

NOTHING LESS THAN A DISASTER: HENRY KISSINGER, THE
MUNICH OLYMPICS ATTACK, AND THE OCTOBER WAR

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my children, Roxie and Delilah, and especially to my husband, Scott. Thank you for all your support, I love you so much.



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I would like to thank Dr. James Matray for serving as my thesis advisor and for his limitless guidance, inspiration, and patience with my thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. Jeffrey Livingston and Dr. Najm al-Din Yousefi for serving on my committee and for their insight and suggestions for my thesis.

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines what led to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's surprise and shock when war broke out between Israel and Egypt in October 1973. During President Richard M. Nixon's first term, Kissinger, as Nixon's National Security Advisor sparred with then Secretary of State, William Rogers, dismissing and undermining the State Department's policy toward the Middle East in a quest to gain more power and influence. For Kissinger, the conflict in the Middle East served as a bargaining chip with the Soviets, a way to gain diplomatic traction and neutralize Soviet influence. Instead of working to solve the Middle East problems, Kissinger's policy aimed to keep the Middle East mired in the status quo, much to the chagrin of Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. Finally, U.S. policy on the Middle East under Kissinger's direction remained unexamined despite the terrorist attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympics and the subsequent Israeli

retribution for those violent acts. Because of these reasons, Kissinger was surprised when the October War broke out. Kissinger's inaction in failing to anticipate the war had a negative impact on the achievement of important U.S. policy objectives in the Middle East.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On 5 October 1973, Egyptian scouts crossed the Suez Canal, looking for evidence of Israeli military mobilization. Observing nothing, they returned with a message: the Jews were sleeping.¹ Egyptian and Syrian forces² returned the following day and attacked Israel. Meanwhile another Jew, the newly confirmed U.S. Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, was also asleep. Twenty-four hours earlier, U.S. intelligence had assured him that neither Israel nor Egypt had made any military movements, despite evidence of rising tensions in the region. Understandably, Kissinger was shocked when the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph J. Sisco came “barging” into his bedroom and insisted “that Israel and two Arab countries, Egypt and Syria were about to go to war.”³ Although Kissinger’s surprise was genuine, there were harbingers pointing to an imminent conflict—the October 1973 War—had been developing in the region for over three years.

This thesis will explain what led to Kissinger’s surprise and shock when the October War broke out between Israel and Egypt in October 1973. It identifies and examines three main reasons for his reaction, demonstrating how Kissinger’s failure to anticipate the war had a negative impact on the achievement of important U.S. policy objectives in the Middle East. Despite his reputation as a successful diplomat, his missteps in this instance made it difficult for the United States to keep Arab and Israeli

tensions calm. Kissinger misread seemingly overt signs from Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, signaling his ultimate decision to attack Israel and allowing personal issues to cloud his judgment on the region. Finally, U.S. policy on the Middle East under Kissinger's direction remained unexamined despite the terrorist attacks at the 1972 Munich Olympics and the subsequent Israeli retribution for those violent acts.

President Richard M. Nixon's decision upon assuming office to run foreign policy "from the White House" created a tense rivalry between then National Security Advisor Kissinger and Secretary of State William Rogers, leading to an early internal showdown. This power struggle constituted the first reason why the October War⁴ came as a surprise to Kissinger. Throughout Nixon's first term, Rogers and Kissinger had sparred over the Middle East. Having little regard for Rogers, Kissinger dismissed and undermined the State Department's policy toward the Middle East, which sought to address both Arab and Israeli concerns. Instead, Kissinger sought to maintain the status quo in the region during Nixon's first term in office.

Jussi Hanhimaki and Salim Yaqub, in their studies of Kissinger and Nixon respectively, accept his surprise without much investigation as to why it happened, focusing instead on explaining the genesis of his policies. Robert Dallek does examine why Kissinger failed to see the coming war, but leaves out major factors like the Munich Massacre. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston claim Kissinger and Nixon aimed to use any methods to avoid a "nuclear holocaust,"⁵ but do not explore how the surprise of the October War brought the United States close to this threat. As for the origins of the war, historians like Albert Hourani in his *A History of the Arab Peoples* trace the war's origin mainly to "the desire to compensate for the defeat of 1967,"⁶ highlighting Arab unity and

disunity before and after the conflict. On the other hand, William Quandt, a foreign policy historian and former member of the National Security Council under both Nixon and President Jimmy Carter, claims that the Egyptian attack caught Kissinger off-guard because he had “misinterpreted” the Soviet influence in the region stemming from the crisis in Jordan. Finally, Historian Craig Daigle explains how the October War was a “*consequence of [Kissinger’s policy of] détente,*”⁷ as Sadat’s actions were directly aimed at changing the U.S. supported status quo. However, Daigle does not explore how the Munich Massacre at the 1972 Olympics increased the tensions in the Middle East, playing a large part in the start of the war.

The bureaucratic rivalry had a major influence on why Washington failed to anticipate the Egyptian attack on 6 October 1973. Kissinger had been Nixon’s main advisor on China and Vietnam, and experienced an expanded role as the key figure in developing foreign policy in the White House cabinet. However, when Nixon continued to allow Rogers to have influence over the Middle East during the crisis in Jordan in 1970, Kissinger objected, acting to counter this challenge to his preeminence. Rogers had spent the last year attempting to make his “Rogers Plan” viable, while Kissinger actively dissuaded Israeli adherence. Kissinger had his own plans for the Middle East. He wanted to use it as a bargaining chip in what he saw as more important negotiations with the Soviet Union to achieve a larger geopolitical goal. Kissinger hoped to prove to Nixon that his Jewish background would not hinder his negotiating skills and diplomatic access to the region. However, because of his determination to prove the Rogers Plan wrong, disdain for Rogers as a statesman, and misguided confidence that came following his own

perceived success in handling the 1970 Jordanian crisis, Kissinger refused to accept mounting evidence that the region was on the verge of exploding in war.

A second reason for Kissinger's surprise resulted from his misguided political aims for the region. Recent treaties the United States negotiated with the Soviet Union encouraged Kissinger's misunderstanding of the political situation in Egypt. He viewed regional struggles as a way to win the larger Cold War competition without the direct involvement of the United States. Thus, Egypt became a proxy battleground where any compromise from Washington would provide leverage for Moscow.

At the beginning of Nixon's first term, Kissinger divided his time addressing more glamorous and high profile cases challenges, notably ending the war in Vietnam and reconciling with China. For Kissinger, the conflict in the Middle East served as a bargaining chip with the Soviets, a way for Kissinger to gain diplomatic traction and neutralize Soviet influence. Therefore, instead of working to solve the Middle East problems, Kissinger's policy aimed to keep the Middle East mired in the status quo. In this way, Kissinger could apply pressure to the Soviets while keeping the area somewhat quiet ahead of Nixon's reelection.

However, this plan had its limits, as Kissinger could not allow the area to slide into a larger conflict as this could derail diplomatic agreements between the two superpowers on other global issues. As Kissinger and Nixon worked towards the SALT agreements, Kissinger did not realize how tenuous the status quo had become for the Egyptians. Sadat was under pressure from his own constituents to fight back against the Israelis and regain the land they had taken during the 1967 war. Instead of addressing the

increasing volatility in the region, Kissinger ignored Sadat's threats of war and continued the U.S. policy of stalemate.

Finally, Kissinger downplayed the upswing of violence in the Middle East region that the Arab terrorist attack at the 1972 Munich Olympics and subsequent retaliations from Israel had ignited. After finally wresting control away from Rogers over the Middle East, Kissinger focused on Soviet-American relations, diverting his attention from examining the growing regional issues. Claiming he only dealt with conflicts when they were "hot," Kissinger allowed the Egyptian situation to explode before taking action. As a result, he failed to recognize how the Munich Massacre was a turning point signaling the imminence of a new regional war. This stunning attack exhibited to the world a bold new brand of terrorism and brought the Arab and Israeli conflict to the world's attention. Angry about the low international political esteem of the Palestinians, the Black September terrorist organization, with ties to the more legitimate Palestinian Liberation Organization, kidnapped nine Israeli Olympians and murdered them. This attack cast a spotlight on the region, placing its leaders in an awkward position as they struggled to find a way to discredit the terrorist attack without condemning the reasons behind it.

To be sure, the Middle East had been a hotbed of political unrest since shortly after World War II. The Black September attack on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich on 6 September 1972 and the retaliations from Israel, however, greatly increased tensions in an area quickly approaching a breaking point. The boldness of the attackers and the international stage on which they made their attack brought world attention to the rapidly

escalating crisis in the region. The Munich Massacre was a significant flashpoint, setting off a chain reaction that ultimately led to war. Kissinger ignored this alert, even when the Soviets, Israelis, and Egyptians told him that tensions were reaching a climax. However, despite the violence in Munich, the United States refused to change its Middle East policies, continuing to hope the stalemate between Egypt and Israel would lead Cairo to grant concessions to Tel Aviv.

Israel had begun bombing Lebanon in retaliation for the Munich Massacre in the fall of 1972, causing Arab leaders to favor a larger conflict. Unfortunately, Kissinger ignored Arab frustration. He postponed meetings with Egyptian diplomats, claiming that ending the war in Vietnam required his attention at that time and the Middle East could wait. While this tactic may have been necessary to solve the larger crisis of Vietnam, it left the Middle East primed for another potentially global conflict. Kissinger, involved in intense negotiations behind the scenes at the Paris Peace Talks, believed the area would remain stable so long as the Soviets remained passive observers, revealing a flaw in his understanding of the conflict and the Middle East. Instead of seeing the Munich Massacre and Israeli retaliation lighting the fuse for war, he continued to trust his own policy despite warnings from the Egyptians, the Soviets, the Israelis, and even Nixon.

This thesis examines Kissinger's failure to see the coming of the October War. It focuses attention on explaining how larger factors such as the rivalry between Kissinger and Rogers, contesting the global influence of the Soviets, and the Munich Massacre affected the conclusions Kissinger reached about the Middle East. Each issue will receive discussion separately. Chapter One will describe how Nixon's choice to allow Kissinger to make decisions for the Middle East alienated Rogers and led to an

intense rivalry between Nixon's national security advisor and his Secretary of State. Chapter Two will explain Kissinger's strategy to use the Middle East to manipulate the Soviet Union to the detriment of U.S. interests in that region. Chapter Three will explain Kissinger's failure to understand the meaning and impact of the Munich Massacre on the regional conflict. U.S. policy had centered on keeping the Mideast quiet after the Six Day War in June 1967, but in October 1973, because of Kissinger's choices, U.S. policy inattention contributed to the Middle East once again exploding into war.

NOTES

1. Abraham Rabinovich, *The October War: the Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East* (Toronto: Schocken, 2004), 83.

2. Throughout this thesis, the author will use the term “Egyptian forces,” but with the important understanding that Syrian troops bolstered the Egyptian forces on the Eastern border.

3. Henry A. Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 12-13.

4. I use the term "October War" to describe the conflict 1973 conflict between Egypt and Israel. In my research, terms like the "Yom Kippur War" and the "Ramadan War" had a bias attached to them that I wanted to avoid.

5. Fredrick Logevall and Andrew Preston, eds., *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 9.

6. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 414.

7. Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Israeli-Arab Conflict 1967-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 8.

CHAPTER II

POWER STRUGGLES INSIDE THE NIXON

WHITE HOUSE

Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon were surprised when the Egyptian Army attacked Israel on 6 October 1973, despite years of official and unofficial communication with high-ranking diplomats and leaders in Egypt. One reason for this was the power struggle that emerged early in the administration between Nixon's National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger and Secretary of State William Rogers. Both men had drastically different and conflicting philosophies about the Arab-Israeli clash in the Middle East. Rogers sought to work with the Israelis and the Arabs to find a regional solution to the conflict, whereas Kissinger saw the issue through a global lens, seeing an opportunity to use the Middle East to further U.S. diplomatic goals in other parts of the world. During Nixon's first term, they angled to have the president adopt and enact their ideas as official U.S. policy.

The rivalry between Kissinger and Rogers continued throughout Nixon's first years in office. Instead of working with Rogers for the resolution of a region in turmoil, Kissinger eagerly and actively undermined Rogers' efforts to achieve a permanent Mideast peace. He influenced leaders to spurn Rogers' proposed agreements, inserted himself into the crisis despite having little background knowledge about the region, and undermined official U.S. policy toward the Middle East. Kissinger's rivalry with Rogers

left a lasting negative impact on U.S. foreign policy toward the turbulent region because it made Kissinger defensive and intractable. He had worked hard to assert U.S. control there and he refused to yield any ground to Rogers. Along with this, Kissinger's low opinion of Rogers kept him from realizing key insights about the Arabs and their leaders, proceeding to upset major players in the Middle East. Finally, Kissinger's rivalry with Rogers drove him to cling steadfastly to erroneous conclusions about the nature of the regional conflicts, causing him to pursue a plan that ultimately would lead to another Middle East war.

Nixon fostered a deeply divided White House and his foreign policy in the Middle East was a direct result of this rift. Instead of peace and unity, as he had promised in his 1969 inaugural address,¹ Nixon invited a power struggle between Kissinger and Rogers for control over U.S. policy in the Middle East during his first term. Kissinger later reported that when he first began working in the White House, he "knew little of the Middle East," admitting his inexperience in the region. In fact, he later claimed that until "the end of 1971, I was not permitted to conduct diplomacy except in rare cases of acute crisis,"² although, as this chapter will explain, he inserted himself nevertheless into policy making. To accomplish this goal, he created backchannels that he used to undermine Rogers' policies toward the region, thus neutralizing Rogers' influence. Furthermore, Kissinger ignored key State Department intelligence that pointed towards a coming conflict because it contradicted the wisdom of the course he preferred.

For his part, Nixon viewed his presidency as a way to elevate the U.S. role in the world, which meant reconfiguring how and who made foreign policy. Nixon held a deep distrust and contempt for his opponents, who he believed dominated positions in the

federal bureaucracy. This included the State Department, motivating his decision to run his foreign policy “from the White House” insulating himself from his perceived enemies in the professional diplomatic corps. He restructured the “machinery of government,” taking power away from the State Department and building up the National Security Council (NSC), where he named Kissinger as director.³ As such, Kissinger held sway over most areas of the globe, except for the Mideast where Secretary Rogers proposed most policy decisions. Despite Kissinger’s protests, Nixon allowed Rogers to keep control over the region, tolerating input from Kissinger. This is significant because Nixon created an ambiguous environment where both the State Department and the NSC created policy for the same region.

Kissinger confirms in his memoirs that Nixon added to the competition between himself and Rogers. Acting “like other Presidents, he was not above feeding the rivalry inherent . . . between the offices of Secretary of State and Security Advisor in order to enhance his own control.”⁴ Kissinger insists that this rivalry was unavoidable because of Nixon’s manipulation, not his own choice. However, far from being unintentional, his actions were a deliberate attempt to neutralize his foreign policy rival. To obscure this fact, Kissinger blamed Nixon for not just tolerating the competition, but encouraging it.

According to Nixon, Kissinger’s ambition generated his feud with Rogers to discredit and then replace his rival. “Kissinger suggested repeatedly,” Nixon later wrote, “that he might have to resign unless Rogers was restrained or replaced.”⁵ This put pressure on Nixon to pull Rogers away from his policy-making duties. Because Kissinger wanted his job, he detested Rogers. Remarking on Kissinger’s low opinion of Rogers,

Nixon reported how “Kissinger felt that Rogers was vain, uninformed, unable to keep a secret, and hopelessly dominated by State Department bureaucracy.”⁶ This disdain caused Kissinger to discount immediately Rogers’ policy ideas, even when intelligence information validated their wisdom. Discrediting Rogers was the essential element in his plan to persuade the president to adopt and implement his policies toward the Middle East.

When it came to the Middle East, both Rogers and Kissinger recognized the fundamental fact that the region was in turmoil. The conclusion of the Six Day War in June 1967 had entrenched more deeply the hostility between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Israel was eager to create and maintain space between it and its enemies. Arabs wanted not only return of lost land, but to stop the Israelis from taking more. Amid this escalation of the dispute, both the Soviets and the Americans vied for influence in the region. Facing this crisis when Nixon took office, Rogers and Kissinger developed conflicting strategies for reaching a peace settlement and limiting Soviet influence in the Middle East. The State Department saw the conflict, “. . . as growing from regional conditions that the Soviets could exploit for their own advantage. To reduce Soviet options, State officials argued, the United States should try and resolve the underlying disputes.”⁷

Kissinger, on the other hand, “was less sanguine about the prospects for resolving the regional conflicts, and in any case believed it was Soviet involvement in the disputes that made them particularly dangerous.”⁸ Rogers and Kissinger therefore approached the issues in diametrically opposed ways.

To solve the Mideast conflict Rogers wanted to develop a strategy to solve the regional problems that would leave the Soviets with no dispute to exploit. Kissinger, by contrast, emphasized blocking Soviet ambitions first, hoping that the removal of this threat would ease tensions.⁹ Despite these differing plans, Rogers put forth official U.S. policy at the beginning of Nixon's term, attempting to solve the crisis and stymie Kissinger's plan before he could put it in motion.

In 1969 Rogers attempted to curtail the cycle of violence between the Israelis and the Arabs that had resulted from the 1967 Six Day War. Called the Rogers Plan, it became the first of the secretary of state's many attempts between 1969 and 1973 to restore to the Arabs their occupied land in return for their assurance that they would not attack Israel. Rogers assumed regaining "the occupied territories would at least remove for the Arabs the hated reminder of their humiliating defeat."¹⁰ This, he thought, might allow tensions to ease enough to sign a ceasefire. A negotiated settlement, historian Jussi Hanhimaki explains, would involve "key countries in the region" and be overseen by "the auspices of the United States and the Soviet Union."¹¹ The expectation was that this would make each superpower responsible for its respective clients respecting their commitments to uphold regional peace.

Instead of territory, as Rogers suggested, Kissinger was more interested in leveraging the Middle East to compel Soviet compliance with agreements serving U.S. interests elsewhere in the world. This strategy directly contradicted the objectives of the Rogers Plan. It was based more on geopolitical maneuvers instead of compromise among the directly involved parties to achieve a workable settlement. Kissinger wanted the Israelis, with their impressive American-backed military, to "act as a deterrent" to Soviet-

endorsed Arab violence in securing Moscow's dominant influence in the Middle East. Arab leaders would be wary of attacking Israel, thus assigning to the Israelis the responsibility for protecting U.S. interests "with no actual loss of American lives."¹² Problematically, both the Arabs and the Israelis criticized the Rogers plan, which the secretary of state had announced as official U.S. policy in the summer of 1970.¹³ With the Rogers Plan in place, it made it difficult for Kissinger to use the Middle East as a diplomatic tool in U.S. negotiations with the Soviet Union because the Rogers approach focused on solving the issue from a regional standpoint, not a global one. Kissinger sought to scuttle the Rogers Plan, which would allow him to use the Middle East as collateral to achieve his goals in other geopolitical negotiations.

Despite his critique, Kissinger recalls that Nixon "had little stomach for overruling Rogers." He speculates that this hesitation resulted from the long friendship that the president had with the secretary of state. However, Nixon explained the decision as a political power play. He therefore allowed the State Department plan to continue, even though he assumed it would fail.¹⁴ Nixon may have approved the Rogers Plan initially as a way to pay lip service to the Arabs in the Middle East and curry favor with Jewish voters in the United States. If the plan actually began to work, however, there was no reason for Nixon to curb Rogers' efforts. Even if the initiative failed, it still served a positive political purpose for Nixon.

While Nixon did not want to "overrule" Rogers, he did not shut Kissinger out completely either. Three months before the official announcement of the Rogers Plan, Nixon gave Kissinger approval to open a back channel with the Israelis.¹⁵ This gave Kissinger access to the region, but still did not allow him the total freedom he wanted. As

time passed, however, Kissinger would realize the value of the channel in diplomatic relations and in his quarrel with Rogers.

Rogers continued to determine policy for the Middle East through the summer of 1970, with Kissinger openly questioning his actions. He advised Nixon of his concerns about the Rogers Plan, claiming it ignored the increasing Soviet influence in the region.¹⁶ Kissinger underscored the Soviet threat as a way to frame the Middle East as part of a global conflict and end Rogers' quest for a regional settlement. In place of Rogers' pursuit of a ceasefire, Kissinger "suggested an alternate approach" to the administration. However, even Kissinger conceded implementation would be a "bureaucratic nightmare," as Nixon would "have to override the recommendations of [his] top Cabinet advisor," something Nixon was not willing to do at the time.¹⁷ This action demonstrates how Kissinger wanted Nixon to follow his advice, even if it made the president's job more difficult. Despite Rogers' expertise and Kissinger's admitted ignorance in the Middle East political arena, the national security advisor continued to seek control over all issues in U.S. foreign affairs.

Kissinger's naked ambition for power was evident when he advised the president to ignore or oppose trusted advisors, in favor of accepting his own opinion. Furthermore, no substantial evidence supported Kissinger's theory that it was increased Soviet influence that was driving the Middle East conflict. On the contrary, a fact finding mission to the region just a year earlier found that the Soviets had "strong—but not 'dominant'—positions in the Middle East,"¹⁸ suggesting the conflict had local roots. Despite this, Kissinger continued to frame the conflict in Cold war terms in hopes of gaining political power and actively pushing his own agenda to replace the Rogers Plan.

Instead of failing, however, Rogers' initiative initially showed signs it might work. Egypt and Israel agreed to discuss terms of a ceasefire with UN Representative Gunnar Jarring acting as mediator, a first for the region. Kissinger would claim later that this agreement was a front, affording Egypt time for "a rapid buildup of missiles,"¹⁹ although he did not provide evidence for this charge. Despite Kissinger's claim, Egypt and Israel signed a short-lived ceasefire on 7 August 1970. Within days of the ceasefire, however, the Israelis accused the Egyptians of violating the agreement, thus resuming a status quo that was beneficial to Israel. Rogers' fleeting success had ended.

Rogers had spent over a year pursuing his plan, only to have it blow up in his face. Jumping on this opportunity, Kissinger claimed that the State Department was ineffective because it "simply did not know enough about the President's thinking to pursue the nuances of his policy."²⁰ Kissinger, on the other hand, insisted that he understood the president, highlighting his own proximity to Nixon, while diminishing Rogers' effectiveness in Middle East policy. With the failure of the Rogers Plan and a back channel newly opened, Kissinger was now in a prime position to orchestrate formulation of what would become the president's policy.

Gradually, Kissinger whittled away a substantial amount of the State Department's influence in the Middle East, but Rogers still remained active in developing U.S. policy for the region. Kissinger had bristled at the introduction of the Rogers Plan and openly asked Nixon to abandon it, even at political cost. But the president had not followed his advice so Kissinger began to use the already established back channel to prevail. He acted to circumvent the State Department, keeping the Rogers Plan from gaining traction and thereby elevating his own diplomatic profile on Middle East policy.

For Kissinger, the back channel arrangement also allowed him to work outside the confines of political accountability and transparency. He could make deals with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin, without congressional or the public scrutiny, on a region of the world he knew very little about. Kissinger's working knowledge of the Mideast was admittedly anemic,²¹ yet he was deciding foreign policy without oversight from the State Department or any other government body, save for the president himself. Kissinger soon used the back channel to eliminate Rogers from the picture entirely.

Nixon allowed Kissinger's power play because he himself was using the Rogers' initiative in a self-serving manner. Despite claiming that he knew the plan "could never be implemented," Nixon thought the gesture would "let the Arab world know" that the United States had not "automatically dismiss[ed]"²² their aims for the occupied territories. He wanted to use Rogers as a way to appear genuinely interested in regional peace, while still maintaining his distance should the plan fail. Nixon claimed the Rogers Plan would allow "Arab leaders to propose reopening relations with the United States," but, if this indeed was his purpose, the plan offered too little, too late for it to be viable.²³ It did not do much for the Arabs except propose that they undertake a dangerous gamble. If Arab leaders agreed to it without gaining back occupied land, they would have no choice but to accept the status quo and lose their only bargaining chip with Israel. However, Nixon hoped that even this small gesture of sympathy toward their cause would be enough to gain positive points with the Arab states.

Nixon claimed that even if either side violated the Rogers ceasefire immediately, it still served to establish "the United States as the honest broker accepted by both sides."²⁴ The plan represented his administration's good faith effort for peace

between the Arabs and Israel, buying time with the Arabs and making Nixon appear as if he really cared about promoting a peaceful outcome in the Middle East. Nixon was pleased with Rogers' limited success and the positive publicity it generated for him in the region, which may have been why he allowed Rogers to continue to make decisions for the Middle East. The Rogers Plan became useful not as a foreign policy strategy, but as a bargaining tool with Arabs, Soviets, and as a political tactic to build support with Nixon's electorate.

Nixon's White House hierarchy rankled Rogers, as he began to see the president using his plan not to promote peace, but to placate politicians. Kissinger claims that "it was clear to [Rogers] that he was being excluded from key decisions on almost all issues except the Middle East," even though he continued to occupy his post as secretary of state. By the middle of 1970, Kissinger already had taken over many of the secretary of state's duties, reflecting how Rogers had become a policy "ratifier rather than that of a . . . formulator."²⁵ Kissinger's influence began to become markedly more evident on White House policies.²⁶ However, Rogers was not directly made aware of his changed duties. Kissinger revealed that Nixon and he made "Presidential decisions" when Rogers was on "foreign trips,"²⁷ deceptively ensuring Rogers would not be available to join in policymaking. Kissinger was able to have total access to Nixon and put forth his own plans, uninterrupted. In 1970, Kissinger saw the Middle East as not only a Cold War battleground, but a struggle for his own bureaucratic power in the region. Forcing Nixon to see the conflict as a contest for influence with the Soviets became central to Kissinger's strategy to control policy there. This viewpoint limited Kissinger's ability to

realize fully the depth of the Israeli-Arab conflict because securing Nixon's confidence and proving his worth over Rogers was consuming his time.

At this point, in the fall of 1970, a crisis erupted in the Middle East.

Palestinian extremists, with the help of the Syrian army, used refugees living in Jordan to instigate a civil war against the Jordanian King Hussein bin Talal. Kissinger wasted no time framing the conflict in Cold War terms. "When Kissinger reported this news to me," Nixon recalled later, "he said, 'It looks like the Soviets are pushing the Syrians and the Syrians are pushing the Palestinians.' The Palestinians don't need much pushing,"²⁸ highlighting Kissinger's views that Russian support was driving the crisis. Kissinger already was working closely with the Soviets on the possibility of a Moscow-Washington treaty and the resolution of the Vietnam War, so it made sense to him that he be intimately involved in the Middle East. The Arabs and Israelis were clients of the Russians and the Americans respectively, and accordingly, he argued, the Middle East talks would have an effect that could be positive or negative on other global agreements.

Kissinger wanted complete control over U.S. policy toward the region because he saw Rogers' involvement as a potential interference with what he was pursuing in other parts of the world. However, before Kissinger could cut Rogers out of the Middle East completely members of a radical Palestinian group called Black September hijacked two planes, an American TWA 707 and a Swissair DC-8, and landed them in Jordan. They attempted to trade release of the passengers for Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Because the passengers were of different nationalities (including American) Kissinger urged the countries, "at a minimum, to negotiate as a group."²⁹ Rogers, presumably hoping to take the lead in resolving the crisis and denying information to

Kissinger, sent out a telegram asking for all communication to “keep in closest concert with [the] State Department.”³⁰ Complicating the issue was the hijackers demand for an answer within seventy-two hours. Rogers’ missive was an attempt to channel diplomatic activity through the State Department where he could maintain control over U.S. policy, instead of the National Security Office, where he knew Kissinger effectively would exclude him from any involvement.

Rogers had reason to worry about his shrinking role in decision-making, as Kissinger quickly moved to discount his input in the looming crisis. On 8 September, Rogers, Kissinger, and other members of Nixon’s cabinet met in Rogers’ office. In his memoirs, Kissinger related how he voiced displeasure with Rogers and his plans to solve the hijacking crisis. He claimed “wild ideas dominated desultory discussion,” and “considerable time” was wasted on “impractical” tactics, openly criticizing Rogers and his efforts. According to Kissinger, Rogers had concluded that “nothing could be done,” thus explaining why he had to insert himself into the hijacking incident. Kissinger characterized Rogers as a bumbling bureaucrat who lacked leadership skills and was unable to make decisions at critical moments. Meanwhile, Kissinger alleged that Nixon already “turned” to him for advice and had shared with him the goals he hoped to achieve during this crisis. In Kissinger’s estimate, his plan was working—Nixon was discounting Rogers’ opinions in favor of Kissinger’s analysis.³¹ By criticizing Rogers’ efforts and working tirelessly to submit reports and analysis to the president, Kissinger was moving closer to gaining the principal advisory role when it came to the Middle East.

Instead of a cohesive staff working together to solve a rapidly deteriorating hijacking crisis, Nixon allowed Kissinger to exploit it to embarrass Rogers and usurp his

power. On 9 September, Kissinger took it a step further and began to put his staff in crisis mode, meeting with his Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) daily. With the NSC “preparing contingency plans, and implement[ing] decisions on a coordinated basis,”³² Kissinger worked to separate Rogers from the crisis altogether. By this time, Nixon already was seeking Kissinger’s advice on what to do in the region so Kissinger eagerly put a staff together to strengthen his recommendations and political position within the White House.

Kissinger admitted that he expected his actions would influence Nixon. By “activating the NSC crisis machinery,” Kissinger sent a message to Rogers that he would not tolerate “vacillation.” “My chairmanship of WSAG implied the threat that any unresolved issues would be passed on to Nixon,”³³ he claimed, exposing the secretary of state to political exasperation. Kissinger essentially told Rogers he had a direct line to the president and flatly challenged Rogers’ power. If Rogers failed to act quickly, Kissinger would report him to Nixon, hoping to cause Rogers’ embarrassment. Although Rogers had attempted to funnel communication through the State Department early in the crisis,³⁴ the effort was inadequate. Kissinger was giving Nixon “at least two, and on occasion three, situation reports”³⁵ daily, which contained analysis Nixon relied on. In one telephone conversation during the crisis, Nixon expressed to Kissinger that he was “wrong before” about how the United States should handle the Soviets and Kissinger was “completely right,”³⁶ showing Nixon becoming a captive of his NSC advisor’s insight. Kissinger’s maneuvers were succeeding.

As the crisis deepened, Kissinger and Rogers sparred over how to and who should handle the conflict. Soon, Syrian troops were camped inside Jordan and moving

towards the capital at Amman. On 20 September, Jordanian King Hussein “requested American assistance,” asking Washington in no specific terms for help pushing back the encroaching Syrian army. Kissinger immediately wanted American troops to be ready, claiming that “if [the United States] failed to act, the Middle East crisis would deepen as radicals and their Soviet sponsors seized the initiative.”³⁷ Jordan, Israel, Syria, and Russia looked to Washington for a response.

Despite having troops ready, Kissinger did not immediately send U.S. troops to help the king, as this might draw the ire of the Soviets. Instead, he urged Rabin to help King Hussein through Israeli airstrikes and deployment of ground troops if necessary. Rogers, on the other hand, opposed the use of ground troops. He “believed in very slow and measured escalation, if any,” however, Kissinger thought this was “the most likely way for a crisis to become unmanageable.”³⁸ Despite Rogers’ reservations, Kissinger, with the blessing of Nixon, contacted Rabin, informing him of the U.S. position. Kissinger claimed he “checked”³⁹ with Rogers, but by then Rogers had taken a backseat position on the conflict. Kissinger now had taken control of managing the conflict and had gained Nixon’s trust in his policy-making abilities for the region. It was the crisis in Jordan that proved to Nixon how Kissinger was indispensable to foreign policy creation, no matter the region. As historians Simon Zernichow and Hilde Henricksen Waage explain, “Following the resolution of the Jordanian crisis, Nixon fully supported the transfer of a large share of responsibility for the Middle East...to Kissinger.”⁴⁰ Nixon still kept Rogers as secretary of state and allowed him to perform the ceremonial duties of that post. Thereafter, Kissinger made deals that often undercut Rogers, hampering the overall effectiveness of U.S. policy.

With Kissinger so consumed with taking power from Rogers during the Jordan crisis, he misjudged how his actions influenced the region. Because of Kissinger's promise to help King Hussein, Jordan was able to launch a successful campaign pushing Syria back from its capital. With the successful end to the crisis in Jordan, Kissinger assumed this success was a result of his insights on the threat from increasing Soviet influence in the region. However, as Quandt points out, "the Soviets did not have a big 'stake' in the Middle East and 'adopted a cautious policy' during the crisis."⁴¹ Kissinger and Nixon were eager to give themselves the credit for preventing what they saw as a potentially dangerous U.S.-Soviet conflict without committing U.S. troops. They attributed their victory to blocking assertion of Soviet influence in the area, without looking at any possible regional reasons for their success. In other words, they did not look at any reasons beyond their own actions for a favorable outcome. This gave them a false sense of accomplishment, creating confidence in following the same path when facing future crises in the region. This also gave them "proof" their plan for the Middle East was working, even if they ignored or missed evidence to the contrary.

Kissinger had steered Nixon away from Rogers' influence, but by February 1971 he took an even bigger step to neutralize the secretary of state. Although Rogers' authority over U.S. policy in the Middle East was rapidly evaporating, he still clung to his plan and continued his attempt to persuade Tel Aviv and Cairo to compromise. Rogers now called again on the help of UN Representative Gunnar Jarring, and worked with Prime Minister Golda Mier and the new Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to find favorable terms for a ceasefire. While this happened, Kissinger side-stepped the State Department and back channeled with Rabin, explaining that "the United States supported

[the Israeli] position of refusing to relinquish the Golan Heights.”⁴² This essentially gave the Israelis a green light to disregard the terms of the Rogers Plan. With Kissinger’s and by extension the White House’s blessing, Israel was able to reject what it viewed as an unfavorable agreement without disrupting its relationship with the United States. The rift between the White House and the State Department began to severely inhibit the U.S. ability to set a coherent foreign policy for the Middle East.

Instead of working with Rogers in support of his efforts, Kissinger and his staff advised the Israelis to hold out for more favorable terms with the Egyptians.⁴³ While Rogers worked to persuade the Israelis to accept his rebooted plan, Kissinger told the Israeli Ambassador Rabin that the United States would support Israel if it spurned the settlement and held out for a better deal. By Kissinger’s estimation, the Arab armies were crippled. Israel, on the other hand, had access to the U.S. arsenal. Dragging out the existing “War of Attrition” for a few years would allow Arab countries to see the folly in their alliance with the Soviets and ultimately work with the United States to secure peace.⁴⁴ Acting on Kissinger’s advice, the Israelis rejected the Rogers initiative.

Kissinger’s deliberate undercutting of the State Department’s plan had lasting effects on the Middle East region. Working with the Americans and the Israelis already presented a risk for Sadat because radical sections of Egyptian society believed any cooperation with the West meant ignoring the plight of the Palestinians. Rabin’s backsliding on the agreement exposed Sadat to criticism among his own supporters. Moreover it signaled Middle East leaders that Kissinger was the American official with the real power. Sadat claimed “American double-crossing” had squandered the opportunity for peace between the Egyptians and the Israelis,⁴⁵ becoming extremely

disillusioned with the United States. Nixon had allowed Kissinger to discredit the State Department, sending confusing messages to Arab nations in the Middle East and especially Egypt.

One could argue that the Rogers Plan was so weak to begin with, that Kissinger did not have to convince Rabin to reject it to have it fail. Even with Kissinger's actions, the Rogers Plan may have collapsed during negotiation of more concrete terms. This made Kissinger's actions even more devious. If Rogers' initiative had the potential to fail in any event, all Kissinger had to do was wait. Instead, he actively worked against Rogers, meeting with Rabin and giving him the green light to pull out of the deal. This action highlights the deep contempt Kissinger reserved for Rogers, explaining Kissinger's obsession with undermining Rogers authority without regard to the impact of doing so on U.S. foreign policy. He was willing to work against a fellow cabinet member to seize control of U.S. policy toward the Middle East to eliminate his rival, while assuring his view of world affairs, and especially the destructive Soviet role in it, prevailed.

While the United States officially called for peace in the Middle East, Kissinger's actions revealed that he had other plans in mind. Kissinger wanted the ability to manipulate the Middle East for his own purposes, whereas Rogers favored a more evenhanded approach as essential to achieve peace. Historian Jussi Hanhimaki explains the difference between the two plans, "Kissinger's enhanced role in America's Middle East policy resulted in a shift from an effort to find a balanced solution via multilateral negotiations to a policy that relied on Israeli military strength as the key to stability in the region."⁴⁶

Kissinger wanted U.S. influence in the area more than peace. Not only did Kissinger disagree with the Rogers Plan, he had no intentions of working within the already existing bureaucratic framework where following policy lines hindered achieving his own plans. He openly defied Rogers' authority in the Middle East early and often during Nixon's first term, causing tension. Furthermore, Kissinger's policies, which enforced the status quo, benefitted Israel and led to Arab leaders, notably Sadat, taking offense at the U.S. stance. Ultimately, he became so fixated on his own vision for the region's future that he failed to see signs of a coming war.

Although Nixon was slow to isolate Rogers from policy making in the region entirely, he eventually allowed Kissinger to assume the lead role. As Kissinger gained responsibility in the region, he quickly escalated his tactics to remove Rogers entirely. Kissinger first just criticized Rogers, but by 1971, he undermined his rival's work. After the 1971 failure of the Rogers Plan, Kissinger cemented his preeminent place in U.S. policy-making toward the Middle East, essentially cutting Rogers out completely. His hard fought battle for power in determining the U.S. role in the Middle East left him so bitter towards Rogers that he discounted any State Department plans, even those built on solid understanding of the region. Kissinger had received reports that the Arabs wanted the Israelis to concede land; however, he dissuaded Israeli participation in such deals to offset any progress Rogers may have been able to make in moving the warring parties toward a genuine settlement.

During the Jordanian crisis of 1970, Kissinger took the opportunity of inserting himself into the conflict to further siphon power away from Rogers. Blaming Rogers' ineptness, Kissinger again failed to understand the dynamics of the Middle East

and pushed for U.S. involvement against Rogers' wait and see approach, with albeit, somewhat successful results. With the confidence gained from his involvement with the 1970 crisis, he then applied this strategy to future volatile episodes in the Middle East without realizing the complexities inherent in each individual instance of regional violence.

Finally, during 1971, Kissinger met with Rabin and gave U.S. approval for the Israelis to reject the Rogers Plan for a second time, subverting State Department progress. In doing so, he strengthened the Israeli position and damaged U.S.-Arab relations. This created unnecessary mistrust between Washington and Cairo. Kissinger's rivalry with Rogers, apparent during the first iteration of the Rogers Plan, then again during the crisis in Jordan, and finally reaching an apex during a visit from Israeli Ambassador Rabin, undermined the effectiveness of U.S. policy in the region. Both men wanted their Middle East policy to succeed. Even as he increasingly took more power from Rogers, Kissinger did not soften in his resolve to push through his views on the Middle East. After he had "won," Kissinger steadfastly stuck to his policy positions, ignoring evidence that challenged the wisdom of his strategy. Kissinger did not want a peaceful settlement in the Middle East in 1971. Instead, he misperceived the region as inextricably connected with the Soviet global plans to extend its influence and needed it as collateral in his negotiations with Moscow.

NOTES

1. Richard Nixon: "Inaugural Address," 20 January 1969, Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=1941> , (accessed 9/4/2015).
2. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1979), 341, 347.
3. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 5.
4. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 348.
5. Richard M. Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1978), 433.
6. *Ibid.*, 433.
7. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), 74.
8. *Ibid.*, 74; Paper Prepared by the National Security Council Staff, 12 June 1970, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*, with appropriate year) *1969-1972, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 24: 81-88.
9. Kissinger had alternate motives for his desire to deal with the Soviets first, which will be expanded on in chapter 2.
10. Nixon, *RN*, 479.
11. Jussi Hanhimaki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 94.
12. *Ibid.*, 97.
13. *Ibid.*, 94.
14. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 577; Nixon, *RN*, 478.
15. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 80-83.

16. Kissinger, *White House Years*, p. 577; Memorandum for the Record, 10 June, 1970, *FRUS 1969-1976*, 23: Document 124.
17. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 578.
18. Paper Prepared by the Interdepartmental Group for Near East and South Asia, 30 January, 1969, *FRUS 1969-1972*, 24: Document 2.
19. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 585.
20. *Ibid.*, 589.
21. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 341.
22. Nixon, *RN*, 479.
23. *Ibid.*, 479.
24. *Ibid.*, 482.
25. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 589.
26. Memorandum of Conversation, 14 May 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, 24: Document 21.
27. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 589.
28. Nixon, *RN*, 483.
29. Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1982), 601.
30. Telegraph from the Department of State to the Embassies in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Israel, and West Germany, 7 September 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, 24: Document 205.
31. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 602.
32. *Ibid.*, 603; Minutes of a Combined Washington Special Actions Group and Review Group Meeting, 9 September 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, 24: Document 214.
33. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 603.

34. Telegraph from the Department of State to the Embassies in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Israel, and West Germany, 7 September 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, 24: Document 205.
35. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 604.
36. Transcript of a Telephone Conversation between President Nixon and the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Kissinger), 17 September 1970, *FRUS, 1969-1972*, 24: Document 262.
37. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 618.
38. *Ibid.*, 626.
39. *Ibid.*, 625.
40. Simon Zernichow and Hilde Hendriksen Waage, "The Palestinian Option: Nixon, the National Security Council, and the Search for a New Policy, 1970," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 38, Issue 1 (2013): 193.
41. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 112.
42. The Golan Heights were one of the areas Israel had taken from Syria during the Six Days War. Salim Yaqub, "The Weight of Conquest: Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 233.
43. *Ibid.*, 233.
44. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1279.
45. Anwar el-Sadat, *The Public Diary of President Sadat, Part One: The Road to War (October 1970-October 1973)*, compiled by Raphael Israeli (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 105.
46. Hanhimaki, *Flawed Architect*, 95.

CHAPTER III

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

By early 1971, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger had effectively wrestled foreign policy control from Secretary of State William P. Rogers and had begun to apply this power to Cold War issues. Nixon increasingly left Kissinger to create foreign policy, allowing him to do so with little oversight. Kissinger used this independence to form policies that attempted to limit Soviet influence in the Middle East and render the region a bargaining chip he could use to extract Soviet cooperation with U.S. pursuit of its interests in other arenas. Kissinger's policies for the Middle East revolved around maintaining the region's stalemate in hopes of keeping the area quiet to further his personal ambitions and geopolitical goals. Just as the perceived success of his policies was coming to fruition, the relative stability of the Middle East began to show signs of crumbling.

From the beginning of his tenure as National Security Advisor, Kissinger only understood the Middle East as it related to broader U.S. relations with the Soviet Union. His sparring with Rogers was a direct result of this, as Kissinger fought openly during the second year of Nixon's presidency to keep the Rogers' Plan from gaining any traction. Kissinger realized that the region was more useful as providing leverage in manipulating U.S.-Soviet relations. Accordingly, his policy centered around his ability not to solve the crisis in the Middle East, but to neutralize Moscow's role in shaping events in the region.

As a result, Kissinger committed the United States to a policy of stalemate, as he believed the region could remain in stasis without damaging the administration's policy of détente.

For Kissinger, stalemate in the Middle East served many purposes. Politically, it embarrassed the Soviets, effectively neutralizing their influence from spreading in the region while demonstrating to the Arabs that hope of achieving their goal of regaining their territory under Israeli occupation and reducing Israel's diplomatic and military prominence in the region rested with the Americans, not the Soviets. Kissinger's goal was to use the status quo to keep the region relatively calm, avoiding a conflict that could potentially drive deeper the distrust that already existed between the Kremlin and the White House, at least until the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) was signed. Finally, it bought Kissinger time to deal with larger geopolitical issues like reconciling with the People's Republic of China and ending the Vietnam War before turning his attention to the Mideast.

Between February and May 1972, Kissinger used the Middle East to elicit Soviet compliance ahead of Nixon's summit meeting with Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev in Moscow. The Middle East provided an effective bargaining tool and a way to influence summit proceedings without a direct confrontation that could derail the progress of Kissinger's larger geopolitical plans. Kissinger saw SALT as a way to cement his diplomatic legacy and buoy Nixon's 1972 presidential re-election campaign. However, while SALT came together, the Middle East modus vivendi was beginning to unravel.

Crushed under the weight of Kissinger's policy of stalemate, the leaders of the Middle East, most importantly Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, became frustrated with

the minimal efforts for settlement from the superpowers. Sadat's frustration with U.S. policy effectuated Egyptian policy changes that Kissinger either misinterpreted or failed to recognize entirely, leaving the Egyptian leader with no workable options for resuming the stalled negotiations with the Israelis. Realizing that the limited promises made to him to keep the region calm were not going to be fulfilled, Sadat began to push back against his Soviet patron, increasing the friction in an already volatile region.

Because of his policy of stalemate and his exploitation of the Middle East conflict for his own use in advancing the SALT negotiations, Kissinger laid the groundwork for the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War. His urgency to push through détente, at the cost of understanding the Middle Eastern situation, led to his surprise when the October War broke out in 1973. Historians, such as Craig Daigle, have noted how a major weakness of détente was that in emphasizing development of cooperation with its superpower adversaries, the United States undermined its alliance relationships in both Western Europe and Japan.¹ Furthermore, Washington either ignored or directly damaged its interests in the developing world. The impact of Kissinger's pursuit of détente on U.S. policy in the Middle East provides a prime example supporting this latter assertion.

After the second failed Rogers Plan in February 1971, Kissinger had effectively taken control of the foreign policy of the Middle East. By then, Kissinger had become arguably the most powerful person in Nixon's administration and had begun to take charge of the U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. In fact, Kissinger claims Nixon was worried that the State Department's initiatives in the area would "arouse opposition from all sides."² Therefore, the president had decided that Kissinger was to lead policy in the Middle East.

Instead of a settlement like Rogers had proposed, Kissinger wanted to see Soviet influence in the Middle East greatly limited and this became the central objective of his policy. In a memorandum to Kissinger, Nixon claimed that if there was an Arab-Israeli settlement, “the Soviets would be seen as the champions of peace in the Middle East and demonstrate to their Arab clients that they are doing something useful in the diplomatic realm.”³ Kissinger agreed. He therefore wanted to take steps to stifle Moscow’s goals for the region. Instead of encouraging a collaborative settlement between the Egyptians, Soviets, Israelis, and Americans, Kissinger instead worked to prevent any settlement, keeping the Soviets from any potential benefit.

In Kissinger’s opinion, the Middle East could—and should—wait, as there was no reason to reach quickly a settlement there. The National Security advisor doubted a conflict was imminent; he also believed that an agreement would “give the Soviets a dazzling opportunity to demonstrate their utility to their Arab friends.”⁴ If the Kremlin were able to broker a deal in the region, its Arab clients would see the benefit of their relationship with the Soviets. Kissinger wanted to make sure this did not happen, hoping to prove the Soviet Union’s ineffectiveness to the Arabs instead. Furthermore, he believed it would be better to wait until the United States had more to gain politically before committing to a settlement. Kissinger did not want to solve any crisis in the Middle East without using it to highlight Soviet shortcomings in the area.

A settlement in the Middle East would not only benefit the Soviets, but it also would keep the region from being used in competitive superpower geopolitics. Instead of a settlement, Kissinger would use the area in negotiations with the Kremlin, hoping to further U.S. goals in Vietnam before committing any U.S. resources to achieving a

Middle East peace. He realized that he would be “more likely to obtain” desired “Soviet cooperation” in Vietnam if the United States “moved deliberately” in the Middle East.⁵ As the war in Vietnam continued, Kissinger primed the region for his use during negotiations with the Soviets for U.S. benefit.

Kissinger’s willingness to prolong a settlement came from his belief that the area was not in danger of immediate conflict and therefore its issues did not require prompt resolution. By early 1972, after meeting with Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin, Kissinger deduced there were only two outcomes for the Mideast. Kissinger claimed that the Kremlin’s

. . . client could not win a war with the Israelis. Therefore, a continuation of the situation would lead to one of two situations: either a conviction on the part of the Arabs that their alliance with the Soviet Union was not adequate to produce a settlement, or a war by the Egyptians which would face the Soviet Union with a decision of military support and a risk out of proportion to anything that could be achieved.⁶

With only these two options, Kissinger assumed the Arabs would not gamble their future on a war they would inevitably lose.

Kissinger believed the threat of an Egyptian loss at the hands of the Israelis would keep them from attempting military action alone. If that option was off the table, the only two alternatives that remained for the Egyptians were to move away from the Soviets or to double down on their Soviet relations and convince Moscow to help them initiate and conduct a war. Kissinger did not believe that the Soviets or the Egyptians would risk a war with the Israelis that would force the United States to intervene simply to promote settlement negotiations. Furthermore, Kissinger knew from his Russian counterpart that the Soviets were invested in the upcoming Nixon-Brezhnev summit and

would not back a war that would increase tensions.⁷ Kissinger believed he could use the region to further U.S. goals without consequence. This belief became a critical element in Kissinger's misunderstanding of the region.

As the stalemate continued, Kissinger began to see direct results from his policy. He began to use the Middle East to encourage more fruitful Soviet negotiations. In a meeting with Nixon in March 1972, Kissinger explained that he and Dobrynin had spoken about a possible proposal between the Washington and Moscow to achieve peace in Vietnam. Dobrynin suggested that both nations agree on a deadline for the United States to "withdraw" and thereafter "not to give any more military aid" to North and South Vietnam.⁸ After relaying this conversation to Nixon, the president said, "I don't think we should deliver unless they do something."⁹ In response, Kissinger immediately pointed to the Middle East as a region where Soviet movement toward advancing U.S. goals would be an acceptable exchange. He claimed the Soviets had "promised [him] a reaction" to U.S. recommendations in the Middle East if Nixon would consider Moscow's proposal regarding Vietnam.¹⁰ In this exchange, it is clear that Kissinger's plan for the Middle East was effective, for the time being. Kissinger could work to remove Soviet influence in the Middle East while working towards an agreement in Vietnam.

While extracting Soviet compliance with U.S. policy in the Middle East was a central part of Kissinger's strategy, there were other benefits from delaying movement toward a settlement in the region and prolonging the status quo. Kissinger wanted to make sure there were no major incidents that would detract from the administration's impressive achievements in foreign policy during Nixon's first term as his re-election

campaign got underway. Months earlier, in February 1972, Nixon and Kissinger successfully had completed a groundbreaking trip to China and returned to praise for their achievement—any skirmish in the Middle East could mar their record. Kissinger claimed, “My principle assignment was to make sure that no explosion occurred to complicate the 1972 election . . .”¹¹ Kissinger’s personal stake in the election was obvious, and Kissinger gambled that the Mideast would not boil over before Nixon could secure his second term.

If Nixon was successfully re-elected, Kissinger, with his anticipated elevation to the post of secretary of state, would have four more years to reach a settlement in the Middle East. Kissinger understood the Middle East was complicated. He claimed that his “delay” also was based on the fact that it was a very complicated situation:

The Middle East crisis had many components, all of which were traps for the unwary and argued for caution: the Arab-Israeli conflict; the ideological struggle between Arab moderates and radicals; and the influence and rivalry of the superpowers, especially the growing Soviet military role. These ingredients had separate origins but had grown intertwined: a solution to one could not be accomplished without grappling with others.¹²

As Kissinger began to make inroads in other areas of foreign policy, he simply may not have had the time to commit his attention and energy fully to the Middle East. The stalemate was useful because, on a practical level, it gave him time to sort out more pressing diplomatic issues until he could concentrate his efforts on the Middle East. Furthermore, Nixon claimed that Kissinger had threatened to leave Nixon’s cabinet if not appointed Secretary of State.¹³ Therefore, Kissinger may have been saving the complexities of the Middle East until he could approach it from the more formally

powerful position of the nation's chief diplomat. Kissinger's policy to promote the Mideast stalemate fell in line with his own professional aspirations.

Another problem with an attempt at a settlement was Kissinger's uncertainty that he would be able to persuade the Israelis to agree. A settlement in the region would force Kissinger and the United States to "deliver" Israeli cooperation, something he was not confident Washington could do. The National Security Council (NSC) worried that it "could not produce the Israelis"¹⁴ as supporters of a settlement. The United States was uncertain that its own influence in Israel would be enough to secure Tel Aviv's support for peace and this would cause it to lose influence in the Arab states. Washington potentially could be very embarrassed if the Soviets could "produce" their clients, but the United States could not do the same. In the ideological struggle, Kissinger wanted to show that the United States was more influential in the region than the Soviets, but without overselling U.S. power. The Mideast was a powerful bargaining tool for the United States, but only if a settlement remained distant.

However, before Kissinger could count on another term as a member of Nixon's cabinet or attempt to gain Israeli cooperation, he first had to prepare for completion of the SALT negotiations. In Kissinger's talks with Dobrynin, both agreed that the Middle East would have to remain quiet until after the summit.¹⁵ Since August 1970, and the Israeli/Arab sparring over the return of occupied territory that resulted from the 1967 Six Day War, both Washington and Moscow were aware of how quickly the region could slide into conflict. The Middle East had the potential to draw the Soviets and the Americans into an unwanted conflict,

. . . if there is an Arab-Israeli war that is not caused either by a decision in Washington or a decision in Moscow, . . . the United States and the Soviet Union may get involved despite the fact that they were not involved in the initial decision.¹⁶

Because of the dependency that dominated diplomatic relationships within the Middle East, it was crucial for both the United States and the Soviet Union to keep their clients from any actions that could disrupt SALT.

However, while the United States and the Soviet Union tamped down on their clients, distrust between the two nations escalated. As the conflict in Vietnam flared during the Easter Offensive of 1972, Kissinger's distrust of Moscow's intentions became manifest in the Middle East. Kissinger worried that the Soviets would begin to push for a settlement, exposing his stalemate strategy and potentially embarrassing the United States before the summit. The NSC and Kissinger feared that the Kremlin was "preparing to set [the United States] up for a diplomatic kill in Moscow,"¹⁷ suspecting that it would undermine its verbal agreements with Washington and force a showdown to reach a peace settlement in the Middle East. This outcome would be disastrous for Kissinger, as it could drive the Arabs into closer collusion with the Soviets and embarrass Nixon's administration.

The prospect of the Kremlin upsetting Kissinger's policy brought into focus how delicate Soviet-American relations were in the Middle East. Despite this, Kissinger remained committed to SALT and retaining the stalemate in the Middle East to achieve signing of the arms control agreement. Kissinger, Robert Dallek contends, "saw the Moscow Summit as vital to . . . larger designs and [was] eager to preserve it,"¹⁸ which meant Kissinger's policy for the region, even with the limited pushback from the Soviets,

remained unchanged. Indeed, in April, Kissinger claimed that despite his being preoccupied with Vietnam, the U.S. policy towards the Middle East was working. “Above all, a measured pace fitted in with our strategy of creating in Egypt maximum restlessness with the status quo,” he later wrote.¹⁹ Kissinger believed he was close to persuading the Egyptians to see the uselessness of their Soviet patrons as the stalemate persisted.

In some ways, Kissinger was correct. Sadat’s frustrations with the Soviets were growing. However, Kissinger was not able to detect how frustrated Sadat was becoming because Sadat’s actions up to this point had been desultory. Sadat had attempted to reach out to both nations to further Egyptian interests. First, he had removed pro-Soviet cabinet members, but then had signed a Soviet Friendship Treaty. Second, he had agreed to sign an interim agreement with the Israelis, but also was working actively with Moscow on a weapons deal. While Sadat’s actions seemed confusing, they in fact were increasingly desperate attempts to break the stalemate imposed on his nation. Having lost patience with the continued stalemate, in April 1972 he began to increase his efforts to find a diplomatic solution. On 5 April, Sadat opened a backchannel to Kissinger, exploring his options for diplomacy with the Americans. According to Kissinger, “little took place in the channel,”²⁰ so Sadat’s hopes for American intervention went nowhere.

Sadat also continued to reach out to the Soviets. On 10 April 1972, Sadat travelled to Moscow, hoping to continue their February 1972 talks to build up Egypt’s weapons capabilities.²¹ Sadat wanted to remind the Soviets of Egypt’s frustration with the continued absence of progress toward securing Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab

land, having assumed correctly that “the Middle East [would] certainly be on the agenda”²² during the U.S.-Soviet summit. However, in April, just as in February, Sadat came away from the talks with Moscow disappointed, as the Soviets continued to limit arms shipments to Egypt.²³ Sadat’s actions in April 1972 demonstrate his growing desperation to break the stalemate.

Kissinger was very aware of Sadat’s frustrations with the Soviets. In a memorandum dated 22 May, the first day of the Nixon-Brezhnev summit, Kissinger reported that Sadat had written a letter to Brezhnev pleading with the Soviet premier to resist an agreement that would “fail to change the terms of power between Egypt and Israel,” because the “existence of . . . Arab regimes may be threatened.”²⁴ Kissinger knew the pressure on the Egyptian leader resulting from the stalemate was enormous, and even reported that Sadat and the Arabs claimed they would “have ‘every reason to use other means’ than negotiations to regain land lost to Israel.”²⁵ However, instead of reacting to this information in a way that would reduce the stress on Sadat, Kissinger continued with the summit, ignoring the dire warnings coming from Egypt. These actions point to Kissinger’s obsession with ensuring a successful outcome of the summit, while continuing to foster the creation of distance between Moscow and the Arab States. Kissinger gambled with the future of the Middle East, keeping the stalemate strategy in place and thereby ignoring clear signs of increasingly volatile set of circumstances emerging in the region.

Signing of the SALT on 26 May 1972, however, did not alter U.S. policy toward the Middle East. On that very day, Nixon and Kissinger again agreed to delay any movement toward achieving a peace settlement between Israel and the Arab States.

While Nixon claimed the region was “serious” it was not, “in the immediate sense as urgent as Vietnam.” Brezhnev pushed back, claiming Kissinger and Nixon were “pessimistic and balk[ed] at taking active steps;” he also warned that the situation in the Middle East was “explosive” and thus warranted attention.²⁶ Nixon and Kissinger demurred and claimed they would get to the “nutcutting” in September after the Republican National Convention; nothing could be “settled” until after the election.²⁷ Kissinger and Nixon deliberately were delaying any action because they did not want to damage their record in foreign policy so close to the election.

This interaction between U.S. and Soviet leaders exposes how much the United States was willing to gamble with the Middle East. Despite being aware of the dangerous situation in the region, Kissinger and Nixon still stuck to their plan of stalemate. Beyond the election, Kissinger knew the situation was very complicated and already had seen how Rogers had struggled with presenting basic agreement terms that both sides would accept. Of course, Kissinger, for personal political gain, had undermined his rival when he could and blamed the lack of agreement on Roger’s ineptness. Nevertheless, Kissinger had a front seat to see the complications that made achieving a peace settlement in the Middle East so difficult. He simply did not want to put his efforts towards ending a conflict that could not be solved within the few months before the election.

Another reason Kissinger procrastinated on the issue was because he knew that the stalemate was working in separating the Kremlin from the Arab States. Sadat may have been threatening war, but without weapons from the Soviets, there was no way he could be victorious in a war against the Israelis. Kissinger knew the Soviets would not

give Sadat weapons as it might place the summit proceedings in jeopardy. Therefore, Kissinger could feel somewhat confident that even the option of war had been taken off the table for Sadat.

Kissinger's goal to persuade the Arabs to establish cooperative ties with the Americans also had been realized with the opening of the backchannel. While the diplomatic conduit was relatively quiet during the middle of 1972, the fact that it had been opened pointed to potential options for diplomatic progress between Egypt and the United States. Throughout May 1972, it seemed Kissinger's policy for the Middle East had been successful, as his goals for the region seemed within reach. But as the summit ended, cracks in Kissinger's policy began to surface. Kissinger's SALT achievement proved that he was a talented diplomat. However, it caused unintended consequences that became increasingly dangerous for the United States and the Middle East, as Sadat's patience with the Soviets and the Americans reached almost complete evaporation.

The signing of SALT demonstrated to Sadat that he could not count on Moscow to provide weapons, nor was any end to the stalemate in sight. During the summit, Brezhnev and Nixon decided on a "military relaxation" policy, limiting the flow of weapons to the Middle East.²⁸ This infuriated Sadat; he still had not received his entire arms order from the Soviet Union that it had promised to him the previous October. He claimed the Egyptians were already "twenty steps behind Israel"²⁹ when it came to military supplies. The Nixon-Brezhnev bargain thus put Egypt in a precarious position militarily. The summit decision further entrenched the Egyptian stalemate as Sadat did not have weapons to wage a war, and yet he was unable to gain any traction diplomatically with either Washington or Moscow.

In Sadat's view, a decisive action therefore was necessary, one that would gain the attention of both the White House and the Kremlin in hopes of trying to push forward the Egyptian agenda. Because Sadat's specific requests for weapons to match Israel's arsenal largely had been denied or delayed so as not to upset the SALT summit, he decided to remove Soviet advisors from Egypt, hoping to attract the attention of both the Americans and the Soviets. His strategy was to remove any Soviet impediment that would keep Washington from providing the diplomatic and military support he desired. "Kissinger and Rogers had 'signaled' to Sadat that the Americans wouldn't and couldn't broker peace for Egypt, so long as there was a Soviet influence there,"³⁰ historian Kirk J. Beattie explains. If Egypt was no longer a Soviet "client," then the United States could broker peace between Egypt and Israel, without any longer having to worry about interfering with a Soviet client. In Sadat's estimation, with the Soviets gone, this would open up Egypt diplomatically to receive help from Washington. This opportunity potentially could break the stalemate in the Middle East, creating traction that would give Sadat more options.

Sadat expelled Soviet military advisors in the summer of 1972, decisively breaking "with Nasser's foreign policy of alliance with the East in order to neutralize the West."³¹ His frustration with the Soviets finally reached a climax. He told Moscow all Russian military experts were no longer welcome in Egypt, and "they must go back to the Soviet Union within one week."³² Sadat was furious that the Soviets had ignored his requests for help and hoped this move would allow for future U.S. intervention in peacemaking processes. Kissinger's plan seemingly worked to perfection.

Incredibly, the United States once again misread Sadat's intentions. Sadat claimed the expulsion of the Soviets meant "the United States would inevitably get in touch with us now,"³³ hoping that his move would demonstrate his willingness to work with Washington to establish a foundation for a settlement with Israel. He was sure that the United States would read his signal correctly and be open to brokering to a viable Mideast peace agreement. But Kissinger chose instead to continue the prolonged stalemate between Egypt and Israel, failing to grasp that Sadat's purge was an overture to the United States hoping to attract diplomatic help. "The Soviet Union, the West and Israel misinterpreted my decision to expel the military experts and reached an erroneous conclusion,"³⁴ Sadat explained later. Sadat's move did nothing to change U.S. policy towards the Middle East since Kissinger maintained his focus on achieving the larger geopolitical goals that rested on superpower cooperation. Instead of drawing the United States closer to the Egyptians, Sadat's move confused Washington. Sadat understood too late that Kissinger had no inclination to offer him much, even with the ousting of Soviet troops from Egypt. Kissinger simply could not accurately assess the evolving regional situation in the Middle East because of his obsession with détente. As Beattie explains, "the Americans could not understand . . . why the Soviets' eviction had not been held out in exchange for some meaningful American concession."³⁵ Instead of seeing Sadat's action as an invitation for the United States to intercede, Kissinger believed Sadat had squandered an opportunity to barter decreased Soviet influence for increased U.S. support. Ironically, this is exactly what Sadat was trying to signal to Kissinger. However, despite this new development, Kissinger continued to follow his policy of perpetuating

stalemate in the Middle East instead of pursuing a permanent peace settlement that might give some credit to Moscow.

Despite Kissinger's confusion in inaccurately interpreting Sadat's squandered opportunity, he did understand that the Egyptian leader was making a power play. However, instead of addressing Sadat's frustration with the persistent U.S. strategy of stalemate, Kissinger pushed back any appeal for a settlement until "September/October," claiming Sadat had had "three years of proposals"³⁶ from the United States that had not received any response. While this was technically correct, it was Kissinger's own actions towards those proposals that kept Sadat and Egypt mired in stalemate, not Sadat's failure to act.

Ironically, Moscow recognized the impact of Kissinger's Middle East policy in annoying the Egyptians. Soviet leaders in fact urged Washington to change course, realizing the rising level of Egyptian frustration. But Kissinger remained steadfast, claiming that "it would be difficult to come up with a comprehensive scheme given all the other pressures on me."³⁷ Kissinger again deflected Soviet pressure to become actively involved in pursuing an Egyptian-Israeli settlement because of his determination that the Kremlin should remain on the outside and receive no credit for advancing the peace process.

While Kissinger's excuse of having to attend to other business is convenient, if probably accurate, there seemed also to be some satisfaction seeing the Soviets suffer the embarrassment of expulsion at the hand of Sadat. His reaction also reflected his perception of regional issues exclusively in the context of superpower politics. Kissinger claimed that it was important to Dobrynin "not to permit small countries to dominate

great powers,”³⁸ yet here Sadat had taken a stand in allowing the Soviets to dictate how much influence a “great power” would have in his country. However, this satisfaction with Soviet embarrassment kept Kissinger from understanding how crucial progress in the region had become to prevent a conflict.

Meanwhile in the Middle East, the relative stability afforded to the region because of the ceasefire with Israel was beginning to unravel, in large part because of the diplomatic stalemate that Kissinger had been encouraging. Sadat was unable to make any political gains for Egypt and was facing his own domestic pressure. According to historian Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “as early as 1972, some of the Islamic groups began to agitate against the [Sadat] regime.”³⁹ By the summer of 1972, Kissinger’s policy created immense pressure in the Middle East for Sadat, leaving him with few choices for advancing Egypt’s interests. As the pressure mounted, the region would be put to the test when a September 1972 terrorist attack in Munich gained the attention of the world.

Leading up to the May 1972 Nixon-Brezhnev summit where the two leaders would sign the SALT, Kissinger’s policy was working the way he had envisioned. The Middle East had stayed out of the headlines with Nixon’s bid for reelection six months away and Kissinger had been able to use the region to U.S. benefit in negotiations to secure Soviet support for SALT. However, the groundwork that eventually would lead to the region’s unrest had been laid as well. Kissinger’s policy of stalemate, while beneficial to the Nixon administration’s larger geopolitical strategy and more immediate domestic political concerns, in fact had contributed to the unraveling of the fragile Middle East peace and the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973.

Kissinger's policy in the Middle East provides an excellent example of his one-minded determination to realize the goals of détente. Kissinger's policy served his desire to cement his diplomatic legacy in American history, while bolstering Nixon's estimable reputation for foreign policy ahead of the November election. He also was able to limit the Soviet influence as the longer the stalemate lasted, the more useless the Soviets seemed to be to their clients in the Middle East in regaining the land Israel occupied and moving toward eliminating the Jewish state.

Keeping the area quiet ahead of the Moscow summit also helped Kissinger. Refusing to become involved in the Middle East peace process meant that regional differences would not derail diplomatic cooperation with the Soviets ahead of the SALT summit. While Kissinger met his goals, however, the pressure that this policy exerted on Sadat began to show. Sadat expelled Soviet leaders, almost as a last resort, daring Kissinger to intervene to gain the attention of the superpowers after his pleas to the Soviets during the summit largely had been ignored. Kissinger again declined intervention, citing his busy schedule and the complexity a solution in the Middle East would entail.

Yet, the longer Kissinger's policy remained intact, the more destructive its damage to the region became. Without any diplomatic progress, Sadat faced increasing domestic pressure. It is within this crucible that the origins of the October War emerged. Kissinger was so committed to his policy of détente between the superpowers that he could not anticipate or react to the unintended consequences his policy created. Kissinger may have perpetuated stalemate in the region, but in doing so had reignited a pressure cooker. Without understanding the repercussions of his policy, Kissinger had made the

situation in the region more perilous. Yet it would take a terrorist attack in Munich, Germany to bring the Middle East to the brink of war.

NOTES

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CHAPTER IV

THE MUNICH ATTACK AND A POLICY

UNCHANGED

Henry Kissinger's rivalry with Secretary of State William Rogers and his complicated relationship with the Soviet Union obscured and influenced his understanding of the Middle East. As a result, the terrorist attack on the Israeli team at the Munich Olympics in September 1972 drastically changed the Middle East without Kissinger or Nixon realizing its effects. Although the signs were evident, neither Kissinger nor Nixon understood the ramifications the Munich attack would have on the Middle East region, as they only evaluated how the attack would affect their personal power calculations, not the effects it would have globally. Despite claims of being experts on foreign policy, they showed very little foresight towards the region after the attack, continuing to retain their policy of enforcing and promoting the status quo and refusing to understand how the Arabs and the Israelis used the attack as a rationale for war.

The Black September attack on the Israeli team at the Munich Olympics served as a major flashpoint for both the Palestinians and Arab countries like Egypt who supported the cause of Arab unity. The boldness of the Munich attack sent shockwaves throughout the Middle East and the world, serving as a warning of the extremely tense situation developing between the Arabs and the Israelis. President of Egypt Anwar Sadat

attempted to distance himself from the actual attack, while still maintaining his nation's political support for Arab unity. Sadat's interactions with West Germany, the increased pressure from the entire world watching the situation unfold, and the threat to the legitimacy of his own power from Black September's actions brought Egypt to its breaking point by the fall of 1973.

Despite these sweeping changes in the Middle East, Kissinger and Nixon stubbornly clung to their own agendas and policies. Instead of responding directly to the crisis as it was unfolding, Nixon and Kissinger only saw the significance of the attack as it applied to their personal political situations, namely Nixon's reelection campaign and Kissinger's diplomacy with the Soviets. Both men became convinced they had read the situation correctly, as they ignored the region and assumed the Arabs would run out of options and be forced to submit to U.S. and Israeli terms for peace.

Because Kissinger and Nixon refused to entertain any other outcomes for the region, they misunderstood how the Munich attack raised tensions. Despite clear signals that Sadat intended to attack the Israelis if the United States refused to increase its level of involvement, Kissinger and Nixon discounted Sadat's threats and remained distant from Egypt. Kissinger refused to acknowledge that any outcome except Sadat's acceptance of his terms would be viable. Because of this erroneous assumption, Kissinger and Nixon found themselves shocked when the Egyptian forces invaded Israel on 6 October 1973.

The Munich attack brought the simmering political tensions of the Middle East to the attention of the entire world. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) had not carried out attacks like this on such a large world stage,¹ signaling this event was

different. Another shocking twist to the attack was that a Western country was hosting the Summer Olympic Games. By choosing West Germany, Black September demonstrated it was able to stage attacks outside the Middle East, and created confusion within the West German leadership as they were unaccustomed to dealing with terrorism resulting from the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. While smaller incidents had occurred previously in Western countries, for example West Germany had been the location of an assassination of a political target and Belgium experienced an airplane hijacking, the attacks were limited and did not have the international, captive audience the Munich Olympics did. Taking hostages from an international, live event brought immediate, worldwide attention to the Palestinian cause.

The brazenness of this act set it apart from other attacks during an already volatile time in the Middle East.² Attacking Israeli athletes at an international, Western event illustrated how the Palestinian liberation movement was becoming increasingly violent to further its aims. In Munich, the attackers had altered their tactics. This signaled a change within the movement, which the United States did not officially note. Instead of allowing hostages to exit, as they had with the Belgian plane hijacking, the Munich terrorists were ruthless and desperate, willing to kill to make sure an international audience heard their requests for Palestinian liberation.

This attack was problematic politically for the entire region because it brought acute pressure on Arab leaders to answer for the use of terrorist actions. Championed by Egyptian President Abdul Nasser in the 1960s, the Palestinian plight had served as a rally point for the 1967 Six Day War between Egypt and Israel. While Palestinians had begun to demand more rights and identify themselves as more distinctly Palestinian, the main

goal of both the Arabs and the Palestinians was to dismantle Israel's power.³ Because the Palestinian conflict with Israel was a central tenet of Arab identity, Arab leaders attempted to condemn terrorism, while at the same time condoning its intent. The attack highlighted unresolved political issues within the Arab community and broadcast them for the world to see.

The broad viewership of Olympics, televised live around the globe, meant the world could watch each stunning feat, like Mark Spitz's record setting seventh gold medal or Caitlyn (nee Bruce) Jenner's tenth place finish in the decathlon, in real time. It was "the first major terrorist action to be captured on live television and watched by much of America,"⁴ Michael B. Oren observes, creating both controversy and captivation when Black September suddenly and violently hijacked the Games. The attack placed a spotlight not only the Palestinian struggle, but also the struggles of the Middle East during media coverage of a live, international event.

The significance of the increased media attention forced progressive Arab leaders to respond immediately to this event for a worldwide audience, not just a domestic one. The public nature and pressure this created had an alarm bell effect on Arab leaders. The stakes for Mideast leaders became much higher with the international attention, causing an important regional shift that Kissinger and Nixon discounted. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat especially struggled to balance his support for the Palestinian cause with his interest in maintaining credibility as a moderate Middle Eastern leader.

The attack put Sadat in a difficult position because he could not ignore the attack, yet he also could not support it. His struggle became real when, during the crisis,

the West German government called upon Cairo hoping to gain Egypt's cooperation to appease the terrorist demands and convince them to release hostages. However, the relationship between West Germany and Egypt was rocky, even before the Munich attack. In May 1965 Egypt had broken off diplomatic ties with West Germany and, although talks were in the works to reopen lines of communication, this had not happened formally.⁵ Despite the difficult relations, West Germany reached out to Egypt, hoping for help with ending the crisis without loss of life.

Because Sadat already faced criticism about his level of Arab loyalty from within factions of his government, he may have surmised nothing positive would come from any leader who was involved with the attack's resolution. Egypt did not oblige West Germany's request for help and Sadat refused to take Chancellor Willy Brandt's phone call during the Munich attack's intense negotiations.⁶ Sadat feared his involvement could have dire consequences for his plans for diplomacy on other issues. Brandt, now desperate, appealed to Egyptian Prime Minister Aziz Sedki, asking for Egyptian intervention and cooperation between the West German and Israeli governments to secure the safe arrival and prompt removal of the hostages from the Cairo airport for transit to Israel. Sedki demurred, following Sadat's orders, and claimed the situation was "not an Egyptian matter,"⁷ thus limiting options for German and Israeli governments. Without Egypt's cooperation, West Germany had nowhere to take the hostages, forcing them to stay at the West German airfield in immediate danger.⁸ The Egyptian leaders refused to become involved, fearing the negative consequences they would face from their Arab allies.

After the incident, Sedki claimed he declined Brandt's call because Egypt refused to make a decision "without previous agreement of the fedayeen."⁹ The fedayeen encompassed the PLO, according to records from the National Security Council,¹⁰ meaning Sedki and Sadat both understood that the Arab world could interpret helping the Germans as hurting the Arab cause. Furthermore, this refusal demonstrated Sedki's and Sadat's fear to stand against the fedayeen as this would cause Egypt to appear unsupportive of the Palestinian cause, diminishing Egyptian credibility among its Arab neighbors. By contrast, making things difficult for West Germany would show solidarity with the Arab cause and more specifically the PLO's operations, thus helping to burnish Sadat's Arab credentials among Arab nationals.

Although Sadat wanted to appear supportive of the Palestinian cause, he also worried about his own ability to control these non-governmental organizations within his country. The PLO "caused much concern among established Arab regimes," William B. Quandt notes, because the Arabs were not accustomed to seeing the Palestinians "take matters into their own hands."¹¹ This created a delicate situation in the Middle East for Arab leaders as they attempted to support the PLO and its plight against the Israelis, while, at the same time, keeping these organizations from encroaching on their established state governments and their own power.

While Sadat may have been fortifying his Arab support, he also was lending credibility to a volatile organization. According to historians Kay Schiller and Christopher Young, "the Arab governments . . . 'renewed their solidarity with the most radical faction of the Fedayin' for fear of their own populations and the terrorists leaders themselves."¹² If Sadat was to break ranks with his allies, at worst he could become the

next victim of the radical group and at best lose political support from other Arab leaders. This pressure forced Sadat's hand and caused him to begin to explore options of an Egyptian military response.

Because of the increased media attention and the political risk it caused to Arab leaders, the Munich attack put incredible pressure on an already unstable region. This event caused rising Arab frustrations, as many Egyptians detested the status quo still virtually unchanged five years after the end of the humiliating Six Day War.¹³ In response to the attack, Israel bombed what it considered to be PLO bases in Lebanon, killing 200 people¹⁴ and inciting united Arab resentment towards the Israelis. This action tipped Arab leaders towards a violent response aimed at achieving a final resolution to the challenge from Israel. Sadat claimed the bombing of Lebanon was "humiliating to any Arab [which] must be clear to everyone, rulers and peoples alike."¹⁵ To add insult to injury, Sadat also claimed the Israelis were using U.S. weapons to attack Palestinians,¹⁶ belying the progress of U.S.-Egyptian diplomatic relations and demonstrating the obvious military advantage Israel enjoyed because of its exclusive supportive relationship with the United States. Israel's swift and forceful reaction to the Munich attack brought Arab leaders to the conclusion that war was the only alternative.

Israel's retaliatory attack also evoked feelings of powerlessness within Arabs, especially Sadat. Sadat claimed in his personal diary that he wanted "to make Israel think one thousand times before she carries out an aggression of the kind she has done against Lebanon."¹⁷ Israel was able to strike quickly and fiercely at Lebanon because the Arab countries could do little to stop them—they had limited access to weapons and inferior military infrastructure. However, Sadat clearly wanted to provide a challenge to Israel's

military control over the region. After Israel's attack, any Egyptian retribution, even a losing fight, would create some counterbalance to Israel's military dominance in the region.

The Munich attack put enormous pressure on a region already struggling under the political weight of its own nationalist, ethnic, and religious differences. The impact of the attack cemented the impossible position in which Arab leaders found themselves. Instead of realizing and responding in a helpful fashion to the difficulties that Arab leaders were confronting, Kissinger and Nixon ignored them, choosing to focus on advancing their own personal political goals.

Despite the major changes within the Middle East, the United States remained coolly distant from the brewing regional firestorm. Publicly, Nixon and Kissinger condemned the attack, while privately they desperately wanted to keep the United States from making any political faux-pas that potentially could impact adversely the delicate relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Nixon had reason to worry about how not only the Soviets, but also the American people, would perceive his reaction. Facing election in two short months, the Nixon administration needed a portion of the American Jewish vote to secure comfortably the White House for four more years. Therefore, Nixon and Kissinger needed to show enough disdain for the terrorist actions against Israel to appease the Jewish voter bloc, without giving the Israelis too much free reign and offending the Russians.

Even before the Munich attack, Kissinger reports in his memoirs that Nixon worried about how he would fare among U.S. Jewish constituents during his reelection campaign.¹⁸ He assumed the Munich attack had caused "outrage" in the U.S. Jewish

community and he hoped his reaction could sway Jewish votes in his direction.¹⁹ At the same time, however, Nixon understood his reaction also could not cause any international complications.²⁰ Because of these limitations, his response was devoid of any real political bite. He claimed there was nothing he could do “with regard to what happens in other countries—that is their responsibility primarily—except to indicate our interest from the diplomatic standpoint.”²¹ His unique position motivated Nixon to release a bland, tepid statement condemning the attacks and expressing his condolences to Israel’s Prime Minister Golda Meir.

Because of a close diplomatic relationship between the two countries, Nixon could have promised military aid publicly, but he worried that this might provide the Soviets with a reason to help the Arabs. Nixon also could have pulled back and distanced himself from the entire event. However, he understood that a condemnation of the attack at least would indicate to American Jews that he was “showing an interest.”²² He therefore explained in his public remarks that the United States condemned the “tragic and senseless act,” and hoped that “brotherhood” would “in the end persevere.”²³ Nixon’s attempt to please both the American Jews and the Soviets gives insight into how Nixon and Kissinger misunderstood the effects this would have on future events in the Middle East. Instead of attempting to understand how this attack fit within a larger global picture, Nixon immediately looked to exploit it to benefit his own legacy, both in gaining reelection and in later assessments of his foreign policy.

After initially addressing the Munich attack, Nixon wanted U.S. Secretary of State Rogers to handle the whole issue, to shield himself from any possible political fallout. However, Kissinger convinced Nixon to let the National Security Council handle

the situation, claiming the Israelis did not trust Rogers.²⁴ Nixon agreed and left Kissinger to steer foreign policy on the subject, trusting him to keep the region out of the headlines until his reelection. Kissinger wanted to make sure the Jewish vote was amply satisfied with Nixon's reaction; however, he also did not want to upset his own political plan for the Middle East. Attempting to satisfy both agendas, Kissinger delayed talks with Arab leaders, which highlighted the U.S. commitment to Israel, and slowed any change in the Middle East. Kissinger was able to buy time for Nixon and keep the area quiet until Nixon's reelection. His actions in response to the Munich attack ultimately drove the region to war, as the stagnation caused tensions to erupt before Kissinger and Nixon realized the situation they had helped create.

While Kissinger's plan led to a Nixon electoral victory, he struggled to keep the Russians pleased with U.S. policy in the region after the Munich attack. Already working closely with the Soviets on bilateral agreements in Vietnam and the Middle East, it behooved Kissinger and Nixon to be noncommittal towards the attack. This way Kissinger and Nixon could avoid offending the Russians and ensure continuation of the U.S.-USSR talks. Kissinger was keen to continue conversations with Soviet Leader Leonid Brezhnev about Vietnam and Middle East resolutions and to woo him to visit the United States, as another summit with the Soviet head of state would cement Nixon's and Kissinger's legacy of superior statesmanship. Conversely, a breakdown in talks could potentially lead to a larger global conflict between these two superpowers should the Middle East slide into war.

Directly after the attack, Kissinger quickly set up his strategy of non-commitment. Already scheduled for a diplomatic trip, Kissinger travelled to Germany

days after the Munich attack. Despite the incident at the Olympic Games being a major international event just five days earlier, Kissinger and his West German counterparts only specifically mentioned the event as it related to local elections.²⁵ However, West German leaders did interrogate Kissinger about his plans for the Middle East. Kissinger demurred, claiming the region was “too complicated” and he did not “really want to say anything about it now.”²⁶ From this exchange, it is clear that Kissinger was uninterested in having a conversation about the attack and its effects on the Middle East region. He was quick to keep U.S. opinion about the Munich incident from influencing any diplomatic relations.

After his meeting in West Germany, Kissinger travelled to Moscow to meet with Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev. There he allayed fears that the Munich attack would undo any forward progress between the two nations. For Kissinger, the meeting was significant because both he and Nixon wanted Brezhnev to visit the United States, which would prove Nixon’s foreign policy prowess before the coming election. In fact, Kissinger shared with Brezhnev his expectations, “The most important achievement of our Administration will be if we can reverse the pattern of hostility and move to a cooperative relationship with the Soviet Union and both make ourselves responsible to further the peace of the world.”²⁷

Kissinger was obsessed with persuading Brezhnev to visit the United States, making him unable or unwilling to see that there were ramifications of the Munich attack that were out of his control. Kissinger assumed that if he could maintain strong diplomatic relations with the Soviets, the area would not erupt into a new crisis because both the United States and the Soviets would effectively control their clients. Even with

the Russians losing a large part of their influence in Egypt, Kissinger was eager to gain the diplomatic foothold that the Soviet Union had squandered.

Kissinger was confident the Egyptians would not try anything towards Israel without the support of either the Soviet Union or the United States. To this end, he reassured Brezhnev that he would share any information from the region and expected Brezhnev to do the same. During his exchange with Brezhnev, he lent a sympathetic ear to the Russian leader, insinuating that the Egyptian decision to kick military personnel out of the country was not “logical.”²⁸ Kissinger’s goal was to retain the Russian leader’s trust in his diplomatic process. However, during his meeting with the West German leaders, he claimed as a victory for the United States Moscow’s bungled diplomacy that led to the Soviet troop removal.²⁹ As a result of this Soviet mistake, Kissinger clearly believed his plan for the Middle East was still working. With the Soviets out, Kissinger assumed Sadat’s options were diminished and the status quo would remain firmly in place. His confidence was misplaced, but his arrogant self-confidence prevented him from seeing this reality.

While Kissinger’s meeting with Brezhnev promoted relatively positive relations between Moscow and Washington, the Middle East always had been at risk of dragging the Soviets and the United States into war. The Munich attack put a limited amount of pressure on both the United States and the Soviet Union, as at any moment the area could erupt and threaten the tenuous relationship that prevailed between the two nations. In 1972, although U.S. relations with Russia were relatively amicable, the Middle East was still a raw topic for both countries. In fact, neither the United States nor the Soviet Union wanted a regional conflict to hinder their diplomatic progress.

To Kissinger, the Munich attack was just a small speed bump slowing the achievement of his larger plan for Soviet and U.S. cooperation in maintaining world stability. He refused to slow down and really understand the role the attack had on regional leaders and the already incendiary regional conflict. Because of this, Kissinger and Nixon did not take time to reflect on the Munich attack and its ramifications. Nor did they take seriously Egypt's action to ready its military forces. They also continually delayed conferring with Egyptian National Security Advisor Ismail Hafez, despite his urgent pleas for a meeting. Kissinger and Nixon refused to change their course in the Middle East, even after the Munich attack, still believing that upholding the status quo would be their best option.

The problem with Kissinger and Nixon supporting the intractable status quo in the Middle East was they refused to assign any significance to the transformative events, like the Munich attack, that were happening in the Middle East. In his memoirs, Kissinger claimed that by the beginning of Nixon's second administration, "no Middle East issues had yet erupted into major controversy at home."³⁰ In Kissinger's estimation, the Middle East remained relatively calm, yet he was unaware that the long fuse to the October War already was lit. Nixon also ignored the Munich tragedy. After his cursory denunciation of the attack, he rarely mentioned it in public or private. Any discussion of the attack and its ramifications are missing from his memoirs and from the documentary record contained in the Foreign Relations volumes. The Munich attack became a non-issue to Kissinger and Nixon once they realized it would not derail their diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union or Nixon's reelection campaign. However, they did not

account for how this event would affect the Middle East regionally and how these regional issues would eventually lead to war.

Kissinger and Nixon also ignored Sadat and his actions. Since the beginning of his presidency, Sadat had attempted to play off the Soviets against the Americans, with little success. However, after he removed the Soviet military advisors from Egypt, he had hoped the move would signal to the White House that he was ready for the Americans to take him seriously. This did not have the intended effect. According to Kissinger, “little took place”³¹ in the way of diplomacy between the United States and Egypt after the expulsion of the Soviet advisors, clearly highlighting his misunderstanding of Sadat’s intentions.

The Munich attack propelled Sadat, Egypt, and the Arab cause onto the world stage. Sadat was under scrutiny from Arabs to break the status quo, especially after the Israeli air raid in Lebanon. He also faced the reality that quick diplomatic help from the United States would not be forthcoming. With scant options left, Sadat began to ready his troops and reinforce alliances with other countries in the United Arab Republic, including Syria and Saudi Arabia.³² Sadat claimed that the Arab leaders “welcomed me as President and showed that they were willing to help.”³³ They were, according to Sadat, “committed to only one thing—Our Arab character, pure and simple.”³⁴ Sadat gathered his allies, combined military forces with other Arab countries like Syria, and spent the nine months before the start of the October War securing “the support of more than a hundred countries,”³⁵ such as Lebanon and Algeria, as well as the Organization of African Unity (OAU), for the forthcoming attack. Sadat understood his options were limited and assumed that any action would be better for him politically than inaction.

In October 1972, only one month after the attack in Munich, Sadat talked to his War Minister Mohammed Ahmed Sadek and asked him to ready the Egyptian troops by 15 November 1972. The Munich attack had driven Sadat to begin to take concrete steps towards war, yet Kissinger and Nixon failed to see Sadat's actions as an intentional step towards war. In February, Egyptian Premier Aziz Sidqi announced publicly that Egypt was cutting domestic programs to free up funds for the "battle with Israel."³⁶ However, Kissinger claimed he did not take this new development seriously, as previous threats "had not been carried out."³⁷ In some ways, Kissinger's excuse made sense. Sadat had been threatening war for the past two years, but took no action. However, Sadat's public rhetoric and actions this time were different, as he indicated in his speech on 23 March 1973, "We should just like to make the world alert to the developments towards the battle and to our present stage, and to impress upon them that the situation is explosive and can blow up at any moment."³⁸ Once again, Kissinger missed this warning sign of war.

Sadat had worked to unite loosely Arab nations, given orders to ready his troops, and freed up capital for a new war with Israel, steps he had not taken previously. Despite these new developments, Kissinger and Nixon still did not react, ignoring Sadat's new maneuvers and claiming the Middle East region was not yet "hot" enough for Kissinger to get involved. However, Kissinger's claim that he was not yet involved in the Middle East was misleading. Kissinger was deeply involved in the Middle East, as it related to his negotiations with the Soviet Union and Vietnam. With the Russians largely losing their influence in Egypt, Kissinger, despite his happiness at this development, assumed the Egyptians finally would submit to Israeli demands, after seeing they had no

better options. Kissinger changed no policies and put off meetings with top Egyptian officials, hoping to procure Egyptian concessions. In late 1972, Kissinger pushed back meetings with Ismail. “The seminal opportunity to bring about a reversal of alliances in the Arab world,” he claimed, “would have to wait until we had finally put the war in Vietnam behind us.”³⁹ Kissinger’s plan was to buy time until the Egyptians relented to Israeli demands.

Because Kissinger assumed that diplomatically Sadat was trapped, he skirted ways that potentially would have opened opportunities for the Egyptians. Kissinger made excuses for delaying Middle East diplomacy. However, this did not mean he was paying no attention to the region. Kissinger needed the Middle East to remain in its suspended tension so he could use it as a bargaining tool with the situation in Vietnam and his relations with the Russians. If the Middle East remained always on the verge of war, it worked as a tremendous reminder of the importance of keeping diplomatic channels open. The only caveat was that the region could never actually tip into war, as this could have disastrous effects on U.S.-Soviet diplomacy, drawing the two superpowers into a proxy war.

Kissinger still did not take Sadat seriously as a leader, and ignored his threats of war. The way Kissinger saw it, Sadat was trapped and “could not escape his dilemmas by launching an all-out military offensive since it was bound to fail.”⁴⁰ Kissinger assumed that Sadat would not be foolhardy enough to enter into a war he could not win, as Israel had technological and military superiority over Egypt. Kissinger clung tightly to this reasoning, even if it did not factor in events like the expulsion of the Soviets, the

Munich attack, or a growing Pan- Arab movement, all of which had occurred or were occurring in the Middle East.

It was only after the Egyptians had met with the Soviets that Kissinger agreed to a meeting with Sadat's Secretary of State Ismail. Hearing that Ismail visited the Soviet Union in February 1973 and not wanting to drive the Egyptians back into the arms of the Soviets, Kissinger decided it was time to confer with the Egyptians. Ismail, Kissinger claimed, had secured the "largest arms package ever negotiated for the Middle East,"⁴¹ and the Soviets had given Egypt weapons without conditions. The reason for the deal, according to Kissinger, was so the Soviets could regain the influence they enjoyed before with Egypt. The terms of the deal meant that Egypt was "free to consult its own interests,"⁴² implying that if the Soviets could not keep Egypt as a client, they would at least try to keep it as a customer. Despite learning of the arms deal, Kissinger was still not convinced the Egyptians would attack Israel. Maintaining his pattern, Kissinger was only motivated to act in the region if it benefitted the U.S. position in regards to the Soviets.

Ismail met with the U.S. State Department and U.S. President Nixon publicly, and with Kissinger privately. During these discussions, he was careful not to agree to any State Department offerings before he talked to Kissinger.⁴³ After all, the Egyptians had endured humiliation for agreeing to parts of the Rogers' plan in 1970 because they had trusted a politically crippled Rogers instead of Kissinger. Ismail knew his meeting with Kissinger was crucial to secure any kind of agreement between Egypt and the United States. He explained the situation in Egypt "has deteriorated almost to the point of explosion."⁴⁴ Egypt could not hold out any longer, and in a few months it was going to

war. Ismail told Kissinger directly that it was not a matter of if the conflict in the Middle East was to resume, but when. In a strange justification, Kissinger claimed that while Ismail was honest with Egypt's intentions to go to war, "he was so courteous that he obscured Sadat's basic strategy, which was to elaborate the conditions of a showdown."⁴⁵ Instead of recognizing the deteriorating situation in the Middle East, Kissinger remained steadfast to his plans for the Middle East. He politely listened to Ismail, but refused to offer any real options that would derail Ismail's and Sadat's threat of war.

Significantly, even after Ismail's meeting with Kissinger, U.S. policies in the region remained unchanged. Kissinger and Nixon refused to recognize the change in Sadat's actions after the Munich attack, after tensions rising in the region, and after Egyptian leaders explicitly told Kissinger of their plans. Instead of taking the Egyptians at their word and understanding the mounting pressures Sadat was facing, Kissinger and Nixon continued to assume the region would not change significantly. In his memoirs, Kissinger does not offer an explanation for his actions. This may be because he truly thought the October War was impossible to foresee. However, given the evidence, there were large and glaring signs that the October War was coming and the domino effects from the Munich attack pointed to the imminence of resumed conflict. If Kissinger had not allowed his self-serving interests to blind him to the dire situation the Munich attack caused, he might have paid closer attention to what Ismail and other Arab leaders were saying.

The Munich attack had an incredible significance in signaling future events in the Middle East because it exposed the simmering tensions in the region to the entire world. The bold and public nature of the attack brought the Palestinian issue to the

attention of an international audience and forced both the Israelis and the Arabs into action. For leaders like Sadat, this attention meant walking a fine line between acting immediately against Israeli retributions to appease the radical factions of his constituency and exploring diplomatic processes in search of a favorable settlement. In the end, the Munich attack caused both sides of an already divided Middle East to double down their efforts and prepare for a resumption of war.

While war in the Middle East remained a real threat as a result of the effects of the Munich attack, Kissinger and Nixon refused to understand the ramifications and changes the attack had brought to the region. Instead, they focused only on how the attack could potentially affect their personal ambitions. Nixon worried that his reaction to the attack potentially could harm his chance for reelection and Kissinger fretted about the attack upsetting the cooperative diplomatic relations he had established with the Soviet Union. Neither politician saw how the attack already was shifting the course of events in the Middle East toward a renewal of conflict. Furthermore, even when faced with Egyptian leaders explicitly explaining their plans for war, Kissinger and Nixon still refused to believe Egypt would follow through. Despite the changes of Egyptian rhetoric and action, Kissinger and Nixon clung tightly to their belief that the best option for the Middle East would be to reinforce the status quo. Instead of switching tactics and potentially avoiding a war, Kissinger and Nixon stubbornly stayed the course and missed the chance to maintain peace.

NOTES

1. Michael B. Oren, *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co, Inc., 2007), 532.
2. Aaron Klein, *Striking Back: The 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and Israel's Deadly Response* (New York: Random House, 2005), 14.
3. William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1993), 46.
4. Oren, *Power, Faith, Fantasy*, 532.
5. Kay Schiller and Christopher Young, *The 1972 Munich Olympics and the Making of Modern Germany* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 191.
6. German Chancellor Willy Brandt attempted contact with Egyptian President Anwar Sadat without success for two tense hours while the Cairo government claimed it could not reach the president. Serge Groussard, *The Blood of Israel: The Massacre of the Israeli Athletes, Olympics 1972* (New York: Morrow, 1973), 274; Schiller and Young, *1972 Munich Olympics*, 199.
7. Groussard, *Blood of Israel*, 274.
8. *Ibid.*, 135.
9. *Ibid.*, 275.
10. Minutes of a National Security Council Meeting, *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*, with appropriate year) *1969-1972, Middle East Region and Arabian Peninsula* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 24: Document 3.
11. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 4.
12. Schiller and Young, *1972 Munich Olympics*, 210.
13. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1979), 1296.
14. Klein, *Striking Back*, 94.

15. Anwar el-Sadat, *The Public Diary of President Sadat, Part One: The Road to War (October 1970-October 1973)*, compiled by Raphael Israeli (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 265.
16. *Ibid.*, 266.
17. *Ibid.*, 269.
18. Henry A. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston: Little Brown and Co, 1982), 202-203.
19. Conversation between President Richard M. Nixon and Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry A. Kissinger, September 6, 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Documents on Global Issues* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), E-1: Document 93.
20. *Ibid.*, Document 93.
21. Richard M. Nixon, 6 September 1972, "Message to Prime Minister of Israel Golda Meir about the Deaths of Israeli Athletes at the Olympic Games in Munich, Germany," *Public Papers of the President (hereafter PPP), Richard M. Nixon* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1972) I: 288.
22. Conversation between Nixon and Kissinger, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, E-1: Document 93.
23. Nixon, 6 September 1972, *PPP, Richard Nixon*, I: 288.
24. Conversation between Nixon Kissinger, Washington, *FRUS, 1969-1976*, E-1: Document 93.
25. Memorandum of Conversation, 10 September 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Germany and Berlin* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008) 40: Document 372.
26. *Ibid.*, Document 372.
27. Memorandum of Conversation, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Soviet Union, June 1972-August 1974* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008), 15: Document 44.
28. *Ibid.*, Document 44.
29. Memorandum of Conversation, 10 September 1972, *FRUS, 1969-1976, Germany and Berlin*, 40: Document 372.

30. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 195.

31. *Ibid.*, 196.

32. Sadat met with President Hafez al-Assad of Syria and King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, signing agreements for help with Egypt's inevitable "total confrontation" with Israel. Sadat, *Public Diary*, p. 300; Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper Collins, 1978) 244.

33. Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 239.

34. *Ibid.*, 239.

35. *Ibid.*, 240.

36. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 206.

37. *Ibid.*, 206.

38. Sadat, *Public Diary*, 329.

39. Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1300.

40. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 206.

41. *Ibid.*, 209.

42. *Ibid.*, 209.

43. *Ibid.*, 208.

44. *Ibid.*, 213.

45. Sadat, *Public Diary*, 213.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger fundamentally misunderstood the Middle East and made misguided policy decisions when it came to the region, causing his surprise when Egypt's troops rumbled over the Sinai and attacked the Israelis on 6 October 1973. U.S. policy towards the Middle East during 1969-1973 provides an excellent example of Kissinger's quest for personal power, his desire to limit Soviet influence through his policy of detente, and his inability to change U.S. foreign policy based on the Munich attack. These outcomes of Kissinger's policy directly led to the October War. Although signs that Egypt was becoming more volatile, Kissinger ignored these clues and adhered to policies that helped to push the region into war.

From the beginning of Nixon's presidency, Kissinger had worked diligently to gain greater access to creating policy for the Middle East. Kissinger personally and professionally loathed Rogers and used the Middle East and the failed Rogers' plan to humiliate Rogers and prove to Nixon that he had the foresight for the Middle East. Nixon's near constant feelings of being an outsider in Washington led him to move foreign policy creation from the State Department to the White House, giving Kissinger the access he needed to follow his own plans for the region.¹

When crisis hit Jordan in September 1970, Kissinger quickly seized the opportunity to take charge of Middle Eastern foreign policy for the Nixon administration.

While Rogers attempted to have all communication funneled through the State Department, Kissinger highlighted the Soviet involvement, making the crisis a National Security threat, not just a diplomatic issue. Kissinger put his staff in crisis mode, submitting policy and advice directly to Nixon. Nixon soon began to rely on Kissinger for all advice in the Middle East, removing Rogers' influence altogether, and cementing Kissinger's place as the main creator of U.S. foreign policy.

Once Kissinger effectively neutralized Rogers' influence within the Nixon administration, he was able to implement his policy for the Middle East. Instead of reaching a settlement, for which Rogers had advocated, Kissinger worked to preserve the status quo in the region until the conflict could be of better use to himself and his geopolitical aims. During 1971-1972, Kissinger did not see any benefit in a settlement. The Soviets were still influential in the region and would share any praise should an agreement be signed.

However, Kissinger realized that in order for the region to be useful to him, both sides had to refrain from open conflict. Therefore, his strategy revolved around a lasting stalemate that would frustrate the Arabs who wanted to regain land Israel had taken at the end of the Six Days War.

By eschewing settlement and encouraging stalemate, Kissinger was able to use the region to further U.S. geopolitical goals while extinguishing Soviet influence in the Middle East. Kissinger's commitment to his policy of détente led him to focus on the region as a way to remove the Soviets instead of realizing the volatility in the area. This misunderstanding became a prime example of the limits of détente and led to his surprise when the Yom Kippur War broke out in October 1973.

The Middle Eastern turmoil also was useful to Kissinger as a bargaining chip in upcoming SALT negotiations with the Soviets. With an increased effort to keep the area quiet before the summit from both sides, Kissinger was able to buy time before the U.S. election and see the successful conclusion of SALT. This allowed Kissinger and Nixon to cement their sterling reputation in foreign policy. The Middle East became indispensable for Kissinger and U.S. foreign policy during 1972, even if this policy did little to extinguish the region's volatility.

As the stalemate dragged on, the Egyptian president, Anwar Sadat, became increasingly frustrated with the lack of support his country received from either the Soviets or the United States. After the Soviet Union and the United States agreed to limit weapons to Egypt, Sadat kicked out Soviet military advisors and worked earnestly to bring the Egyptians out of their current stalemate. Despite Sadat's bold moves away from Soviet influence, Kissinger's policy towards the Middle East remained unchanged, as he still believed the Middle East's value lay in its use to limit Soviet influence. Because of his unwillingness to appreciate the frustrations of the Egyptians, Kissinger could not see how the region was tipping towards war.

Only a few short months separated Sadat's decision to kick out the Soviet military advisors and the terrorist attack at the Munich Olympics, further highlighting the desperation of the Arabs in the Middle East. Again, Kissinger misunderstood how this major event impacted the region and how the blowback from the attack would drive Sadat and the Arabs to the decision of war.

The Munich Massacre became a flashpoint for the region's troubles, exposing just how volatile the area had become. It brought worldwide attention to the

Israeli/Palestinian conflict and put increased pressure on leaders in the Middle East. Sadat struggled to find a balance between distancing himself from the terrorists' attacks while supporting the cause for Arab unity. The attack and the Israeli retributions incensed both Arabs and Israelis, adding fuel to an already explosive region. However, Kissinger and Nixon clung to their policy of stalemate, refusing to see how this tactic was woefully inadequate to address the changing times. Instead, Kissinger and Nixon worried about how their response would affect Nixon's reelection campaign, never understanding how this event would be a catalyst for the October War.

In response to the continued stalemate, Sadat, who had been diplomatically frustrated the entirety of his short presidency, began to make decisive and open moves towards war. Instead of recognizing the shift in Sadat's behavior, Kissinger continued to believe Sadat had no options except to wait out the stalemate. Kissinger knew Sadat had kicked out the Soviets prior to the Munich attack and believed that Sadat would not start a war without Soviet backing. Without access to Soviet weapons, Egypt could not win a war against the Israelis, and for Sadat to start a war that he would inevitably lose seemed reckless. Therefore, Kissinger believed he had time before the Middle East required his attention. He put off meetings with Egyptian diplomats, erroneously believing his policy of stalemate would continue to be relevant for the area. Even with warnings from other world leaders, Kissinger refused to change U.S. policy as the Mideast prepared for war.

On 5 October 1973, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs Joseph Sisco reported that Egyptian forces had attacked Israel.² Yet, despite implementing a policy that contributed directly to in the region diplomatically for three years, Kissinger was surprised when the Middle East erupted in war. Kissinger's

refusal to change his policy, one that was based on his own personal rivalry, his use of the region for Soviet negotiations, and a gross misunderstanding of the Munich attack's impact on already simmering tensions, ultimately brought about the October War.

Kissinger deeply misunderstood the Middle East and only used the region to further personal political goals, as an extension of his policy of détente to limit Soviet influence, and to force adherence to U.S. requests through a policy of stalemate that disregarded the region's needs. Because of these misunderstandings, Kissinger did not see how his policy had primed the area for war to break out in October 1973. Despite being hailed during the time as a great asset to U.S. foreign policy, Kissinger stubbornly clung to policies that unsurprisingly led to war.

NOTES

1. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (eds.), *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 5.
2. Henry A. Kissinger, *Crisis: The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) 12-13.

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