of Nuclear War, which the two countries had signed in Washington in June 1973. In effect, read the American note, it would destroy the relationship between the two superpowers that had been built up with great effort over the previous years.<sup>91</sup>

A short while later, just before 8:00 am, the first signs of the turn the Americans had been waiting for – or, as they saw it, their diplomatic victory over the Soviets – arrived. After a long and exhausting night, the Egyptians were the first to respond to the messages from the White House, in the form of two notes to Kissinger, one from Ismail and the other from Sadat. The Egyptian national security advisor expressed his country's appreciation of the American efforts between 22 and 25 October to stop the fighting on the Suez front. He explained that Cairo viewed the dispatch of the American military attachés to the front as ineffective; this was why the Egyptian leadership had insisted that a joint Soviet–American force be sent to enforce the ceasefire. However, Ismail added, given the American opposition to the proposal, Egypt had asked the Security Council to dispatch a multinational force instead.<sup>92</sup> In similar fashion to Ismail, Sadat expressed his understanding of the several considerations that Nixon had mentioned in his note about the dispatch of a Soviet–American force to the canal. Consequently, wrote Sadat, Egypt had asked the Security Council to dispatch without delay an international force that would be responsible for implementation of the ceasefire. He also expressed his hope that this would be a first step towards implementing the other articles of Resolution 338, which dealt with a peaceful settlement between Israel and the Arabs.<sup>93</sup>

To Kissinger, the two messages amounted to 'winning the diplomatic game', inasmuch as Egypt had originally suggested the dispatch of a joint US–Soviet military force. Now that the Egyptians no longer supported this proposal, the secretary of

state assumed it would wither on the vine, since it did not seem reasonable to him that the Soviet Union would send forces to a country that did not want them and without receiving the blessing of the United Nations. On the contrary, because Sadat had retracted his request and was now asking for an international force, Security Council custom ruled out the inclusion in the force of the United States, the Soviet Union, and the other permanent members of the Council. As a direct result, Kissinger assumed that the Egyptian president was putting his faith in US diplomacy and its ability to provide his country with the best possible outcome, rather than in Soviet threats and military pressure. The Americans had hoped for this development throughout the Yom Kippur War; the policy they had followed and the diplomatic moves they had made were now bearing fruit.<sup>94</sup>

The Egyptian decision to withdraw its original request led the members of the non-aligned bloc to submit a draft resolution to the Security Council early on the morning of 25 October; it called for increasing the size of the United Nations observer force and establishing an emergency force that would act on behalf of the Security Council and under its authority.<sup>95</sup> A few hours later, at 1:10 pm, Ismail called Kissinger and asked him to tell Nixon, on behalf of Sadat, that Egypt agreed to the immediate dispatch of a multinational force composed of representatives of countries that were not permanent members of the Security Council. However, the Egyptian president conditioned the force's arrival on its having the support of the permanent members of the Security Council, especially the United States and the Soviet Union. Sadat emphasized that it was important that the force in question oversee the implementation of Security Council Resolution 339, namely the pullback of Israeli forces to their positions of 22 October. He also stressed the urgency of this process, since any additional delay could have far-reaching implications with unknown ramifications.<sup>96</sup>

Just before noon, Kissinger held a press conference, during which he informed the American public of the administration's position during the crisis with the Soviet Union as well as the diplomatic and military steps that had been taken. To a great extent, the press conference was exploited to send a message to the Soviet leadership. Kissinger emphasized the Americans' total opposition to the dispatch of a joint Soviet–American military force to the Middle East and utterly rejected any unilateral Soviet move. Alongside the tough position he presented, Kissinger sounded a conciliatory note as well. He repeatedly stressed the need for continued cooperation between Moscow and Washington, despite the political rivalry and ideological differences between the two countries.<sup>97</sup>

Kissinger's detailed arguments notwithstanding, criticism of the necessity and appropriateness of the administration's actions against the Soviets was voiced during the press conference and especially after it. A number of journalists suspected that the top officials of the Nixon administration were trying to divert attention from the Watergate Scandal and the 'Saturday Night Massacre' to the Middle East war and the Soviet crisis. Others wondered whether the Soviets had tried to take advantage of the domestic American crisis and the president's weakness in order to chalk up political gains in the Middle East and whether the steps the administration had taken were necessary and reflected the urgency of the situation. Answering questions about the Soviets' motives, Kissinger did not hide his worries about the impact of the domestic situation on America's standing in the international arena, and said, 'One can not have a crisis of authority in a society for a period of months without paying a price

somewhere along the line'. On the other hand, Kissinger was far harsher about the conspiracy theories regarding the administration's motives. He categorically denied that the decision to increase the military alert level was tainted by ulterior motives; the administration was conducting US foreign policy in a responsible manner and working to realize American interests in both the present and future. The secretary of state added,

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. . . . There has to be a minimum of confidence that the senior officials of the American government are not playing with the lives of the American people.<sup>98</sup>

The fact is that Kissinger did not share full details of the diplomatic events during the press conference. For example, he did not mention the full contents of Brezhnev's letter or his conversations with Ambassador Dobrynin and cited only the evidence that implied a Soviet intention to send forces to the Middle East. Moreover, he never made it clear whether the decisions were made after judicious consideration, on the basis of concrete intelligence, or whether, perhaps, the decision-making process had been affected by the serious fears about the ramifications for American foreign policy of Nixon's dysfunction and the crisis in the presidency. The answers to these questions would seem to lie at the root of Kissinger's awareness that some would interpret the decision to put the military on high alert in a conspiratorial light. It is quite possible that Kissinger believed that publicizing the full content of the Soviet note would produce an interpretation different from that reached by the members of the Washington Group, one that would minimize Brezhnev's seemingly hostile tone and paint the military alert as a crisis staged by the administration to serve its political needs.<sup>99</sup> The way Kissinger instructed Schlesinger to lower the military alert level may indicate just how worried the secretary of state was about criticism and claims of hidden motives underlying the administration's actions. In a conversation with the secretary of defense at 2:45 pm, shortly before the Security Council vote on Resolution 340, Kissinger asked his colleague to lower the military alert level gradually, but only after the vote, so that the entire process would not be viewed as a hollow stratagem to exert pressure.<sup>100</sup>

This worry was unnecessary, however, since, as noted, the Egyptians withdrew their request and, in the end, the Soviets did the same. At 2:40 pm, Dobrynin called Kissinger and passed along Brezhnev's reply to Nixon's note.<sup>101</sup> Like the Egyptian president, the Russian leader backtracked from the idea of sending a joint Soviet-American military force to the Middle East and replaced it with a joint observer force.<sup>102</sup> In this way, Brezhnev highlighted the immediate need for cooperation and coordination in order to bring about implementation of the Security Council resolutions.<sup>103</sup> A short time thereafter, Resolution 340 was adopted. It reaffirmed the call for the 'return' of the combatant parties to the positions they held on 22 October and mandated the establishment of an international force composed of troops from United Nations member states, except for the permanent members of the Security Council. Both the Soviet-American crisis and the Yom Kippur War were over.<sup>104</sup>

It is hard to understand why Kissinger chose to treat Brezhnev's note to Nixon as a real Soviet threat to send the Red Army to Egypt to help it in the war against Israel. A close reading of all of the messages of these days shows clearly that the Soviets had quite a different intention – to continue the cooperation and maintain the *détente* between the two superpowers. This conclusion is reinforced by the full text of the supposedly threatening note, including its final, conciliatory section. The secretary of state's failure to relate to the last paragraph of Brezhnev's note, both during the press conference of 25 October 1973 and in his memoirs, indicates his desire to hold back information that would permit a different and more flexible interpretation of the Soviet message.

On the surface, it appears that Kissinger and his associates in the Washington Group decided to raise the military alert to Level 3, thereby bringing the world to the brink of confrontation between two nuclear-armed superpowers, because of the disproportionate importance they attached to Nixon's weak image in Soviet eyes, and not because of some conspiracy, as theorized by several American journalists. After the media attacks on Nixon, and in light of the difficult situation in which the administration found itself, the United States appeared to be a nation in crisis. Almost every conversation among senior decision-makers touched on the fact that the president's paralysis offered a window of opportunity that the Soviets were trying to exploit in order to realize their interests in the region. Kissinger, as the person who had planned American policy and strove to implement it throughout the October War, wanted to respond in the most unyielding manner possible. That would remove any lingering doubts about the administration's ability to function and about the ability of the United States to protect its interests and standing throughout the world, especially in the Middle East.

The US administration also evinced a degree of toughness towards Israel. Throughout the crisis and during the secretary of state's talks with Israeli leaders, he demanded compromise and flexibility, even when that ran counter to Israeli interests. The pressure that the United States put on its proxy was so great that it actually considered severing diplomatic relations if Israel were to refuse to relax the pressure on the Third Army and pull back to the 22 October lines. It is clear that the American interest lay in preserving its status in the Middle East, and even improving it, at the expense of the Soviet Union; this meant assuming the role of senior mediator in the peace negotiations after the war. Hence Kissinger strove to take advantage of the initial foundations that Sadat had laid for renewing relations between Washington and Cairo, even if this came at the expense of ties with Israel, in order to consolidate the American position and influence in Egypt. In the end, the line followed by the secretary of state was that it would be possible to begin an effective political process in the Middle East and bring real peace to the region only if the war ended without victors and without vanquished.

## Notes

1. H. Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p.306; H. Bartov, *Daddo: 48 Years and 20 More Days*, Vol.2 (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2002), pp.683–4.
2. 'TelCon, Secretary General Waldheim/Henry Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/9:32 am, Nixon Presidential Materials Staff (hereafter NPMS), Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts

- (hereafter HAKTCT), Box 23, National Archives (hereafter NA); 'TelCon, David Popper/Henry Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/9:39 am, Nixon Presidential Materials Project (hereafter: NPMP), HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
3. Vorontsov was filling in for the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, who had not yet returned from Moscow.
  4. 'TelCon, Minister Vorontsov', 23 Oct. 1973/9:45 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.307.
  5. 'TelCon, Secretary Kissinger/Minister Vorontsov', 23 Oct. 1973/9:47 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
  6. 'TelCon, Ambassador Dinitz/Secretary Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/11:04 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Dinitz/Henry Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/12:00 noon, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.307–8; Bartov, *Daddo*, pp.683–4.
  7. Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.307–8.
  8. 'Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting', 23 Oct. 1973, No.250, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *Foreign Relation of United States* (hereafter *FRUS*), pp.696–7.
  9. *Ibid.*
  10. 'Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting', 23 Oct. 1973, No.250, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.696–7.
  11. *Ibid.*, pp.697–8.
  12. 'Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting', 24 Oct. 1973, No.259, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.714.
  13. Kissinger reiterated Israel's total dependence on the United States at the meeting of the Washington Special Actions Group, which convened on 24 October at 10:21 am. In this regard, the secretary of state told the other members of the forum that the Israelis 'were on their knees on October 13 and they couldn't have recovered. If we cut our diplomatic support, they're dead'. See *ibid.*, pp.711–5.
  14. 'Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting', 23 Oct. 1973, No.250, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.697–8.
  15. The Washington Special Actions Group comprised the following officials: Henry Kissinger, secretary of state and chairman of the National Security Council; General Brent Scowcroft, deputy assistant to the president for National Security Affairs; James Schlesinger, secretary of defense; Adm. Thomas Moorer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Kenneth Rush, deputy secretary of state; William Colby, director of Central Intelligence; Alfred Atherton, deputy assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; and James Noyes, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for International Security Affairs.
  16. 'Were Do We Want to Go: Our Objectives', undated, NPMS, Washington Special Action Group meetings (hereafter WSAG), Middle East, Folder 5, 10/14/73, Box H-93, NA.
  17. 'Minutes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting', 23 Oct. 1973, No.250, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.692–8; Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.315.
  18. 'Memorandum for the Record', 24/25 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol. XXV, *FRUS*, p.740; Bartov, *Daddo*, p.688; W.B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p.194.
  19. 'TelCon, Ambassador Dinitz/Secretary Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/11:04 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Dinitz/Henry Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/12:00 noon, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p.571.
  20. 'Hotline Message From Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon', 23 Oct. 1973, No.246, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.684–5.
  21. Untitled, 23 Oct. 1973, see footnote 3, Document No.246, Vol.XXV, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.684–5.
  22. In his book, *Crisis*, Kissinger writes that the conversations at 1:35 and 1:40 pm were with Vorontsov. According to the call registry in the National Archives, however, his interlocutor was Dobrynin. See 'TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger', 23 Oct. 1973/1:35 pm and 1:40 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.312–6.
  23. 'Hotline Message From Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon', 23 Oct. 1973, No.247, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p. 686.
  24. Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.310–15.

25. *Ibid.*, pp.320–21.
26. ‘Cease-Fire’, 23 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismaïl, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.320–21.
27. ‘Cease-Fire’, 23 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismaïl, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
28. ‘Backchannel Message From President Nixon to Egyptian President Sadat’, 23 Oct. 1973, No.252, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.702.
29. Bartov, *Daddo*, p.689; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, p.194.
30. ‘TASS Announcement Follows’, ‘Telegram to Missions’ 187, 23 Oct. 1973, Foreign Ministry (hereafter FM) 5368/52, Israel State Archives (hereafter ISA).
31. ‘TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/7:10 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; ‘TelCon, Sisco/Dinitz’, 23 Oct. 1973, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
32. ‘TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/7:20 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
33. ‘TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/8:30 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
34. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp.574–5.
35. ‘TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/8:35 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
36. In this context we should note that, notwithstanding the disagreements between Washington and Jerusalem and the American need to take action counter to the interests of its ally, and despite the fact that some officials at the Pentagon were eager to suspend the airlift to Israel, Kissinger insisted that it continue without letup. See Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.325; ‘TelCon, Schlesinger/Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/3:02 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; ‘TelCon, Major General Scowcroft/ Kissinger’, 23 Oct. 1973/4:20 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
37. ‘Reconstruction of the Events of the Morning of 24 October’, 24 Oct. 1973, 7792/3 – A, ISA; Bartov, *Daddo*, pp.694–6.
38. ‘Message from Hafiz Ismaïl’, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismaïl, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
39. ‘TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/9:22 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
40. ‘Urgent Message to President Nixon from President Sadat’, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismaïl, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
41. Kissinger knew that Dinitz was telling the truth, but would not admit it. In a phone call between Kissinger and his deputy, Joseph Sisco, the two agreed that it was the Egyptians who had broken the ceasefire. See TelCon, Joe Sisco/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/9:35 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
42. ‘TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/9:32 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
43. Even though Kissinger agreed to the proposal, the US ambassador in Tel Aviv refused to allow the military attaché to follow it up, fearing that he might be injured. See ‘Meeting of Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee’, No.329, 10:00 pm, 25 Oct. 1973, 8163/9–A, ISA.
44. ‘Transcript of Telephone Conversation between Secretary of State Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador (Dobrynin), 9:45 a.m.’, 24 Oct. 1973, No.256, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.707–8; ‘TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/10:10 am and 10:15 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
45. At 1:15 pm, the Soviet embassy resent the message, with minor correction. ‘Message from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon’, 24 Oct. 1973, No.262, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.727–8.
46. ‘TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/10:19 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
47. ‘TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger’, 24 Oct. 1973/10:19 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; at 1:00 pm Nixon sent a letter to Brezhnev which informed him that Israel had ceased offensive operations. See Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.579. It should be added that the anger with Israel was so intense that at the meeting of the Washington Group, which convened a few minutes after the conversation with Dobrynin, Kissinger launched a broadside against it: ‘I’m a specialist on ceasefires that never happen. The Israelis are not only obnoxious, they’re also boastful. If they had kept their mouths shut, no one would have known where the ceasefire line was’ (in the south). See ‘Minutes of Washington Special Actions Group Meeting’, 24 Oct. 1973, No.259, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.711–12.
48. ‘Message from President Nixon to President Sadat’, 9:52 am, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismaïl, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.

49. 'Call from General Haig from the White House at 10:35 hours', 24 Oct. 1973, 7792/3 – A, ISA.
50. 'Message from the President to President Sadat', 10:17 am, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
51. At 1:05 pm, Kissinger sent a message to the Egyptian national security advisor, whose content was similar to that which Nixon had sent to Sadat that morning. In this note, too, Kissinger emphasized to Ismail that the United States had warned Israel that any offensive on its part would be apt to lead 'to a severe deterioration of relations' between the two countries. See 'Message to Mr. Ismail from Secretary Kissinger', 1:05 pm, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
52. 'Message for President Nixon from President Sadat', 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
53. 'Memorandum of Conversation', 24 Oct. 1973, No.261, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.722–7; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.330–31.
54. 'Transcript of Telephone Conversation Between Secretary of State Kissinger and the Israeli Ambassador (Dinitz)', 24 Oct. 1973, See Footnote 2, Document No.263, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.728; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.330–31.
55. For the series of conversations between Kissinger and Dobrynin, see 'TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/7:05 pm, 7:15 pm and 7:25 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
56. 'TelCon, Scali/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/7:25 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/7:35 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp.581–2.
57. 'Secretary Kissinger Requests that Mr. Ismail Pass the Following Urgent Communication from President Nixon to President Sadat', 8:55 pm, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
58. 'TelCon, Haig/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/7:50 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
59. 'TelCon, Dobrynin/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/8:25 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
60. 'TelCon, Secretary/Scali', 24 Oct. 1973/8:52 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.342.
61. Note that, according to the label attached to the note, it was received at 10:00 pm. For the text of the Brezhnev message, see 'Message from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon', 24 Oct. 1973, No.267, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.734–5.
62. R. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Warner Communications, 1979), p.938.
63. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.583.
64. *Ibid.*; Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.342.
65. 'Message from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev to President Nixon', 24 Oct. 1973, No.267, Arab–Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.734–5.
66. *Ibid.*
67. A. Dobrynin, *In Confidence* (New York: Times Books, 1995), pp.300–301.
68. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.584.
69. In a conversation between Kissinger and Haig, at 9:50 pm, the two decided not to wake Nixon up then to inform him of the content of the note. See 'TelCon, Secretary/General Haig', 24 Oct. 1973/9:50 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/10:00 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
70. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.584; R.B. Parker, *The October War: A Retrospective* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001), p.174.
71. According to a United States intelligence document, the *Mezhdurechenk* had left the port of Oktyabrskoye on 21 October, passed through the Bosphorus on 22 October, and was photographed in Alexandria harbour on 25 October. The Americans were afraid, as the document makes plain, that the vessel had transported nuclear weapons to Egypt: 'While the evidence is far from conclusive, there is therefore, at least the possibility that the soviets have introduced nuclear weapons into the Middle East. . .the evidence should not yet be regarded as though it creates a strong presumptive case that the Soviets dispatched nuclear weapons to Egypt'. See 'Soviet Nuclear Weapons in Egypt', 30 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
72. The State Department documented the session as a meeting of the Washington Group; the White House considered it to be in the context of the National Security Council.

73. Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.347.
74. 'TelCon, Secretary/Dobrynin', 24 Oct. 1973/10:15 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
75. 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.738.
76. *Ibid.*; Kissinger, *Crisis*, p.349.
77. At a press conference on 26 October, Secretary of Defense Schlesinger reported that on 22 October the Soviet Union had cut back on flights to the Middle East as part of its airlift of equipment and supplies to the Arabs, and that the flights had ended on 23 October. The conclusion was that the Soviet Union had terminated the airlift not because it needed all of its transport aircraft to make them available for its airborne divisions, but because an agreement on a ceasefire had been reached. See 'News Conference by Secretary of Defense James R. Schlesinger', No.301, 27 Oct. 1973, 365/3–A, ISA.
78. Moorer noted that because the United States would become involved in a confrontation with the support of NATO, 'the Middle East is the worst place in the world for the US to get engaged in a war with the Soviets'. See 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.739.
79. *Ibid.*, pp.739–40; 'TelCon, Haig/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/10:20 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
80. *Ibid.*, pp.739–41; Parker, *The October War: A Retrospective*, p.175.
81. 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.739–41; 'TelCon, Haig/Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/10:20 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
82. In the United States, military alerts ranged from Level 1, which means war, to Level 5, which is the normal peacetime level. Level 3 is the highest state of alert in peacetime.
83. It should be noted that, unlike Kissinger, Admiral Moorer asserted that the transfer of Soviet airborne divisions to the Middle East would be a complicated and hard-to-implement operation, because with the equipment at their disposal, hundreds of flights would be needed for each division. See 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol. XXV, *FRUS*, p.741; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.351–2; Parker, *The October War: A Retrospective*, p.175.
84. 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, p.741; Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.352–3.
85. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.590.
86. 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.739–41.
87. *Ibid.*, p.587; 'Telephone call from Gazit at 1:00 A.M.', 25 Oct. 1973, 7792/3 – A, ISA; Bartov, *Daddo*, pp.708–11.
88. 'Phone Conversation with the Prime Minister', 24 Oct. 1973, 7792/3 – A, ISA; 'TelCon, Dinitz/Secretary Kissinger', 24 Oct. 1973/11:25 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA. In light of the fear of direct Soviet intervention in the war, which stemmed in part from the lack of Israeli cooperation, Kissinger asked Dinitz how long it would to 'clean up' the Third Army before the Soviet Union could send forces to bail the Egyptians out. Contrary to what is normally believed, this question did not mean to convey a message that would deter the Israelis from carrying through. During the deliberations by the Washington Group, the secretary of state himself had brought up the option of allowing Israel to attack the Third Army. Kissinger was not interested in allowing the Soviet Union to reap any political rewards, restoring its standing in the Arab world as the party responsible for putting an end to the war by virtue of its assistance to Egypt and the threats it voiced. See 'TelCon, Dinitz/Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:09 am, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'Memorandum for the Record', 24 Oct. 1973, No.269, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol. XXV, *FRUS*, p.739.
89. Because of the American desire to deter Sadat, the note repeatedly mentioned the danger of a conflict between the two nuclear powers that might be fought on Egyptian soil. See 'Secretary Kissinger Requests that Mr. Ismail Pass the Following Urgent Communication from President Nixon to President Sadat', 11:55 pm, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
90. 'Message From President Nixon to Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev', 24 Oct. 1973, No.274, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973, Vol.XXV, *FRUS*, pp.747–9.
91. *Ibid.*

92. 'Message from Hafiz Ismail', Message No.1, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
93. 'Message for President Nixon from President Sadat', Message No.2, 24 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
94. Kissinger, *Crisis*, pp.354–5.
95. Ibid.
96. 'Message from Hafiz Ismail', No.4, 25 Oct. 1973, Box 132, Country Files, Middle East, Egypt/Ismail, Vol.VII, 1–31 Oct. 1973, NA.
97. 'Lehalan Nosach Male Shel Divrey Kissinger' [Full text of Kissinger's message follows], No.272, 25 Oct. 1973, 7249/8–A, ISA.
98. Ibid.; 'The President/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/1:15 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
99. 'The President/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/1:15 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Reston/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/3:00 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, The President/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/3:05 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, The President/Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/7:15 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
100. 'TelCon, Schlesinger/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:45 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; on the same issue Kissinger told Haig: 'Let's not broadcast this [Brezhnev's letter] all over the place otherwise it looks like we [cooked] it up'. See 'TelCon, Haig/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:35 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
101. In Kissinger's phone calls, this moment is described as a 'victory' over the Soviet Union and as 'staring them down'. See, for example, 'TelCon, Haig/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:35 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA; 'TelCon, Schlesinger/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:45 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
102. Ultimately, the idea of a joint Soviet–American observer force was dropped, because Cairo announced that it 'neither wanted nor needed the observers'. See Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p.601.
103. 'TelCon, Ambassador Dobrynin/Secretary Kissinger', 25 Oct. 1973/2:40 pm, NPMS, HAKTCT, Box 23, NA.
104. 'The Text of Resolution 340', No.101/S, 25 Oct. 1973, 7249/8–A, ISA.