Richard Nixon greeted by Hafez al-Assad at Damascus Airport, June 15, 1974.

FACING ASSAD

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria, 1969–76

Lars Hasvoll Bakke

FACING ASSAD

American Diplomatic Relations with Syria, 1969–76

Lars Hasvoll Bakke

To the memory of

Aslaug Petrine Bakke

Preface

I started this project years ago. It is now finished. The interval was interesting. I hope the same is true of the outcome. Without the help and friendship of some remarkable people, the process of getting here would have been unbearable, and the final result a sprawling mess. Foremost among these people is my thesis counselor – Professor Hilde Henriksen Waage. For her critical but always good-humored feedback, for her patience with my countless drafts filled with sidetracks and confusion, for going above and beyond the call of duty, she has my profound gratitude. I also wish to thank my fellow students attending her Middle East seminars, who provided feedback on individual chapter drafts, and I wish to thank Simen Zernichow who did the same. I am immensely grateful to Eirik Wig Sundvall and Anders Brudevoll, who gave their invaluable feedback on my final full draft.

For their expert assistance on very different topics, my gratitude also goes to Dr. Hilde Eliassen Restad and Dr. Sami Moubayed. I would like to thank the very helpful staffs of the Nixon and Ford presidential libraries, without whose guidance I would have drowned in the tens of millions of documents at those archives. Harald Johnsen Vøyle has my gratitude for the subtle and effective graphic design wizardry he worked upon the first pages of this study.

I wish to thank my fellow students for innumerable hours of quizzes, loud lunches and absurd discussions. I also wish to thank my other friends for tolerating my recent dullness and absence. And I wish to thank my family, for being my family.

Finally, to Norway's tax-payers, who funded this strange endeavor, I am (literally and figuratively) indebted. You have my thanks, and my promise to repay the favor, if not to you, then to your children and grandchildren.

Lars Hasvoll Bakke

Oslo, November 14, 2013

Table of Contents

Abbreviations Used for Primary Source Citations

DS-HKT: US Department of State – Freedom of Information Act – Henry Kissinger Telephone Transcripts (digitzed at http://foia.state.gov/Search/Collections.aspx)

FRUS: Foreign Relations of the United States (digitized at http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments)

GF: Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- **GF-NSA-KS**: National Security Adviser – Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files, 1969-1977
- **GF-NSA-KT**: National Security Adviser –Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976
- **GF-NSA-PC-EUCA**: National Security Adviser – Presidential Country Files for Europe Canada
- **GF-NSA-PC-MESA**: National Security Adviser – Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia
- **GF-RAC**: Remote Archive Capture Program (RAC)

GFD: Gerald R. Ford Library – Digital Collections (digitized at http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp)
- **GFD-NCM**: National Security Council Meetings File, 1974-77
- **GFD-HKPM**: Public Papers of Henry Kissinger – Major Addresses
- **GFD-HKR**: Kissinger reports on USSR, China and Middle East Discussions, 1974-76
- **GFD-M**: Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-77

NARA-AAD: National Archives – Access to Archival Databases – US State Department Central Foreign Policy Files (Record Group 59), created, 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1976 – Search engine (http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=sl)

NSA-GWU: Digital National Security Archive (at George Washington University) (http://nsarchive.chadwyck.com/home.do)

RN: Nixon Presidential Library, Yorba Linda, California
- **RN-WCFC**: White House Central Files – Subject Files – County Files
- **RN-WSFP**: White House Special Files – President's Personal File
- **RN-HAKO**: National Security Council Files – Henry A. Kissinger Office Files
- **RN-HAKT**: Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts (Telcons)
- **RN-NSC**: National Security Council Files
- **RN-NSC-D**: Archived in the National Security Council Files, but found via the Nixon Library website (http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/releases/dec10.php)
- **RN-NSC-IF**: National Security Council Institutional ("H") Files

Introduction

Ignoring, confronting, containing and colluding – such was the twisted road of Washington's approach to Syria from 1969 to 1976. After years of neglect, the October 1973 Arab-Israeli War impelled the American Secretary of State – Henry Kissinger – to face President Hafez al-Assad of Syria and mediate a Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement. At the time, Kissinger saw this as a way of isolating Syria from other Arab states. This American isolation strategy soon evolved into a sort of courteous containment, accented in 1976 by an element of collusion with Syria. The presidencies of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford were the first to face the emerging regime of Hafez al-Assad, whose dynasty and legacy confounds American leaders to this day. Fundamentally, this study seeks to answer the following question:

> *How did the Syrian-American diplomatic relationship develop in the 1969-1976 period, and why?*

Two subsidiary questions derive from this:

> *Which policies did Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger pursue, and why? Insofar as the chosen primary sources help illuminate this: How can Hafez al-Assad's goals and policies be understood?*

This thesis examines American primary source documents to answer these questions. No comparable study exists. A key objective is therefore to present a thorough (though in no way comprehensive) and chronologically coherent account of the relationship's development from 1969 to 1976. The study was not conducted to formulate explicit lessons on international politics, or to point out who were the angels and demons of the day. Rather, it is intended as an empirically and methodologically sound description of what is plausibly knowable, in a form both dispassionate and vivid.

National Interests in American Middle East Policy
Washington D. C. lies nearly 10 000 kilometers from Damascus. Why should American taxpayers spend their money, and their politicians and bureaucrats spend their time bothering about Syria, or the greater Middle East? Which interests did Americans perceive in the region, and why? States act to promote their own perceived national interests. But in

itself, the 'national interest' concept is an empty container.[1] Political actors and scholars add to it such values as they prefer. Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger explicitly grounded their foreign policy in their own conceptions of national interests. Their perceptions of national interests, however, were not universal. A person's conception of what constitutes a national interest, and thus his preferences in foreign policy, hinges on his fundamental beliefs about how people reason, how they interact within and across borders, and how this comes together in international politics. International relations theorists are frequently divided into three main schools: Realists, Liberals and Constructivists.[2] This study is fundamentally, but not exclusively Realist in its outlook. It operates with a fluid concept of national interests, focusing on interests as they were perceived by the principal actors, rather than 'objective' interests. William Quandt, a historian of the Arab-Israeli conflict, identifies three widely perceived US national interests in this context, which align well with the impressions given by the primary sources used for this study. In brief, they were:

1. The containment or rollback of Soviet influence.
2. Securing oil supplies from the region to the US and its allies.
3. Facilitating Israel's security and survival.[3]

First, the geostrategic situation which emerged following World War II turned the Middle East into one of many areas which the United States felt impelled to take an interest in. American Cold War logic dictated that the US should contain or drive back Soviet influence in the region. Not doing so risked allowing the Soviet Union (USSR) to gain political strength and resources there, in turn strengthening the Soviet position versus the United States.

Second, the United States, and particularly its allies in Western Europe and Japan, needed

---

[1] Some argue that all rational actors, including state governments and leaders, calculate objective national interests with essentially logical reasoning. This implies that the content of the national interest concept has meanings which should be inherent to all. This study is based on the assumption that although historical experience suggests the existence of *some* near-universal norms of national interests in international relations, they are insufficient in explaining the behavior of states towards one another. Thus, this study assumes there is no inherent meaning in the national interest concept. It therefore presents a definition of the interests which American policymakers of the periods appear to have percieved as crucial.

[2] Brief introductions to these schools of thought can be found in Steven W. Hook, *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Paradox of World Power* (Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2011), 70–76; Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and History* (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007), 4–8.

[3] William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 11–15.

continued access to the region's vast oil resources, while denying the Soviet Union control over the same. The oil matter varied in importance throughout the period. Syria's insignificant oil resources meant that the US did not pursue strong relations there as it did in oil-rich Saudi Arabia. During the 1973 October War, Arab oil states embargoed oil supplies to the United States and many of its allies which were perceived to be supportive of Israel. Thus, the Arab-Israeli conflict was shown to have direct bearing on energy supplies to the US and its allies. This realized a long-standing fear in the US foreign policy community that their relationship with Israel would threaten energy supplies from Arab states. Meanwhile, financial aid from these Arab oil states to Syria boomed. By supporting a state in direct confrontation with Israel, these wealthy countries presented themselves as supportive of a joint Arab struggle against Israel, while avoiding direct involvement.[4]

Third was the welfare and security of Israel. This thesis sidesteps the fuzzy and hotly contested normative question of whether this *should* be considered a national interest of the United States. On the other hand, it is largely uncontroversial to state that the United States *have been* supportive of Israel since the state's founding in 1948. The presidencies of John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Nixon saw this relationship magnified and tightened. Long before 1948, Americans – both Jews and gentiles – largely favored the Zionist/Israeli cause.[5] These domestic sympathies have been reinforced and focused into political action through the agency of the Israel lobby, "a loose coalition of individuals and organizations that actively works to move U.S. foreign policy in a pro-Israel direction."[6]

Especially during and after Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency, American support for Israel materialized as high volume economic and military aid, and strong political backing, to the point of risking potentially catastrophic confrontations with the Soviet Union. Whether

---

[4] However, as chapter 2 of this study notes, the Tapline oil pipeline did play some role in Syrian-American relations in the 1950s. Vaughn P. Shannon, *Balancing Act* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 3–5; Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 255, 263.

[5] Walter Russell Meade, "The New Israel and the Old," *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2008, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64446/walter-russell-mead/the-new-israel-and-the-old?page=show; Efraim Karsh, "Israel," in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 156–185; Shannon, *Balancing Act*, 27–28.

[6] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 5; Andrew Preston, David Schoenbaum, and Tony Smith, review of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, ed. Christopher L. Ball, *H-Diplo Roundtables* VIII, no. 18 (December 15, 2007), http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/IsraelLobby-Roundtable.pdf.

threatening such a showdown or aggravating US relations with important Arab states, the special relationship with Israel has challenged American leaders since 1948. Long before 1973, Middle East area experts, especially in the US State Department, called for pursuing improved relations with the Arabs, or relatedly, for what President Johnson called an "even-handed" approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict.[7] By balancing support, the United States could seek friends on both sides of the conflict. If successful, this would give the US greater influence in stalling Soviet influence in Arab states and secure oil supplies, while also adequately supporting Israel. One concrete way for American leaders to ease this balancing act would be to improve Arab-Israeli relations.[8]

This study recognizes the existence of other influential factors in the events studied. Such factors include cultural affinities and idealism among individuals and national populations, cognitive failures among policy making individuals or within groups, and so on. For instance, idealism matters in American foreign policy. American politicians would be hard pressed to fully divorce themselves from the exceptionalist ideals on which American politics have always been based. However, abstract factors such as these are not easily traced among concrete developments like those examined in this thesis, or in its sources. To the extent that it is productive in pursuing the study's objectives, the thesis explicitly or implicitly incorporates understandings of a number of such factors.

Institutional and Individual Factors in Washington D. C.

While frequently referred to as 'the world's most powerful man', an American Cold War president faced numerous constraints on his power. The United States Congress was one key source of political constraints. Presidents whose leadership provoked serious opposition in Congress might in the end face restrictive laws or reduced funding for their policies. Richard Nixon became an example of this. During his presidency, and that of his successor, Gerald Ford, Congress worked to strengthen legal restrictions on presidential power.[9] Congress is an important avenue of influence for numerous professional lobby organizations in the United States which work to sway political processes. They operate through the media, through

---

[7] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 11–15; Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 248–253; Shannon, *Balancing Act*, 2, 6–7.
[8] Ibid.
[9] One example was the "War Powers Resolution" of November 7, 1973. Hook, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 136–170.

other types of appeals to the American public, and through direct contact with politicians. They are widely understood to be most influential through the US Congress. One example is the groups collectively known as the American 'Israel Lobby'.[10]

American foreign policy was traditionally formulated and executed through the cooperation of the White House and the US State Department. The department's Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (NEA) employed a large number of analysts with the Middle East as their forte, many possessing extensive first-hand experience in the region. Richard Nixon came to the White House planning to strengthen the presidency's power over policy implementation. This worked to the detriment of the State Department's bureaucrats, whom Nixon distrusted.[11] In the words of historian and Kissinger-biographer Jussi Hanhimäki, Nixon "wanted to be his own Secretary of State".[12] To facilitate this, Nixon modified the National Security Council's (NSC) role. The NSC was created in 1947 as a formal gathering of top-level figures involved in foreign affairs, such as the President and Vice-President, the secretaries of State and Defense, military- and intelligence chiefs, and others, such as the National Security Adviser (NSA). The NSA led the NSC staff, tasked with preparing briefing papers for meetings, and coordinating policy across the numerous government branches involved in foreign policy. Whereas the importance of the NSC as a decision-making forum had declined significantly by 1973, the importance of Kissinger and his staff was ascendant.[13]

The NSC staff in effect grew into a small State Department, a process which accelerated under Nixon. Nixon chose Dr. Henry Kissinger as NSA and placed him in a White House office, within easy reach. Together, they re-structured the NSC system with numerous sub-groups, doubled its staff and magnified its influence over policymaking. For Nixon, the crucial difference between the State Department and the NSC was proximity and loyalty. State Department career bureaucrats had their own networks, priorities, and ways of doing things.

---

[10] Shannon, *Balancing Act*, 6–8; Meade, "The New Israel and the Old."

[11] Andrew Preston and Fredrik Logevall, eds., *Nixon in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5; Jussi M. Hanhimäki, "An Elusive Grand Bargain," in *Nixon in the World*, ed. Andrew Preston and Fredrik Logevall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.

[12] Hanhimäki, "An Elusive Grand Bargain," 28.

[13] Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 40–51.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The NSC staff's loyalties went first and foremost to their employers: Nixon and Kissinger.[14]

For his Secretary of State, Nixon picked a lawyer and old friend, William Rogers. Rogers and his State Department experts tended toward seeing local and regional issues in the Middle East as central and requiring attention. Kissinger and the NSC staff preferred to see the area as another Cold War battleground, where the main causes of conflict were Soviet meddling. Rolling back Soviet influence would thus be a particular priority.[15] In the following years, Nixon appeared a willing spectator as a power struggle ensued between Rogers and Kissinger over the leadership of US foreign policy. While formally the President's chief lieutenant in foreign policy, "only one of the major issues on Nixon's agenda fell under Rogers' purview: the Middle East."[16] Nixon made that call due to worries that Kissinger's Jewish background would bias him in matters relating to Israel. But in Middle Eastern matters, Kissinger often undercut Rogers, and had, by the end of 1970, assumed the chief role there as well.[17] For most of his 44 month tenure, Rogers and his department was either subverted in its initiatives, or relegated to handling minor issues which Nixon, Kissinger and the NSC staff lacked time for.[18] Henry Kissinger was made Secretary of State on September 22, 1973, and held that post for the remaining Nixon-Ford presidency. Brent Scowcroft, until then Kissinger's deputy at the NSC, took over the NSA position on November 3, 1975.

Literature

Countless books and articles assess the nature of American foreign policy in the 1969-1976 period, the personalities of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, and the organization, psychology and effectiveness of their leadership. Likewise, a significant body of scholarship describes the internal structures, divisions and relationships of Syrian politics. However, studies of Syrian-American relations remain scarce. As are works on Syrian foreign policy in general. Sami Moubayed's 2012 book *Syria and the USA* offers a valuable overview from the time of President Woodrow Wilson through the end of Eisenhower's presidency. One of the books strengths is its combination of classical 'big man' diplomatic history with perspectives

---

[14] Hook, *U.S. Foreign Policy*, 171–207; Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making*, 40–70; Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 81–86.

[15] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 59–62.

[16] Jussi M. Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23–25.

[17] Ibid., 17–19, 23, 92–94.

[18] Ibid., 23.

on the attitudes and actions of Syrian commoners. David Lesch's *Syria and the United States* deals specifically with the important Eisenhower years. Patrick Seale's 1965 study *The Struggle for Syria* covers the 1945-58 period in a regional perspective, while keeping sight of influential powers beyond the Middle East.[19] Following the Eisenhower presidency and Syria's 1958 entry into the United Arab Republic with Egypt, the lack of scholarly coverage echoes the period's low ebb in the Syrian-American relationship. Thereafter, insights into the relationship must be gleaned from sparse, incidental coverage in works on related subjects, such as books on the Cold War and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, general histories of the region, and books covering American Middle East policy in general. This study helps fill this gap by examining the revival of the Syrian-American relationship in the 1970's.

Inasmuch as scholars can ever 'get under the skin' of the people they study, Nixon and Kissinger's motives, logic and idiosyncrasies are among the most accessible. Thousands of pages of scholarly studies ensure this, based on a profusion of sources. This is not the case with Hafez al-Assad. Only two studies covering Hafez al-Assad can roughly be considered of scholarly quality: Historian and journalist Patrick Seale's *Asad – The Struggle for the Middle East*, and professor of history Moshe Ma'oz' *Asad – The Sphinx of Damascus*.[20] Seale's biography is particularly valuable due to his personal contacts and interviews with regime figures including President Assad, a rarity when it came to this guarded and careful man. Seale further interviewed numerous other important Syrian political figures while writing the book. These contacts seem to have engendered in Seale an understandable, but in the context of his book, excessive amount of sympathy for the Syrians and their leader. This contrasts with his obvious antipathies toward Henry Kissinger, whose actions Seale typically interpret in the worst possible light. Seale seems more balanced, nuanced and insightful when discussing the main object of his study – Hafez al-Assad and colleagues. Devoid of such personal contacts on the Syrian side, Moshe Ma'oz' account is more detached, but lacks Seale's 'personal flavor'. Both are valuable attempts at understanding Assad.[21]

---

[19] Sami Moubayed, *Syria and the USA: Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012); David W. Lesch, *Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992); Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965).

[20] Seale, *Asad of Syria*; Moshe Ma'oz, *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus: A Political Biography* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988).

[21] Seale, *Asad of Syria*; Alasdair Drysdale, "Review of Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East by Patrick

On the American side, Richard Nixon's great triumphs, tragic failures and the conflicted personality behind them, has attracted an immense body of scholarly writing. The same is the case for Henry Kissinger, variously portrayed as a brilliant peacemaker, *realpolitik* cynic and eccentric media darling. Gerald Ford's presidency – relatively short and less dramatic – has attracted less attention. Especially when it comes to Nixon and Kissinger's legacies, debates abound. One concerns the question of who *really* determined US foreign policy during the Nixon and Ford presidencies: Kissinger or the presidents? Beyond the occasional encouraging message to Kissinger, Nixon's footprints are scarce in the sources used for this study. But this could simply mean that his input was more often than not given in ways which left no documentary traces. However, two examples from early 1974, discussed in chapter 4, where documents show Nixon involving himself without Kissinger asking him to, give a relevant insight into their dynamic. In both cases, Kissinger was greatly displeased. When, in one of these cases, he received advance information of Nixon's planned actions, Kissinger quickly and sternly warned the President to step back. Nixon duly complied. Both these cases concerned specific matters of saying and doing the right thing at the right time. These were tactics, not strategy. As for the question of who set the overall tone and strategy of American foreign policy, these sources do not reveal much. Examples in chapter 4 seemingly illustrate how Nixon had a grander vision of dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict, than did Kissinger. If Nixon pushed for implementing such a vision, it left few traces in the records studied.

Historian William Bundy argues that it was Nixon who set the overall tone and framework of US foreign policy, which Kissinger executed. But in the Middle East, he claims Kissinger operated largely on his own after 1972. Asaf Siniver studied four cases of Nixon-era crisis management. Two of these were the 1970 Jordan invasion and the 1973 October War.[22] By the time of the October War, Siniver found that the shifting balance of power in the White House "put Kissinger in a particularly propitious position to design, manage, and make

---

Seale," *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 1990); Ritchie Ovendale, "Review of Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East by Patrick Seale," *International Affairs* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 1991); Marius Deeb, "Review: Asad of Syria by Patrick Seale and the Sphinx of Damascus by Moshe Ma'oz," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 1992).

[22] William P. Bundy, *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 510–515, 528; Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making*.

foreign policy almost single-handedly."[23] Most significant developments covered by this study unfolded after that war. While the primary sources examined for the study cannot conclusively *confirm* Siniver's claim, there is very little there to support a counter-argument to the effect that Nixon was the mastermind of the policies pursued after the October War.

Following Nixon's resignation, Gerald Ford's initial inexperience in foreign policy by default granted Kissinger much leeway in policy making.[24] According to a Ford biography by John Robert Greene, Nixon "bequeathed to Ford a foreign policy that had begun a thorough reassessment of America's place in the world. For the most part, Ford agreed with those changes."[25] Greene paints Ford as a President who neither had, nor truly wanted to have, a vision for where he would take the United States.[26] Ford's footprint in the available sources is significant, most notably in records from numerous Ford-Kissinger meetings. Like Nixon, he occasionally declared himself willing to be tough and decisive with the Israelis to achieve movement in negotiations. But he typically added that he would only do so if Kissinger thought it the best course of action. Nothing indicates that Ford pushed significant foreign policy initiatives independent of Kissinger's advice.

The Kissinger Challenge

Leading American figures of the Nixon-Ford era have issued thousands of pages of memoirs and other records of their respective roles. Presidents Nixon and Ford each published mildly interesting accounts, which, however, provide almost nothing of substance on the topics covered by this study.[27] Henry Kissinger's writings are a very different animal. His three-volume memoirs – published in 1979, 1982 and 1999 – total 3871 pages. These were supplemented by more specific volumes such as *Crisis* – published in 2003 – 400 pages of which cover his role in the 1973 October War. Kissinger based these books both on personal recollection and primary sources.[28] He clearly had access to many of the same primary

---

[23] Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making*, 54–55.

[24] John Robert Greene, *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 117–119.

[25] Ibid., 117.

[26] Ibid., 189–193.

[27] Richard M Nixon, *RN : The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990); Gerald R. Ford, *A Time To Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford* (London: W.H. Allen, 1979).

[28] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979); Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982); Henry Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999); Henry

sources which were used for this study. However, each of these books was published well before the relevant archives were opened to the public, typically occurring no sooner than 30 years after their creation. Kissinger thus had a head start on the historians, which he used to maximum advantage. Written in staggering detail and grandiloquent prose by one of the most influential figures of the era, his memoirs are at once immensely attractive sources, and ripe with hazards for those aspiring to balanced historical writing. Leafing through the citations of various studies of US policies in the era – especially those written prior to the opening of relevant archives – typically shows Kissinger's accounts heavily referenced. While scholars lacked access to 'raw' source material, Kissinger's selection and presentation of sources and events was available and has spread into decades of scholarship.

Fortunately for this study, most relevant archives had been opened. Early on in the process, I chose to leave Kissinger's memoirs aside until having fully processed the primary source documents gathered, and formed an opinion based on these. Then, my reading could be complemented by that of his memoirs. In general, where Kissinger's memoirs overlap with available primary sources, they are typically not incorrect. But they are, unsurprisingly, selective presentations, leave out valuable nuances, and frequently frame or interpret Kissingers actions in overly positive or otherwise misleading ways.

Primary sources

While many comparable studies in diplomatic history would focus on the archives of the US State Department, this makes less sense for the period under study. Nixon and Kissinger built a highly centralized structure of policy formulation and decision making within their White House, more so than had ever been the case before. Thus, the brunt of the original research for this thesis was done among the records of the Nixon and Ford presidencies, or in other words, in the archives left to posterity by the White House of this era. Focusing on White House archives was done from an understanding of that institution being the most important center of foreign policy power, among a range of others:

> The Presidency is the prime decision-maker in US foreign policy, as Chief Diplomat and Commander-in-Chief. Most decisions about foreign relations are made in the Executive Branch, and most decisions in

---

Kissinger, *Crisis - The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003); William Burr, "The Kissinger Papers," *The New York Book Review*, May 20, 1999, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1999/may/20/the-kissinger-papers/.

the important Arab-Israeli conflict are left to the president. Nonetheless, Congress has the will and ability to serve as a check on presidential power on this particular issue.[29]

The United States Congress played a role. As did the departments of State, Defense and Commerce, along with various intelligence agencies, the press and others. But the top level policy formulation and decision making largely took place in the White House. Numerous other archives might have provided valuable insights. A historian of modern diplomatic history faces an immense surplus of potential sources, but priorities must be made.

Main Archives and their Content

Seeking primary source materials from contemporary White House archives, archival research was done at the Nixon and Gerald R. Ford presidential libraries in Yorba Linda and Ann Arbor. The high-quality digitized archive holdings of the Ford Library greatly complemented this. As did the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) document series, compiled by the State Department, and documents declassified by that department under the Freedom of Information Act. Most notable among the latter is the "Kissinger Telcons", a large collection of transcribed telephone calls between Henry Kissinger and various American and foreign figures. Finally, the US National Archives' Access to Archival Databases contains a large but incomplete collection of digitized diplomatic telegrams ('cables') from the State Departments' Record Group 59, originating between 1973 and 1976.[30] Due to their vast scope, audio recordings from the White House taping system (operating between February 1971 and July 1973) were not prioritized for review.

One still-closed archive merits mention – the so-called 'Kissinger Papers'. Apparently accumulated during Kissinger's tenure as Secretary of State, they were removed by him from the department in late 1976 – just before leaving office – and placed at the Library of Congress as a private collection. The documents thus avoided their normal 30-year

---

[29] Shannon, *Balancing Act*, 5–6.

[30] "The Nixon Presidential Library & Museum," accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/; "Conducting Research in the Archives," *Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum*, accessed February 27, 2013, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/research.asp; "Foreign Relations of the United States," *US State Department - Office of the Historian*, accessed October 14, 2013, http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments; "FOIA Virtual Reading Room Documents Search," *US State Department - Freedom of Information Act*, accessed October 14, 2013, http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments; "Central Foreign Policy Files, Created, 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1976," *The National Archives - Access to Archival Databases*, accessed October 14, 2013, http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=sl.

declassification schedule. Kissinger made these accessible only with his express permission, or five years after his death. In 2011, he moved the archive, apparently still closed, to Yale University.[31] Its one million pages are likely of high value. For example, they contain a copy of the June 16, 1974 Nixon-Assad memcon (see chapter 4). This document was not found at the Nixon Library archives, nor at the Ford Library – a curious hole since the latter held numerous similar documents from Nixon's June 1974 Middle Eastern tour.[32]

The depth and quality of the documents accumulated during research varies considerably through the 1969-76 period. Until the 1973 October War, the records are slim. This corresponds with the almost non-existent Syrian-American diplomatic relationship at the time. For this particular period, research into State Department records from the US Embassy in Beirut may have been of some value, as its location made it a likely channel of communications with Damascus.

During and after the 1973 October War, the documentary record becomes much larger, in line with the priority given to the Arab-Israeli conflict. National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger became heavily involved, and records of his views and actions thereafter become the main focus of the study. A large amount of transcribed telephone conversations ('telcons') and transcribed or summarized conversations ('memcons') provide valuable insights. Largely based on conversation conducted behind closed doors, these to varying degrees convey the principal actors views in raw form, as opposed to the polished statements made in public speeches, and to the press. In interpreting these documents, this study distinguishes between the 'insiders' of Washington policymaking, the 'outsiders' and those in-between. Simply put, Henry Kissinger was typically most earnest with his Washington chiefs and subordinates. To a somewhat lesser extent, this was also true when he met his Israeli opposites. The 'outsiders' included people such as Hafez al-Assad, who would typically hear views and arguments from the Americans which were neither fully true nor fully disingenuous. As for their public statements, these were, simply put, crafted for public consumption. These did not necessarily have much to do with the real discussions

---

[31] Burr, "The Kissinger Papers"; "Kissinger Visits Yale to Donate Papers," *Yale Daily News*, August 31, 2011, http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2011/08/31/kissinger-visits-yale-to-donate-papers/.
[32] "Foreign Relations of the United States," Document 92.

carried out behind closed doors, and were not a focus of this study.

The documents gathered for this thesis were created and used at the very highest level of American foreign policy-making of the period. While by no means exhaustive, they likely reflect most major developments in American diplomacy toward Syria from 1969 to 1976.

Archive Documents as Sources – Problems of Authorship, Readership and Quantity

In his memoirs, while discussing his time as Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger noted that

> at the [State Department's] apex is the Secretary of State, in whose name all actions are taken; all instructions and cables are issued over his name. He cannot possibly read them all. Thus to produce with great flourish a cable signed by the Secretary of State proves only that he was in town, not that he wrote the cable or even knew of it.[33]

Similarly, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State under Kennedy and Johnson, noted that:

> During my eight years 2,100,000 cables with my name signed to them went out of the Department of State to our embassies and other governments of the world. Of these 2,100,000 cables, I saw fewer than 1 percent. The rest were written and sent on the basis of authority delegated to hundreds of officers in the Department of State.[34]

The archives studied suggest that this also happened during Kissinger's tenure at the State Department. However, it is less likely that papers on major decisions would be passed around under the names of principal figures if these had no knowledge of their content. Often, the document's contents and markings suggest who wrote them. But this is far from always the case. Likewise, the matter of who *read* important documents is often hard to establish. In rare cases, documents carry a red stamp saying "THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN…..", or even more rarely the handwritten initials and comments of Nixon, Kissinger or Ford. Consequently, these documents are often inadequate for assigning responsibility for one initiative or another. More than anything, they suggest the opinions and perceptions of policy- shapers and makers, and illustrate the discussions which preceded decisions. During the most 'active' years studied in this thesis, circa 1974-1976, the large amount of memcons and telcons eases attribution of views. Using specific examples, Appendix C discusses some challenges of precision and representativeness involved when using such primary sources.

---

[33] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 437.
[34] Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It: A Secretary of State's Memoirs* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1991), 459.

Syria from Independence to Isolation

The genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves, only <u>complicated</u> stupid moves which make us wonder at the possibility that there may be something to them we are missing.
- Gamal Abdel Nasser, as quoted by Miles Copeland.[35]

On April 15, 1946, the last French troops left what we now know as Syria. They had ruled the area since 1920, as part of the League of Nations Mandate of Syria.[36] On April 17, Syrians celebrated their first independence day, and with it, full formal sovereignty and autonomy. By 1946, the harshness of French rule, and centuries of imperialism before it, had taught Syrians to fear and resent the influence of foreign powers. They did not yet associate the United States with imperialism. Rather, the lofty, liberal American ideals proclaimed by presidents Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt stood out, alongside 120 years of good but largely low-level relations.[37] The permanent, heavy American engagement in global affairs following World War II would complicate matters. How had the Syrian-American relationship developed until 1969? Who was Hafez al-Assad? Which domestic sentiments and interests would he have to contend with in his foreign policy? What was the regional context within which the Syrian-American relationship would play out from 1969?

Independence – The Struggle for Syria

In the words of historian Sami Moubayed, Syria "had been patriotically yet superficially held together in the long fight against colonial rule, but once the French had left Syria in 1946, most decision makers had no clue on where to take things."[38] President Shukri al-Quwatli and his government were essentially pro-American, but his relationship with President Harry Truman's administration soured quickly after independence. Moubayed points to three main reasons: First, Quwatli allowed a significant role for the Syrian Communist Party (SCP) in national politics, causing anxiety in Washington that Syria might turn into a Soviet client. Second, he infuriated the Americans by refusing to allow construction of the Trans-Arabian Pipeline ('Tapline') through Syria. Third, the two governments disagreed bitterly over the

---

[35] Miles Copeland, *The Game of Nations: The Amorality of Power Politics* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969), 183; In the original rendering, the word "complicated" is emphasized in italics.

[36] The Mandate also included present-day Lebanon, which was turned into a separate state.

[37] Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate : The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987), 615–618; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, xiii, 13–57; Douglas Little, "Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945-1958," *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (1990): 52–53.

[38] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 71.

partition of Palestine.[39]

On November 29, 1947, the UN passed its partition plan for the British Mandate of Palestine. It proposed creating a Jewish state on 56 percent of the territory, leaving 43 percent for an Arab state. Two thousand angry demonstrators stormed and torched the American Embassy in Damascus. Syria's government flatly refused the UN plan and prepared for war. In the Arab-Israeli fighting which ensued in Palestine, Syria sponsored thousands of Arab guerrillas. Several prominent figures of post-independence Syria took part in the fighting. British rule in Palestine ended at midnight on May 14, 1948. On May 15, Zionist leader David Ben Gurion announced the creation of the State of Israel. Immediately thereafter, while Harry Truman recognized the new state, the Syrian Army went to war in Palestine. Anti-American sentiment swelled in Syria's streets. Meanwhile, Washington increasingly worried over a perceived Syrian drift towards the Soviet Union, exemplified by arms purchases from Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1948.[40]

Syria experienced three *coups d'etat* in 1949. American complicity has been alleged in the first and third of these. Whatever their degree of complicity, the Americans were not unhappy about the men brought to power – the last of whom was Colonel Adib al-Shishakli. In those years, many Syrian politicians aired sympathies for the Soviet Union. The Americans saw Shishakli as potentially pro-American, focused on economic development and strengthening his own regime rather than resumed fighting with Israel or flirting with the USSR.[41] Meanwhile, frequent Syrian-Israeli border clashes stoked widespread Syrian fears that "they would be the next victim of Israeli expansionism."[42] Syria's leaders consistently sought arms to counter this threat, arms which the United States had in abundance. But early talks over US arms deliveries to Syria foundered. Shishakli could not guarantee that the weapons would not be used against Israel. Truman's offer of development aid through his *Point Four Program* met with indifference. This was not the aid Syria was looking for.[43]

---

[39] Ibid., 70–77; Tapline would bring oil from Saudi Arabia, a new U.S. client and trading partner, via Syria, to Lebanon's Mediterranean coast for shipment to key U.S. allies in Europe.

[40] Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 53–55; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 75–77.

[41] Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 44; Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 58–60; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 77–94.

[42] Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 19.

[43] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 85–94; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 17–21.

Eisenhower's Middle East

The US presidential campaign of 1952 received much attention in Syria. With a young Richard Nixon as Vice President, Dwight D. Eisenhower's presidency was widely welcomed. Syrians hoped the pair and their new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, would take a more even handed approach to the Middle East than had Truman.[44] But in the fraying Syrian-American relationship, worse was yet to come:

> As a function of its cold war alliance with the Soviet bloc and its traditional position as the most vehemently anti-Israeli Arab state, Syria has been perceived by Washington as an implacable foe for most of the period since World War II. This antagonistic relationship evolved during the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.[45]

As the first US Secretary of State to do so, Dulles visited Damascus in May 1953. Sensing a need to bolster his credentials as a "tough negotiator and ardent Arab nationalist", Shishakli, the Syrian strongman, took a tough public posture against Eisenhower. But in private talks with Dulles, Shishakli proved forthcoming.[46] He asked for US arms deliveries "to fight off communism, in order to keep Syria independent".[47] An impressed Dulles responded very favorably, but added that the "United States must be confident that Syria would not attack Israel" and that US arms would not be used in any future war with that state.[48] In the shifting constellation of forces pushing and pulling at Syrian-American relations, here was the constant wedge: Israel. American military aid came with strings no Syrian leader could accept. Absent a satisfactory resolution to the issue of Israel and the Palestinians, war with Israel had to remain an option for Syria's leaders. Seeing Israel as something of an existential threat, they sought the means to defend themselves. While Dulles and Shishakli talked, huge demonstrations rolled through Damascus, organized by the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ba'th Party and the SCP.[49] They were furious at the signs of Syrian-American friendship. If Shishakli promised non-hostility to Israel in return for arms, and this became public knowledge, the strongman knew he would be finished.[50]

---

[44] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 97–100.

[45] David W. Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour: Syria and the Eisenhower Administration," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 92.

[46] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 100–102.

[47] Quoted in Ibid., 101.

[48] Quoted in Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 32.

[49] The Brotherhood sought to rule Muslim societies according to the ideals of early Islam. Founded in Egypt in 1928, it was active in Syria prior to the country's independence. The Ba'th Party will be introduced below. Derek Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society* (London; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 85–86; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 100–103; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 32–35.

[50] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 100–103; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 32–35.

Dulles returned from Damascus with a favorable impression of Shishakli, but the matter of Israel blocked the United States from delivering what Syria's leaders wanted: Military aid.[51] After the meeting, a perceptive Dulles noted that the Arabs were "more fearful of Zionism than communism".[52] American leaders could not ignore their ties with Israel and its backers in the United States to gain Syria as an anti-communist client. Syrian leaders could not ignore their or their people's fear of Israel to gain US backing in the turbulent Middle East.

In October 1953, tensions with Israel grew over Israeli water diversion works on the Jordan River, coupled with a widely condemned Israeli attack on Qibya, a village on the Jordanian-ruled West Bank. In response, Shishakli raised the alert level of Syria's armed forces while dispatching 24 000 men to the front, approximately two thirds of Syria's total forces. In a rare show of strength against Israel, Dulles condemned the Qibya attack and halted aid. One month later, following strong pressure on the US State Department by the American Israel lobby, aid deliveries resumed. This vacillating response gained the United States few Syrian friends. With the Israeli wedge firmly in place, other forces would pull Syria and the United States farther apart.[53]

The Rise of the Ba'th Party

The Eisenhower administration had for a while worried about the growing influence of the Ba'th Party, especially within Syria's armed forces. The party originated with two Syrians, Salah al-Din Bitar and Michel Aflaq, who met while studying at the Sorbonne in the early 1930's. Their party espoused what they considered an indivisible trinity of ideas: Arab unity, freedom and socialism. From the outset, they saw domestic reactionaries and foreign imperialists as the forces the Ba'th must fight. Despite stressing socialism and anti-imperialism, which the Soviet Union also proclaimed, they distrusted communism. This was a foreign idea, with followers who advanced Moscow's cause rather than that of the Arab nation. The Ba'thists believed in the existence of one Arab nation, which could and should be united as a nation state. Pursuing that goal required an active foreign policy. The Ba'th

---

[51] Ibid.
[52] Quoted in Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 33.
[53] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 104–108; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 36–37.

preferred to view their foreign policy as Arab neutralism, focused on rolling back the divisive influences of foreign powers.[54]

Formally extant since 1947, the Ba'th Party's mainstream breakthrough came in the parliamentary elections of September 1954. While the conservative nationalist parties were decimated, the Ba'th took 22 out of 142 seats. To Washington's worry, Khaled Bakdash of the Syrian Communist Party became the first elected communist member of a Middle Eastern parliament. Although the new (short-lived) government formed following the election was essentially pro-Western, Washington saw a worrying trend.[55] On December 27, CIA Director Allen Dulles noted that "the situation in [Syria] is the worst of all the countries in that area."[56] Syria was perceived to be moving ever closer to the Soviet orbit. Seen in hindsight, the Syrians were becoming more markedly nationalist/anti-imperialist, rather than pro-communist. But that distinction was often missed in Eisenhower's Washington. To Syrians, the United States would in coming years look increasingly like France and Britain, the old world imperialists. With its particular focus on foreign policy and anti-imperialism, the Ba'th stood to gain from such developments.[57] By 1955, the party had come "to the point of virtually dictating [...] the government's neutralist and largely anti-West foreign policy."[58]

From Baghdad to Cairo – Syria Picks Sides

In the Middle East, Eisenhower worked to build a regional defense structure facing the USSR. But US initiatives toward defense cooperation were, as in the case of Syria, frequently de-railed by Arab conflicts with Israel, and due to animosities and struggles for regional leadership among Arab politicians. In March 1955, Iraq and Turkey signed the Baghdad Pact, with British and American backing. Pakistan and Iran joined soon after. Viewed from Syria, the Baghdad Pact put two menacing neighbors – Turkey and Iraq – together in alliance with old and new imperialists in Britain and the United States. Syrians knew well that the Iraqi royal family still played for the vacant throne in Syria, which had been theirs for a few

---

[54] Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 2; Alasdair Drysdale and Raymond Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process* (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 1991), 14–16.
[55] Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 2, 54–56.
[56] Ibid., 56.
[57] William L. Cleveland and Martin P. Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2009), 325–326; Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 65; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 1–2, 51–56; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 95–124.
[58] Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 2.

months following World War I. Syria clung to a political course independent of the great powers of the world.[59] The Baghdad Pact pushed Syria "closer to the day of reckoning, when it would have to make a decisive choice on the direction of its foreign policy."[60] Syria's political orientations were already markedly leftist and anti-Western.[61]

Following the 1952 overthrow of Egypt's monarchy, Gamal Abdel Nasser eventually emerged as the country's new leader. Partly responding to the Baghdad Pact, Nasser's regime concluded the so-called Czech arms deal in September 1955, purchasing $200 million worth of advanced Soviet weaponry through Czechoslovakia. Large quantities of Soviet arms meanwhile reached Syria via Czechoslovakia. Syria's $23 million deal, which included tanks and warplanes, had preceded the larger Egyptian purchase. On July 26, 1956, Nasser proclaimed the nationalization of the British- and French-owned Suez Canal Company. Britain, France and Israel concocted a secret plan to undo the move, and cause Nasser's overthrow. The first move followed on October 29, when Israel invaded Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and quickly reached the Suez Canal's East Bank. British and French forces then invaded the Suez Canal zone, ostensibly as peacemakers. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union bought the ruse. Under heavy pressure from Eisenhower, the co-conspirators withdrew. Israel completed its evacuation from Sinai in March 1957.[62]

In the eyes of the Arab public, Nasser had defeated two imperialist powers and their Zionist accomplice. It was a massive PR victory, overnight transforming him "into a living legend throughout the Arab world", in Damascus perhaps more than anywhere else.[63] In Syria, Suez boosted a political trend toward nationalist, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist ideas like those Nasser espoused. This was exacerbated by the parallel uncovering of *Operation Straggle*, a

---

[59] Iraq's King Faisal II was the grandson of Faisal I, who declared himself King of Syria in 1920, only to be evicted by French forces four months later; Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 6–10; Lesch, *Syria and the United States*, 53–56; Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 63–64; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 277, 324–326.

[60] Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 98.

[61] Ibid., 93–100; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 277, 324–326.

[62] Nasser formally became President of Egypt on June 23, 1956.; Keith Kyle, *Suez : Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 14; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 301–313; Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 256; Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 93–100; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (Harlow, Essex, U.K: Longman, 2000), 190–194.

[63] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 142.

British-American-Iraqi plot to overthrow the Syrian regime at the end of 1956. In a January 5, 1957 speech, President Eisenhower announced what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. Aimed at Middle Eastern countries under Soviet pressure, Eisenhower offered economic and military aid. If necessary, this might include direct US military involvement. The doctrine constituted a hastily formulated attempt at filling a perceived power vacuum opened in the Middle East by Britain's defeat at Suez.[64] According to historian David Lesch, it misread the popular mood in the Arab world, especially in Syria:

> As far as the Syrians were concerned, the doctrine was totally inappropriate because it focused on what Washington saw as the major threat to its interests in the Middle East, that is, Soviet expansionism, and not on what the Arabs perceived to be their main problem – Israel. The only aggression the Arabs had witnessed of late was that of Britain, France, and Israel at Suez, and a covert operation in Syria sponsored by the British and the Iraqis – nothing emanating from communist or Soviet sources. In addition, any regional interpretation of the doctrine concluded that it was anti-Nasser (the phrase "rollback Nasserism" was commonly used in the West), and thus contrary to the popular wave of support in the Arab world for Egypt in the wake of its tremendous political victory at Suez. To the Syrians, the doctrine was a unilateral action taken by the United States in its attempt to assume the imperialist mantle of Britain and France, and Washington immediately lost any goodwill it had attained by its opposition of the tripartite invasion of Egypt at Suez.[65]

After nearly a decade of worsening Syrian-American relations, a new low was reached in what Lesch terms the *American-Syrian Crisis* of 1957. It began when Syrian authorities uncovered *Operation Wappen*, a Washington-approved CIA plot to 'correct' Syria's perceived drift into the Soviet orbit. A diplomatic crisis followed. It escalated to the point where the US and Turkey, fearing that Syria was about to become a full-fledged Soviet satellite, massed military forces on Syria's northern border and in the Mediterranean. Washington seriously considered direct use of force to keep Syria out of the Soviet orbit. However, fears of Soviet reprisals against Turkey apparently restrained Eisenhower.[66]

The fear of an impending Soviet takeover, aided by indigenous communists, was also widespread in Syria at the time. This was particularly true in the Ba'th Party. Syrians no more desired Soviet domination than American. Between Turkish-American and Soviet pressures, Syrian politicians sought a third way out. While the Syrian-Turkish-American confrontation intensified, Egypt's Nasser dispatched a force of around 2000 soldiers to Syria's threatened border with Turkey. This militarily insignificant move was a well-publicized show of Arab

---

[64] Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 64–69; Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 99–100; Eisenhower Dwight D., "Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East," January 5, 1957, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11007&st=&st1=.
[65] Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 100.
[66] Ibid., 100–104; Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 69–75; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 154–168.

solidarity, further heightening Nasser's status in Syria. With Egypt, the Syrians found their

third way. A Syrian-Egyptian union, the United Arab Republic (UAR), was announced on

February 1, 1958.[67] According to David Lesch, the 1957 American-Syrian Crisis was

> the coup de grâce to any hope of improving the relationship between the United States and Syria that had so steadily deteriorated since the early 1950s. [...] In Syria, the United States was unable to curb the rise of leftist Arab nationalist forces and ironically found itself [...] relying on a nationalist movement to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its position in the Middle East; the hostility engendered by a feeling of betrayal and imperialist victimization nonetheless was created, severely hampering U.S.-Syrian relations for more than a generation and beginning an antagonistic relationship that only recently has somewhat subsided.[68]

While outside of clear-cut Soviet dominance, Syria had shacked up with the independent-

minded Nasser. Every US president until Nixon would struggle with the policies and influence

of this ascendant star of the Arab world. Following the UAR's formation, scholarly studies of

the Syrian-American relationship become sparse. The US embassy in Damascus was

downgraded to a consulate, its ambassadorial function transferred to Cairo. Nasser quickly

took charge of the UAR's foreign affairs.[69]

Syrians and Egyptians initially cheered the UAR's formation. Arab unity seemed to be at

hand. But the project soon ran into hurdles. In July, Brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim overthrew

Iraq's Hashemite monarchy in a bloody coup. Iraqi pan-Arabists pressured him to unite with

the UAR. Qasim refused. Within the UAR, the Syrians found that Nasser and the Egyptian

subordinates he sent to Syria preferred to rule the country without their input. Suspicious of

political parties, Nasser strove to dismantle them and end the political activities of the

notoriously politicized Syrians. Feeling like subjects rather than equal partners, Syrian

military units led by right-wing officers rebelled in September 1961, expelled the Egyptians,

and ended the union.[70]

In the White House, President John F. Kennedy had succeeded Eisenhower on January 20,

1961. He narrowly defeated Richard Nixon in the November 1960 elections. Despite good

---

[67] Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 293–303; Little, "Cold War and Covert Action," 69–75; Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 100–104; Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 157–168.
[68] Lesch, "When the Relationship Went Sour," 104.
[69] Moubayed, *Syria and the USA*, 167–175.
[70] US State Department analysts at the time perceived the new Syrian regime as pro-Western conservatives, by Syrian standards. Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 80–85; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 303–314, 326–330; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 58–73; Seale, *The Struggle for Syria*, 307–309; M.E. Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War* (London: Longman, 1991), 251–253.

intentions vis-à-vis Arab nationalists, in Syria and elsewhere, the Eisenhower administration's record on that account was decidedly mixed.[71] During the presidential campaign of 1960, Kennedy had spoken of reconciliation with leaders he felt akin to:

> It is a time, in short, for a new generation of leadership--new men to cope with new problems and new opportunities. All over the world, particularly in the newer nations, young men are coming to power--men who are not bound by the traditions of the past--men who are not blinded by the old fears and hates and rivalries--young men who can cast off the old slogans and delusions and suspicions.[72]

Kennedy hoped to guide neutralists such as Nasser away from Moscow.[73] If they would not side fully with the United States, then at least "the Third World might find a third way."[74] Eisenhower and Truman's approach to the Arab Middle East had focused on conservative regimes, such as those of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iraq. In Kennedy's Middle East, American fraternity with Arab Nationalists like Nasser was the great prize.[75] On the day of Syria's secession, the State Department reported to Kennedy that "the rebels were, by Syrian standards, pro-Western conservatives."[76] Relations with this new regime appealed. But overt support might wreck the budding relationship with Nasser, who had been greatly humiliated by Syria's secession. Quietly and indirectly, Kennedy's White House chose to back the new Syrian regime. Nasser soon reconciled himself with the fact of the coup. The US recognized a once more independent Syria. However, Kennedy's focus remained on Nasser and Egypt.[77]

Hafez al-Assad

As the UAR foundered in 1961, a tightly knit group of Syrian officers, all Ba'th Party members, watched from their postings in Cairo. On the backdrop of Nasser's attempts at strangling Syrian politics, they secretly worked to keep the Ba'th Party alive. This group, dubbing itself the *Military Committee*, became one of several factions fighting for power in Syria in the following years. Among them was a 30 year old air force captain named Hafez al-Assad. He was born in 1930 in Qardaha, an impoverished mountain village in north-western Syria. Assad belonged to the Alawite sect, a religious minority of heterodox Shi'a Muslims. He was

---

[71] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 39–48, 64–65.

[72] "Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States - Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles," *The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara*, July 15, 1960, http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25966.

[73] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 64–65.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid., 64–67, 80.

[76] Ibid., 80.

[77] Ibid., 80–85; Though Syria had seceded, Egypt would be known as the United Arab Republic until 1971.

one of very few of his peers to get any sort of education. After excelling at every level, he rose to become an air force pilot and officer. Assad was a committed political fighter and Ba'th Party member from his youth days. His entry into the utterly politicized Syrian officer corps allowed him to carry on with politics, with much higher stakes.[78]

Nasser had succeeded at restraining Syria's lively political scene. But he did not strangle it.[79] Following the UAR's breakup in 1961, "Syria recovered something of its old chaotic vigour".[80] While many Syrian political figures objected to the realities of the UAR, far from everyone supported its ending, much less abandoned the ideal of Arab unity. The UAR's collapse in 1961 left many unhappy. Assad and his Cairo comrades returned to a Syria ruled by the right wing officers who had led the secession. Unwilling to trust Ba'thists with positions of importance, the prevailing powers in Damascus shuffled Assad and likeminded officers into dead-end jobs.[81] The Cairo comrades began plotting the regime's overthrow and Assad "spent 1962 as a full-time conspirator."[82]

Ba'thist Coups and Syria's Road to Isolation

On February 8, 1963, the Iraqi branch of the Ba'th Party took power through a bloody coup in Baghdad. This inspired the small Syrian party branch to carry out a successful coup one month later, on March 8. Assad's Military Committee was instrumental in planning and executing the takeover in Syria, which was a purely military affair. Assad became the commander of Syria's most important air force base, effectively making him commander of the Air Force itself. The Military Committee expanded to include a total of ten officers. They gradually became the real power holders in Syria. Ba'thists were given important positions, particularly in the armed forces, which emerged as the true heart of Syrian politics.[83] The new ruling party's slogan was 'freedom, unity and socialism'. Unity in this sense equaled *Arab unity*, which required fighting off the divisive influence of the superpowers and Israel:

> Israel was viewed as a wedge to Arab unification, the culmination of which would be an Arab nation
> united under one flag, leadership and ideological structure; this would remake the Arab world into the

---

[78] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 3–71, 88; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 398–399.
[79] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 57.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid., 67–75.
[82] Ibid., 72.
[83] Ibid., 75–80, 86–88; David W. Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Avi Shlaim and Wm. Roger Louis (Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2012), 81–82.

> global force [sic.]. Western imperialism had, in the Ba'th perspective, planted Israel in the heartland of the Arab world, perhaps with the primary objective of keeping the Arabs divided. […] One of the main prescriptions for curing the Arab world's weakness brought about by its divisiveness was simply the elimination of Israel.[84]

For a brief period in 1963, the Ba'th, fresh in power in Baghdad and Damascus, seemed to have the momentum to become the unifying force of Arab nationalism it aspired to be. Instead, a power struggle between Syrian Ba'thist and Nasser supporters (Nasserists) erupted in Syria between April and July. Purges were followed by bloody assaults and street fighting in Damascus and Aleppo.[85] The Ba'th Party clung to power while "Nasser denounced the Syrian Ba'thists as fascists and murderers."[86] On November 11, Ali Salih al-Sa'di, the Iraqi Ba'thist leader, was ousted by officers and moderate Ba'thists. The Ba'th Spring ended. Rather than forming the vanguard of a united Arab world, Syria's Ba'th stood alone, increasingly isolated and stripped of its momentum. While its sweeping dreams of pan-Arab unity faded, the would-be unifiers of the Arab world faced a fractured home scene. The new regime marked its one year anniversary by crushing a Muslim Brotherhood revolt in Hama.[87] Likewise, "within the Ba'th Party there were splits between the Military Committee and the civilian leadership, older and younger party members, rural peasant and urban intellectual party members, and minority groups based on tribal and regional ties."[88]

Isolated in the Arab world and internally fractured, the Syrian Ba'th found itself in a weak position. Intra-party power struggles continued for years to come. Assad was given the task of curing Syria's armed forces of its chronic factionalism. After its numerous interventions in Syrian politics, the military should become a dependable tool of the new regime rather than the source of its overthrow. Assad sought to indoctrinate its personnel with Ba'thist ideology, and moved regime loyalists into all important positions.[89] In Patrick Seale's words, Assad "set about building inside the armed services and on the model of the civilian organization a hierarchical structure of party cells, divisions, sections and branches".[90]

---

[84] Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 80.
[85] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 81–90.
[86] Ibid., 83.
[87] Ibid., 90–94.
[88] Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 81.
[89] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 89–90.
[90] Ibid., 89.

In the United States, the November 22 murder of President Kennedy in Dallas paved the way for Lyndon B. Johnson's presidency. Kennedy's Middle East policy had begun as unusually sensitive to Arab nationalist sentiments. This Nasser-focused policy perished in the war-torn mountains of Yemen, where Saudi Arabia, a US client, fought a proxy war with Egypt. Failing to attract Nasser and his Arab nationalist followers into the US orbit, Kennedy found more willing strategic partners in Israel. When Kennedy agreed to sell Hawk missiles to Israel in the summer of 1962, it opened a new chapter in the American-Israeli relationship.[91] In the words of Kennedy-historian Warren Bass, "Harry Truman was the father of the U.S.–Israel special relationship; John Kennedy was the father of the U.S.–Israel alliance."[92] President Johnson built on Kennedy's foundations and oversaw a large expansion, in scope and nature, of American arms sales to Israel. The wider American-Israeli relationship likewise tightened.[93]

In Syria, a string of intra-party power struggles and purges rocked the Ba'th from 1964. These culminated in the Military Committee's bloody, successful coup on February 23, 1966. The new regime is often referred to as the 'neo-Ba'th'. Assad partook throughout, and became Minister of Defense at age 35. After a period of skepticism with the new regime, the USSR resumed its aid to Syria. It added major infrastructure and industrial projects to the portfolio, while continuing arms sales and training for Syrian officers. But the Ba'th remained skeptical of the Soviets and yielded little influence to their benefactors.[94]

Patrick Seale describes the neo-Ba'th regime as "the most extreme Syria had ever known, rash abroad, radical at home, engulfing the country in war, and attempting to refashion society from top to bottom."[95] While Dr. Nureddin al-Atassi posed as president, the 40 year old Salah Jadid became Syria's strongman. As Minister of Defense, Hafez al-Assad stood at the sharp end of this regime's confrontation with Israel.[96] In Seale's estimation, the neo-Ba'th was not well prepared to plan or conduct war:

---

[91] Bass, *Support Any Friend*, 37–48, 60–67, 164–169, 184–185, 245–248.

[92] Ibid., 246.

[93] Ibid., 248–253.

[94] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 95–109; Nikolaos van Dam, *The Struggle for Power in Syria : Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 34–47; Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 82–84; Patrick Seale, "Syria," in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 58–60.

[95] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 104.

[96] Ibid., 101–107.

> The team over which Jadid presided was made up of middle-ranking officers bumped up to generals overnight and of inexperienced medical practitioners whom the excitements of the times had brought into politics […] All these men were unknown to the public. With the exception of Atasi, their names had no resonance, their families were obscure, they commanded no automatic respect, in a state of affairs departing fundamentally from Syrian tradition in which networks of patronage stemming from men in public life provided the foundation of government. Asad, without wealth or connections, was as much a puzzling newcomer as the others.[97]

This regime now embarked upon "a brutal refashioning of Syrian society", eradicating once and for all the old political and economic order.[98] Anyone connected with Syria's old elite families were purged from government service, businesses were nationalized and land reforms carried out. Just as the neo-Ba'thist's way to the top had led through intrigues, conspiracies and coups, they feared being overthrown and killed, jailed or exiled. Suspicion and intrigue abounded. Soon after the coup, the neo-Ba'thists turned to suspecting each other. A plot unfolding in August and September only ended when Assad sent fighter jets and tanks toward the southern town of Suwayda to free Jadid and Atassi, held captive by a discontented Military Committee member. Further purges followed for the armed forces. Not until March 1967 was the last round of the affair settled.[99]

1967

While attempting a forced transformation of Syrian society, the Ba'th Party regime spent much of its energy on internal rivalries and plots. The country meanwhile stumbled toward war. While seeing American, Israeli, Jordanian and Saudi threats all around, the regime lacked the focus to prepare for war as the Middle East heated up in 1967. David Lesch points to Syria as critical in provoking the 1967 June War, its regime playing with fire while tensions mounted. After the 1948 War, the Syrian-Israeli border had become an area of chronic provocations, confrontation and fighting. On the face of it, Syria and Israel fought over borders and water resources. However, their bitter enmity had deeper roots. In an Israel where the Holocaust's horrors remained vivid in memory, the pursuit of security seemed to know few bounds. In an increasingly nationalist Syria, recalling hundreds of years of foreign rule and manipulation, Israel was often seen as an imperialist imposition on Arab lands. Further, Israel's willingness to provoke large and small battles with Syria and Jordan after

---

[97] Ibid., 107.
[98] Seale, "Syria," 58.
[99] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 105–114; Volker Perthes, *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1995), 2–3.

1948, and its outright invasion of Sinai in 1956, caused deep-seated fears over Israeli ambitions in Syria.[100]

Israel attacked Egypt, Jordan and Syria on June 5. The Israelis acted after receiving what has subsequently been called an 'amber light' to go ahead from President Lyndon B. Johnson. The emerging consensus among scholars seems to be that none of the involved regimes planned for or truly wanted the war. Caught in a spiral of mutual misunderstanding, distrust, threats and escalation, they stumbled half-blindly into a war with immense consequences.[101]

The Arab states were disorganized and poorly prepared for the war, which opened with a surprise Israeli air strike eradicating Egypt's crucial air force, at the time parked in open air with no cover. Jordan and Syria's air forces were wiped out soon after. The disorganized state of Egypt's ground forces in Sinai made them prime targets. Lacking air cover, 10 000 Egyptian troops were killed in four days, while 13 000 were captured. Meanwhile, Syria and its Defense Minister did very little. Lacking air cover, Syria's freshly purged, under-officered army hunkered down in its Golan Heights fortifications. After some days of resisting pressure for an attack on Syria, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan changed his mind and ordered an attack on June 9. Over two days, Syria's forces fought stubbornly but lost. Alongside Golan, the Israelis captured Mount Hermon to the north, from where they looked down upon the Syrian plain, and, 40 kilometers into the distance, Damascus. Facing Soviet and US pressure, Israel's forces did not proceed further into Syria. The Israeli occupation of Golan drove approximately 120 000 Syrians from their homes, thus becoming internally displaced refugees. Soon after the war, Damascus broke off formal diplomatic relations with the US.[102]

---

[100] Wm. Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, eds., *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Avi Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson," in *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, ed. Avi Shlaim and Wm. Roger Louis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire"; Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 228–241; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 105–120, 128.

[101] The essentially unplanned and unintended nature of the 1967 War are among the main conclusions of Louis and Shlaim's edited volume reassessing the war, its causes and consequences; Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 134–135; Hilde Henriksen Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten* (Kristiansand: Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2013), 348–452.

[102] See Appendix B-3 for a map of the Golan Heights. The entire area delineated West of Lake Tiberias belonged to Syria before the war; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 136–141; Shlaim, "Israel: Poor Little Samson," 48–51; Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 95; "Syria Fact Sheet," *U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Public Affairs*, October 24, 2012, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm.

Chapter 2 - 1946 - 1969

Consequences

> In many ways, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war is still being fought in the Middle East today. This is especially true for Syria, where one cannot engage in any sort of political discussion without soon venturing into the subject of the Golan Heights, the swath of territory Syria lost to Israel in the 1967 conflagration. The essence of Syrian foreign policy today, as it has been for more than four decades, is the return of the Golan Heights to the 4 June 1967 line, the Syrian-Israeli border before the war commenced. It is an emotional issue in Syria; one that has been drummed into the minds of Syrians for two generations. No Syrian leader can enter into peace a peace agreement with Israel without demanding the return of the Golan.[103]

Although constituting less than one percent of Syria, Golan became a manifest symbol of much of what had gone wrong for Syria since independence: The failures of domestic unity, the failures of Arab unity and decades of failure against imperialist-backed Israel. Thereafter, Syrian leaders needed only point to the Heights when requiring an external symbol at which to focus the frustrations of Syrian commoners.[104] In Patrick Seale's view, the war transformed Hafez al-Assad's perspective and ambitions: "The shock woke him up as nothing else could and transformed the parochial putschist into a student of strategy and international politics."[105] While Assad had been a steady climber, Seale portrays the 1967 defeat as pushing him into ambitions for paramount power:

> The importance of this moment of national ruin in Asad's career cannot be overestimated. Without a doubt, the defeat was the decisive turning point in his life, jolting him into political maturity and spurring the ambition to rule Syria free from the constraints of colleagues and rivals who he felt had led the country to disaster.[106]

The defense minister disliked hearing accusations of his responsibility for losing Golan. He blamed Jadid and his supporters. Further, Assad disagreed with Jadid's choice of distancing Syria from 'reactionary' Arab regimes, which in effect meant every other Arab regime. Assad thought the Arab states should find common cause. Jadid kept Syria out of the Arab League's post-war Khartoum Summit where states such as Egypt and Jordan publicly pledged to continue the confrontation with Israel.[107] Assad later described Syria's isolation to Seale:

> Before 1970, there was an almost total breach between us and the other Arabs. We used to say that the Cause was an Arab one yet we didn't give the Arabs a chance to join in. Some of my colleagues denounced other countries with great fanaticism. I strongly believed that we should encourage other Arabs to play their part and not be the ones to obstruct a joint Arab effort. Whatever the conflicts between regimes, the Arabs faced a common danger.[108]

---

[103] Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 79.
[104] Louis and Shlaim, *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, 11.
[105] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 117; The term "putschist" denotes a person who partakes in a putsch/coup or similar.
[106] Ibid., 143.
[107] Ibid., 144–147; Moshe Shemesh, *The Palestinian Entity 1959-1974: Arab Politics and the PLO* (London: F. Cass, 1988), 95–96.
[108] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 147.

On July 17, 1968, a coup brought the Iraqi Ba'th back to power. Syria's neo-Ba'thists responded coolly. These two parties were by now brethren in name only. The Syrian Ba'th Party's antagonism to foreign reactionaries echoed the Jadid regime's continued fear of, and struggle against bourgeoisie reactionaries within Syria.[109] Assad found himself increasingly at odds with the radical socialist goals of Jadid and his followers: "More than ever [Assad's] view was directed outwards towards the lost province, theirs inwards to the further transformation of Syria."[110] As his disagreement with Jadid grew, Assad built his independent power base. He proved more successful within the armed forces than among the civilian Ba'th, where Jadid and his supporters remained strong. But in the end, the military was all Assad needed.[111] By the end of 1968, he had, according to Seale, "outstripped Jadid in the accumulation of power. His maneuverings in the army – postings, transfers, sackings, re-recruitment – threw Jadid on the defensive."[112]

Still, Assad lacked full control. In keeping with his fundamentally cautious nature, he continued building support. The still powerful Jadid remained for another two years, maintaining Syria's radical public posture vis-à-vis both Israel and the Arab states. In a meeting with King Hussein just after the 1967 War, Syrian President Nureddin al-Atassi did not discount the sensibility of Syria partaking in a 'moderate solution' with Israel. However, he feared his government had already become a captive of its own post-war propaganda. Even if it had wanted to, Jadid's regime may have found itself unable to publicly bridge the divide widened by its own propaganda. On November 22, 1967, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 242 toward resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. For years, Syria completely rejected the resolution, which became a key component in future Middle Eastern peace initiatives.[113]

---

[109] Ibid., 145–147.
[110] Ibid., 145.
[111] Ibid., 144–150; Lesch, "Syria: Playing with Fire," 95–96.
[112] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 150.
[113] Ibid., 150–165; *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1964-1968 Volume XIX*, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2004), Document 331. For the text of resolution 242, see Appendix D.

Sleeping Dogs

Insofar as Syria is concerned, we should continue to avoid taking any position and to let sleeping dogs lie.
-      Secretary of State William P. Rogers, December 10, 1969.[114]

Until the 1973 October War, Richard Nixon and his White House team had a non-policy on Syria. U.S. policymakers saw few good reasons to deal with a Syria seen as politically beyond the pale. In September 1970, Syria invaded Jordan, a key U.S. client. Months later, Hafez al-Assad completed his ascent to power in Syria. How did the White House assess the Jordan invasion? How did it asses the new regime of Hafez al-Assad, and its foreign policy? How did the Nixon White House's general view of the Middle East inform its policy toward Syria?

The View from Washington – Syria's place in the American Middle East

Documents from the Nixon White House discuss at length how and why Israel and Jordan should be supported, Egypt accommodated or Soviet influence obstructed. This was not the case with Syria. American policymakers of the time were not ignorant of the country. Rather, the exclusion of Syria from their discussions suggested a widespread, largely unspoken understanding in Washington of Syria's fundamental unimportance to US interests and initiatives. In a chapter on U.S. peace efforts in the Arab-Israeli conflict prior to the 1973 War, historian Salim Yaqub describes who the U.S. favored interacting with, and why:

> Of the three Arab countries seeking to regain territory from Israel – Egypt, Jordan, and Syria – Egypt received the most attention from the United States. Syria […] had rejected Resolution 242 and showed little interest in diplomacy. Jordan had a history of secret contacts with Israel, but it was too small, weak, and politically vulnerable to take the lead in any public peace efforts. Egypt, by contrast, was the most populous and influential Arab country, and [President Nasser] remained an imposing symbol of Arab nationalism. These facts, combined with the growing severity of the [ongoing Egyptian-Israeli] War of Attrition, caused US officials to view Egypt as the key to any Arab-Israeli settlement, a perception that lingered into the era of Anwar Sadat due to Sadat's own obvious interest in resolving the dispute.[115]

U.S. analysts did watch developments in Syria. But the country's perceived unimportance meant that these were never viewed as significant. This was the analytical backdrop of Washington's perception of Syria throughout Richard Nixon's first term, and beyond.

On February 1, thirteen days after assuming office, Nixon presided over an NSC meeting focused on the Arab-Israeli conflict. In preparation for this meeting, the staffs of the NSC and

---

[114] "Folder - NSC Meeting 12/10/69 - Middle East [Folder 2 of 2]," December 10, 1969, Box H025, RN-NSC-IF.
[115] Nigel J. Ashton, ed., *The Cold War in the Middle East : Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73* (London: Routledge, 2007), 39.

the State Department's Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs (NEA) compiled several studies of US interests in the Middle East, the simmering Arab-Israeli conflict, and options for resolving it. These studies give an impression of consensus on certain crucial issues: First, due to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the American position in the Arab world was slipping. By portraying the US as a one-sided supporter of Israel, the Soviet Union and "radical" Arab regimes could build popular support all the while weakening support for American-friendly "moderate" regimes like that of Jordan.[116]

Second, if the perceived Arab-Israeli stalemate of early 1969 were allowed to continue, the conflict would eventually escalate, thus threatening not only Arab-Israeli bloodshed, but also a potentially devastating confrontation between the US and USSR. Third, all countries involved in the conflict were said to understand that only the United States could bring sufficient pressure to bear on Israel to achieve peace. No final settlement was considered likely if the US did not take an active role. In consequence, it seemed the US had no choice but be involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict if it hoped to maintain its position in the Arab world. Only then could the US hope to avoid another round of Arab-Israeli fighting which might escalate into a showdown with the USSR. Some sort of peace effort was required.[117]

One might assume that Syria, Israel's neighbor and a principal party to the war in 1967, would figure prominently in documents discussing such an effort. But the country is barely mentioned. Until the 1973 October War, the archival holdings from the Nixon White House discuss Syria only infrequently and cursory. There were many reasons for this, some of which are implied by the preparatory documents for the February 1 NSC meeting. An NEA staff study makes one of few substantive mentions of Syria. Referring to a time when Syrian-American relations where less frigid, it argued that "experience with such countries as Syria and Iraq shows that the loss of US position in one country or another does not materially

---

[116] "The Richard Nixon Presidential Library & Museum," Presidential Daily Diary – February 1, 1969; Throughout this period, American analysts and actors frequently use the "radical" vs. "moderate" dichotomy to categorize the regimes of the Middle East. This largely corresponded with their choice of a pro-Soviet or pro-American posture. Moderate regimes included Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Iran. Egypt was largely seen as a radical regime, though less so than the most stand-out radicals, namely Syria, Iraq, and eventually, Libya. "Folder - NSC Meeting - Middle East," February 1, 1969, Box H020, RN-NSC-IF.

[117] "Folder - NSC Meeting - Middle East," February 1, 1969, Box H020, RN-NSC-IF.

weaken the US position in the area as a whole."[118] The same study argued that "it would be hard to prove that we have suffered serious damage from the absence of diplomatic relations with some countries, such as Syria and Yemen, since June 1967."[119] Another study referred to the idea of a settlement with Syria as a solely "academic issue".[120] It thus implied that the US had almost nothing to gain from improved relations and that involving Syria in any upcoming peace initiative was not a real alternative. While discussing in some nuance the roles and positions of the US, USSR, Britain, France, Israel, Egypt and Jordan, these documents mention Syria only in passing. No clear reasons are given for the sparse discussion of Syria, perhaps indicating that such reasons had by then become established truths, presumed to be so widely known that they needed no mention.

Relatively Moderate Extremists – A Report on Political Developments in Syria

On March 17, a report by Thomas L. Hughes of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research addressed to Secretary of State William Rogers was forwarded to the NSC. It described recent developments in the power-struggle between Hafez al-Assad and Salah Jadid – Assad's chief rival for power, and Syrian strongman since 1966 – as well as general features of the current regime. Hughes was not a central figure in US foreign policy. But his report gives an interesting glimpse of what was known in Washington of Assad's ascent to power. Prevented from meaningful political or military cooperation with other Arab regimes due to its "extremist policies", Hughes described Syria as well outside of the Arab mainstream since early 1966. Syria still categorically rejected UNSC resolution 242. The US thought this element fundamental to any Arab-Israeli negotiations.[121] Despite particularly close relations with the Soviet Union, any Soviet peace efforts fell on deaf ears: "The most extreme Arab state on the Israeli problem, Syria acutely mistrusts peace settlement efforts. It has therefore regarded Soviet views and initiatives toward that end with deep suspicion and resentment."[122]

---

[118] Ibid.

[119] Ibid.

[120] Ibid.

[121] While the original document appears to have been addressed to the Secretary of State on March 13, markings on the document show it was forwarded to the NSC on March 17. "Memo - Hughes to The Secretary - Syria's Ba'thi Leadership in Disarray," March 13, 1969, Box 631, RN-NSC; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 150–153.

[122] No elaboration is given on what these Soviet initiatives consisted of. They may have been made as a part of the US-USSR talks which were ongoing at the time. "Memo - Hughes to The Secretary - Syria's Ba'thi Leadership in Disarray," March 13, 1969, Box 631, RN-NSC; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 64.

Hughes described Hafez al-Assad's faction as gaining ground in Syria, to the detriment of Jadid. Greatly concerned by Syria's deep isolation in the Arab world, Assad wanted increased military cooperation with other Arab states, probably hoping to change the Arab-Israeli balance of power. In some respects, Hughes saw this as a struggle between Hafez al-Assad and more pro-Soviet figures in the Ba'th leadership. Assad sought a considerable reduction of Soviet influence and presence in Syria and had already sent out feelers to France and elsewhere, seeking alternate patrons and weapons suppliers.[123] Assad was "attempting to expand and consolidate the considerable, but incomplete, measure of control he has exercised since October 1968."[124] Hughes concluded that Assad now appeared to have "reasonably firm control of the regime".[125] These developments "might even provide enough stability to enable him to turn away from domestic affairs long enough to deal with some regional policies, a luxury no Syrian leader in many years has enjoyed."[126] Hughes' report ends with a brief assessment of the Syrian-American relationship:

> The current power struggle will have little effect on US-Syrian relations. They could hardly be much worse and Asad's regime probably would not be any more troublesome than its predecessors. Although Asad is a moderate in the Syrian context, Syria's basic orientation as a "progressive, anti-imperialist" and socialist state and its uncompromising hostility toward Israel are not expected to change.[127]

Formulated by "extremists", the Syrian political discourse of 1969 lay far beyond the pale of what Hughes could imagine dealing with. The report clearly sees the ascendant Assad as relatively "moderate" and seeking a way out of Soviet dependence as well as isolation in the Arab world.[128] However, these moves started from positions so extreme that Syria was not expected to move within reach of a meaningful relationship with the US anytime soon. Hughes' report suggested two things: First, that Hafez al-Assad and his allies were tightening an already significant grip on power. Second, that Assad had begun loosening Syria from its dependence on the USSR, and improving relations with other Arab states as well as western countries such as France. In his account of Assad's actions following the November 1970 coup, Patrick Seale describes him rapidly restoring the worn-down relationships between Syria and other Arab states, as well as making the Syrian-Soviet relationship more

---

[123] "Memo - Hughes to The Secretary - Syria's Ba'thi Leadership in Disarray," March 13, 1969, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.

businesslike.[129] Hughes' report suggests Assad began this process well in advance of the 1970 coup in which he is widely assumed to have achieved dominance of Syrian politics.

Leaving Syria Out – The Rogers Plan

In a December 9 speech, William Rogers launched a peace initiative soon known as 'the Rogers Plan'. It provided for an Egypt-Israel peace settlement, a final border delineation, demilitarized zones and freedom of navigation through the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal. Rogers presented a corollary Israel-Jordan settlement proposal on December 18. The Rogers Plan was the Nixon administration's first formal Middle East peace initiative. With Nixon and Kissinger sabotaging the plan behind the scenes, it failed almost immediately, publicly rejected by the principal parties – Israel, Egypt and the USSR. Only Jordan's King Hussein appeared interested, but Jordan was of secondary importance. Neither Roger's speech nor the plan at large concerned Syria. The just-launched plan was discussed at a December 10 NSC meeting. In a strategy paper prepared for the meeting, issued over Rogers' name, he found space for a paragraph on Syria.[130] It summarized the prevailing Syria policy:

> Insofar as Syria is concerned, we should continue to avoid taking any position and to let sleeping dogs lie. If and when Syria should decide to accept the Security Council Resolution we should face up to that problem at that time. We certainly should not agree at this juncture to any Soviet proposal which calls for Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.[131]

While Syria would not play by the basic rules of the game – UN Security Council resolution 242 – Washington policymakers seemed happy to avoid the Golan issue. If any Syrian-Israeli talks were to be held, a key issue would be determining who would control those strategically important heights on their border. As Rogers suggested, the 1969 situation made a continued non-policy on Syria possible and preferable.

Black September and the Syrian invasion

After seeing the Arab armies crushed in 1967, armed Palestinian guerillas increasingly took matters in their own hands. Jordan, which had a huge Palestinian refugee population,

---

[129] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 186–187.

[130] William P. Rogers, "Statement by Secretary of State Rogers," *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Historical Documents*, December 9, 1969, http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/9%20statement%20by%20secretary%20of%20state%20rogers-%209%20decemb.aspx; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 67–70; "Folder - NSC Meeting 12/10/69 - Middle East [Folders 1-2]," December 10, 1969, Box H025, RN-NSC-IF.

[131] "Folder - NSC Meeting 12/10/69 - Middle East [Folder 2 of 2]," December 10, 1969, Box H025, RN-NSC-IF

became a key base. King Hussein of Jordan saw his grip on power eroded at the hands of such armed groups, who were effectively building a state within the state. In June 1970, Rogers had brokered a ceasefire between Egypt and Israel, ending the so-called 'War of Attrition', a low-intensity conflict ongoing since the 1967 War. Many Palestinians feared this meant they were losing Egypt as their most prominent backer, and with it, their growing momentum. To regain the initiative while they still could, Palestinian guerrillas in Jordan decided to heighten existing tensions with Jordanian authorities. Throughout the summer and autumn of 1970, this escalated into a full-fledged civil war between Hussein's forces and the Palestinians. Syria and Iraq were seen as backers of the Palestinians, and Hussein feared they would intervene if he took the offensive. An Iraqi force numbering 17 000 had remained in Jordan since the 1967 War. On September 17, Hussein nevertheless ordered his forces to attack Palestinian strongholds. While the Iraqi forces kept still, Syria responded the next day, invading northern Jordan with some 300 tanks, supported by infantry and artillery.[132]

That same day, assuming Syria's invasion to be Soviet-backed, the Nixon administration warned the Soviets that the "Soviet Government cannot be unaware of the serious consequences which could ensue from a broadening of the conflict".[133] In all its diplomatic understatement, talk of a 'broadened' conflict in such a message delivered between these superpower foes implied the worst. Hussein sought the support of Israel and the US. After deciding Israel would be best suited to provide it, the White House helped Israel and Jordan find an arrangement. Intimidating Israeli fighter jet maneuvers conducted near the Syrian invasion force helped convince Hussein that he had backing if need be. On September 22, he let loose Jordan's small air force against the Syrian tanks. As the substantial Syrian Air Force remained curiously absent, Hussein's planes struck essentially unhindered and halted Syria's advance. The invaders retreated, and on the following day, left Jordan altogether. As Nixon and Kissinger saw it, the Soviet Union had just tried using their Syrian and Palestinian clients to overthrow Hussein's pro-western regime. This was how they tended to view the Middle East at the time. Subsequent studies of the crisis show there was little truth to this. The

---

[132] Yazid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 147; Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 306–311; Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 93–94; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 75–79; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 158; Kissinger, *White House Years*, 595, 615; "Folder - NSC Meeting - Jordan," September 23, 1970, Box H029, RN-NSC-IF.
[133] Kissinger, *White House Years*, 619.

Jordan crisis came about as a result of local and regional conflicts.[134] Palestinian militants and Syria, it seemed, had caused a minor US-USSR crisis.

As for Syria, most accounts of these events claim Salah Jadid, generally perceived as the country's ruler until November 1970, stood behind the Jordan invasion. Further, they claim Minister of Defense Hafez al-Assad held the Syrian Air Force back, possibly to ensure a failed invasion. This failure would allow Assad to play on the dissatisfaction generated by Jadid's perceived failure, and strengthen his own position. Assad's biographer, Patrick Seale, offers a different account. Seale claims Assad had assumed almost full command of Syria by September 1970. This harmonizes with the previously discussed report in which Thomas Hughes asserted that by March of 1969, Assad's grip on power in Damascus was reasonably firm. Seale goes on to claim that it was Assad who launched the Jordan invasion, not to overthrow the Jordanian monarchy as many believed, but to protect Palestinians from being massacred. Seale interprets Assad's decision to invade as reluctant, which in turn limited his will to give it the requisite support. Assad's fear of escalation kept him from committing the Syrian Air Force.[135]

President Nasser of Egypt negotiated a settlement between King Hussein and the rebellious Palestinians in Jordan, and soon after died of a heart attack. Thus passed the champion of Arab nationalism. He was succeeded by Anwar Sadat, a far less prominent figure. Few at the time expected him to last in power.[136]

In light of the preceding US non-policy on Syria, the Jordan Crisis raises two questions: The first is how the affair might be expected to impact US views of Syria; the second is what in fact happened. As the Jordan crisis showed, Syria was no 'sleeping dog'. Even such a half-hearted invasion demonstrated Syria's ability and will to effectively challenge the *status quo* in the Middle East. It did so in a way which provoked intense US involvement, fear of losing a friendly regime in Jordan, and worse yet, fear of disastrous escalation if the USSR intervened on behalf of its Syrian client. A lesson the Nixon White House could have learned from this

---

[134] Seale, "Syria," 65–66; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 80–82; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 158–162.
[135] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 157–163; "Memo - Hughes to The Secretary - Syria's Ba'thi Leadership in Disarray," March 13, 1969, Box 631, RN-NSC
[136] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 83–85; Cleveland and Bunton, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 370.

affair was that Syria was far from insignificant, and would be ignored at peril. But Nixon and Kissinger did not really see Syrian agency in the invasion. They saw Soviet hands at work. Thus, the Jordan debacle looked like a Cold War battle, one which the U.S. won with Israel's help. The affair instilled Nixon and Kissinger with the notion that a militarily strong Israel could be relied on as a strategic ally and Cold War proxy in the Middle East.[137] Historian Jussi Hanhimäki summarizes this notion: "All the Americans had to do to keep the peace was outclass Soviet military aid to the neighboring Arab countries".[138]

American complacency with this deceptive *status quo* likely deepened Assad and Sadat's conviction that another round of Arab-Israeli warfare, not diplomacy, was required to resolve their grievances. Due to Henry Kissinger's central role in handling the crisis on the American side, and doing so in a way which seemed successful, another by-product of the crisis was enlarging his prestige and influence to the detriment of William Rogers. In Nixon's eyes, Kissinger proved his ability to resolve a difficult crisis. Further, he proved that he could handle Middle Eastern issues, which had thus far been reserved for Rogers and his State Department. The Jordan crisis increased Kissinger's influence over American Middle East policy. In his view, successful American initiatives toward resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict would give Syria and Egypt's backers – the USSR – a great opportunity to demonstrate what could be achieved through Soviet-backed opposition to a US ally – Israel. Kissinger would rather stalemate the Arab states until they gave up their links to the Soviet Union.[139]

The Corrective Movement

Despite likely having played a significant role in the Jordan failure, Hafez al-Assad soon after managed to seize paramount power in Syria.[140] Just after midnight on November 14, information reached the White House of an "army takeover" in Syria.[141] Hafez al-Assad referred to this coup as a "corrective movement".[142] Harold H. Saunders, an NSC staffer since 1961, and by 1970 its top Middle East expert, read the move as a pre-emptive strike against

---

[137] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 79–86; Salim Yaqub, "Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," in *Nixon in the World*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 229–233; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 223–225.
[138] Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 97.
[139] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 83–86; Yaqub, "Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict."
[140] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 162–165.
[141] "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Syrian Power Struggle," November 14, 1970, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[142] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 164.

the Ba'th Party's civilian wing, which had prepared to oust Assad from his post.[143] The move

was reportedly also motivated by certain radical policies of the civilian wing, including its

"refusal to cooperate with non-Baathist governments such as the Egyptian."[144] Quoting a

report from the American embassy in nearby Beirut, Saunders added that the military wing

of the party had "merely assumed in public a control which it had already established behind

the scenes".[145] This claim corresponds with Hughes' 1969 report as well as Patrick Seale's

Assad biography. Saunders included his predictions for the future:

> No fundamental policy shift should be expected. We have had reports over the summer that, if Jordan
> and the UAR appeared to be getting somewhere in peace negotiations with Israel, the Syrians might find
> a way to join the process later. If the reported shift in leadership in Damascus has any effect, it might be
> in the area of greater willingness at some point to join negotiations. There might also be less criticism of
> the UAR and Jordan for negotiating.[146]

It seemed the Syrians had edged towards greater willingness to join Arab-Israeli peace

negotiations since well before the coup. Kissinger copied Saunders' analysis in his

memorandum to President Nixon, adding his own thoughts at the end:

> In short, insofar as this shift may make a difference, it is more likely to be a difference for the better and
> not for the worse, since this government may be less fanatical. The possible advantage is that the Syrians
> might be less active in trying to undercut Israel-Jordan-UAR peace talks. The disadvantage would be that,
> if the Syrians joined peace talks later, this would inject into them the most difficult security issue to
> resolve -- the Golan Heights. In some ways, peace talks might be easier if that issue did not have to be
> addressed. On the other hand, it is not certain that the UAR would sign an agreement with Israel -- or
> the USSR support it -- unless a Syrian settlement were part of it.[147]

Kissinger reiterated these views in another memo to Nixon on December 26.[148] These

documents suggest that Saunders, Kissinger and probably also Nixon now knew that the

Syrian's might soon be ready to join peace talks. Kissinger's description of the difficulties

presented by the Golan Heights is noteworthy. He unambiguously presents the Golan issue

as the most difficult security issue within the Arab-Israeli conflict. On November 19,

Secretary Rogers sent Nixon a three-page memo entitled "An Analysis of Latest Events in

Syria".[149] He opened with the argument that the US "should not attach undue importance to

---

[143] Patrick Seale's biography of Assad makes similar claims. Ibid., 162–164; "Memo - Saunders to Kissinger - Syrian Power Struggle," November 14, 1970, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[144] "Memo - Saunders to Kissinger - Syrian Power Struggle," November 14, 1970, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Ibid.
[147] "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Syrian Power Struggle," November 14, 1970, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[148] "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Middle East," December 26, 1970, Box 646, RN-NSC; This document was stamped with the words "THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN".
[149] "Memo - Rogers to The President - An Analysis of Latest Events in Syria," November 19, 1970, Box 631, RN-NSC.

the recent power play in Syria". [150] His analysis of implications for US interests followed:

> From the standpoint of [United States Government's] policy interests, the emergence of the military faction as undisputed leaders of Syria would be advantageous. This faction is more pragmatic and less doctrinaire than the civilian wing. It is disposed to expand and improve its relations with other countries and to rely less exclusively on the Soviets for outside support. […] It would probably be willing to consider seriously accepting the Security Council Resolution [242] in certain circumstances. [151]

In December, Assad re-affirmed Syria's non-recognition of UNSC resolution 242. [152] Whatever his motives, this rejection of what the Americans saw as fundamental to constructive Arab-Israeli negotiations extinguished any possibility of Syria joining peace negotiations.

1971 – Signs of Change in Damascus

Throughout February and March of 1971, Harold Saunders sent Henry Kissinger several memos on recent developments in the Middle East relevant to the peace process. In a February 19 memo, Saunders noted that an Egyptian initiative vis-à-vis Syria's inclusion in the negotiation process led by UN envoy Gunnar Jarring had "re-opened" the issue of Syria. [153] This, Saunders thought, necessitated an American review of Syria's role. It is unclear precisely what the Egyptians had in mind. At the time, Egypt and Israel were resuming the Jarring talks with a focus on Israel, Egypt and Jordan. [154] On March 11, Saunders sent his assessment to Kissinger, titled "The Situation in Syria and Peace Talks". [155] Describing Syria as the "sick man of the Middle East", Saunders led the analysis with an insightful description of how the last 60 years of history had shaped the outlook of Syria's erstwhile leaders. [156] He then discussed the relative moderation of Assad compared to the radicals he ousted in the November 1970 coup, and the policy changes he had brought about. Most striking were the rapid steps taken to improve relations with other Arab states, including Lebanon, Libya, Sudan, Morocco and Saudi Arabia. Significantly in the context of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations, Saunders' report suggests that the relationship with Egypt, particularly hostile during Salah Jadid's reign, was

---

[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 185–186.
[153] Gunnar Jarring was a Swedish envoy, appointed by the UN after the 1967 War to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. His mission, and talks under his auspicies, was an on-and-off feature of Middle East diplomacy in subsequent years. Quandt, *Peace Process*, 87–89; "Memo - Saunders to Kissinger - A Comprehensive Look at Middle East Issues," February 19, 1971, Box 647, RN-NSC.
[154] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 87–91.
[155] "Memo - Saunders to Kissinger - The Situation in Syria and Peace Talks," March 11, 1971, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[156] Ibid.

now rapidly normalizing.[157] Saunders did not mention it, but lingering bitterness from the UAR's breakup in 1961 had probably hurt Syrian-Egyptian relations through the 1960s. The near-simultaneous change of leadership in Syria and Egypt at the end of 1970 likely helped put this in the past.

Saunders also noted that Assad had considerably toned down Jadid-era propaganda against a peace settlement, as well as essentially freezing the activities of the Saiqa, a Syrian-based Palestinian guerilla group.[158] And there was "continued reporting" on Assad's desire to enter peace settlement negotiations, following Egypt's lead.[159] Saunders was, however, unsure how Assad hoped to do this or what he hoped to gain from it. The Syrian President meanwhile devoted much effort to broadening the regime's power base and bolstering his grip on power. Saunders perceived Assad as striving to be more of a popular leader than the strongman leader of an unpopular junta which Jadid had been seen as. Kissinger read this document.[160]

These tentative Syrian interests in peace talks do not appear to have led to much. Documents found from the next two NSC meetings concerning the Arab-Israeli peace process, held on June 29 and July 16, focused on Israel, Egypt and the USSR.[161] No explanation was given for Syria's exclusion, but two linked explanations seem likely: First, the developments Saunders described earlier in 1971 were perhaps not deemed sufficiently advanced for Syria to be included at present. Second, achieving progress with the larger, more powerful Egypt may have been expected to ease Arab-Israeli tensions sufficiently. Syria remained a pariah which could be ignored, thus allowing the White House to avoid further complications that the Golan Heights would add to negotiations. At the Syrian Ba'th Party's Eleventh National Congress, held in August, the former goal of fully liberating Palestine was scrapped. The new goal, towards which all resources should be dedicated, was "the liberation of the occupied

---

[157] Ibid.

[158] Ibid.

[159] Ibid.

[160] Ibid. The document bears a handwritten comment, "Good job Tel Hal + Rosemary" over Kissinger's distinctive initials ("HK"). In longhand, this likely translates as "Good job, tell Harold ('Hal') Saunders and Rosemary Neaher". Neaher was a 28 year old NSC staffer in 1971-72 who frequently assisted Saunders.

[161] "Folder - NSC Meeting - Middle East Review," June 29, 1971, Box H031, RN-NSC-IF; "Folder - NSC Meeting - Middle East and South Asia," July 16, 1971, Box H032, RN-NSC-IF; "Memcon - Nixon, Rogers, Kissinger et al. - NSC Meeting on the Middle East and South Asia," July 16, 1971, Box H110, RN-NSC-IF.

territories".[162] This vaguer formulation could be interpreted to mean liberating all formerly Arab-controlled territories, or more strictly focused on Golan. Achieving the greater flexibility inherent in this formulation was probably a key motivation for making the change.

A November 1971 paper on the Arab-Israeli military balance presented by Kissinger to Nixon dismissed the Egyptian military's inventory, organization and personnel training as qualitatively inferior Israel's. Syria was not mentioned. According to the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research staff study which he based his summary on, the Syrian Army was "not a major addition to the threat to Israel, even in combination with Egypt."[163]

Hafez al-Assad's Road to War

Unbeknownst to the Americans and Israelis, Assad and Sadat were preparing these same armies to undo the Arab defeat of 1967. According to Patrick Seale, Assad perceived 1967 as an accident, not the result of a fundamental Israeli military superiority. The war's outcome could and should be changed. In Assad's mind, the Arabs could not deal diplomatically with Israel from their current position of weakness. They first had to undo Israel's 1967 gains:

> This grim assessment that war was a necessity was peculiarly Syrian, stemming from the frustration of twenty years of border tussles with Israel, from Syria's passionate attachment to the Palestine cause and, more generally, from the perception that Syria and Israel, face to face and competing for primacy in the Levant, were doomed to be antagonists. So, with the stubborn patience which was the hallmark of [Assad's] character, he set about preparing for war, not talking too freely or bragging about what he hoped to do but working quietly for the opportunity to hit back.[164]

Within days of his 1970 coup, Assad visited the recently installed President Sadat in Cairo. Assad knew that success in a war with Israel required cooperation with Egypt. Joint planning for another war began in early 1971. Assad and Sadat thereafter devoted much energy to re-arming and training their armies. Likewise, Assad quickly sought to improve relations with his chief weapons supplier, the Soviet Union.[165] In hindsight, according to Seale, it is astonishing that no one caught the signals of these developments: "One reason the signals were not read correctly was that the world was watching Sadat rather than Asad, and Sadat was sending

---

[162] Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, 103–104.
[163] "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Military Balance in Middle East," November 27, 1971, Box 647, RN-NSC.
[164] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 185–186; The Levant is a historic geographic term denoting an area roughly equivalent to present day Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan and Cyprus, as well as the Sinai, Turkey's Hatay province and sometimes also Iraq.
[165] Seale, "Syria."

out contradictory messages which left observers more bemused than alarmed."[166]

This latter claim harmonizes well with the archive holdings from the Nixon White House. These archives contain vast amounts of documents reporting on and analyzing developments in Egypt and Israel. Very few cover Syria, and then in a largely cursory manner. In a 2003 book on his handling of the October War, Henry Kissinger claimed that "every American and Israeli assessment before October 1973 had agreed that Egypt and Syria lacked the military capability to regain territory by force of arms."[167] Patrick Seale describes a Hafez al-Assad single-mindedly pursuing another round of Arab-Israeli warfare. But he also underscores Assad's calm and pragmatic nature.[168] Another war was the mean to attain a goal – breaking the Arab-Israeli *status quo* and improving the Arab situation. Could a diplomatic initiative from the US or Israel have swayed Sadat or Assad from their plans? While Patrick Seale seems to argue that Assad was absolutely determined on the necessity of another war, the account seems unnuanced. But the objective conditions of the times made a sufficient diplomatic move unlikely: Israel remained triumphant after the 1967 War and satisfied with the *status quo*. The Americans did not fully perceive the growing danger of another Arab-Israeli war, or its potential consequences for Israel, the Cold War and Western oil supplies. Whatever effort the Americans might have made toward Syria would almost surely have been inadequate, just as they proved inadequate in swaying Egypt from its course.

The Saunders Review

Nixon faced a presidential election on November 7, 1972. In the long run-up to this, he ordered the State Department to avoid new peace initiatives (such as the Rogers Plan had been). Failed moves in the fickle Middle East would not de-rail Nixon's re-election.[169] After a solid win by Nixon in November, Kissinger requested input from his senior NSC staffers on their ideas for US foreign policy in the next presidential term.[170] Saunders responded with a book, over two hundred pages long, titled "The Middle East, 1973-1976".[171] It focused on future peace process options towards Israel, Egypt and Jordan. For Syria, a four page chapter

---

[166] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 189–191.
[167] Kissinger, *Crisis - The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises*, 12.
[168] Seale, *Asad of Syria*.
[169] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 94.
[170] "Memo - For the Record - NSC Staff Meeting November 13, 1972," November 13, 1972, Box 1026, RN-NSC.
[171] "Saunders to Kissinger - The Middle East, 1973-1976 [Folders 1-4]," November 14, 1972, Box 1190, RN-NSC.

and some scattered mentions elsewhere sufficed. In the books' five page introductory

memo, Saunders summarized the current thinking on Syria's role in the peace process:

> We would leave the Syrian front aside for the moment. Our primary interest is to keep Syria from preventing progress on other fronts and to avoid deep Soviet involvement. This may require that we offer the prospect of an eventual Syrian involvement in a settlement provided the Syrians themselves are interested.[172]

Opening his brief chapter on Syria, Saunders asserted that the Syrian-Israeli front had

received virtually no attention in US initiatives. Syria had shown, and continued to show, little

interest in a settlement. Neither Egypt nor Jordan was considered likely to insist on Syria's

inclusion in a final settlement. Another impediment was Israel's unwillingness to withdraw

from Golan. The lack of Syrian-American diplomatic contacts did not help either. However,

Saunders listed several reasons why the US might wish to take a fresh look at the Syrian

dimension of its Arab-Israeli peace efforts. Assad was noted as showing signs of moderation,

which the US would want to encourage, rather than risk Syria being a disruptive force in the

region.[173] Inclusion in talks might "keep Syria out of Moscow's embrace" while smoothing

Hussein and Sadat's road to peace with Israel.[174] Without further comment, Saunders noted

that the Syrians had now turned to accepting UN Security Council Resolution 242. Other

sources place this change in March, 1972. Syria's acceptance was conditioned on interpreting

242 as requiring Israel's *full* retreat from occupied territories, and the restitution of

Palestinian rights.[175]

Saunders listed three main approaches which the US could choose to pursue with Syria –

"Continuation of the present situation" (a *status quo* policy), an "Interim Arrangement" or a

"Full Settlement."[176] There were pros and cons for each of these, but his fundamental

sentiment was clear: While a Syria left out of talks was expected to remain threatening to the

stability of Jordan and Lebanon, and supportive of Palestinian militants, Israel stood ready to

counter such threats. Israel had shown no interest whatsoever in pulling back from the Golan

Heights, while the Syrians showed little interest in a settlement and appeared willing to

---

[172] "Saunders to Kissinger - The Middle East, 1973-1976 (1 of 4)," November 14, 1972, Box 1190, RN-NSC.
[173] "Saunders to Kissinger - The Middle East, 1973-1976 (3 of 4)," November 14, 1972, Box 1190, RN-NSC.

[174] Ibid.
[175] Ibid.; Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, 105–106; Hopwood, *Syria 1945-1986*, 56.
[176] "Saunders to Kissinger - The Middle East, 1973-1976 (3 of 4)," November 14, 1972, Box 1190, RN-NSC.

accept *de facto* Israeli control. In other words, any negotiation efforts to improve on a *status quo* considered acceptable and stable were not worth the effort. After asserting the unlikelihood of a negotiated agreement at present, Saunders noted that "it is probably worth having in mind what type of settlement might someday be feasible, and what the US could support."[177] But in late 1972, neither Israel nor Syria seemed ready, Assad's moderation notwithstanding.

In April and May of 1973, worrying reports reached the White House over increasingly serious Egyptian and Syrian preparations for war. Israel mobilized some forces in response. By mid-May, the crisis atmosphere passed. Something was afoot, but both Israel and the United States missed it. Historian William Quandt, who was an NSC staffer at the time, suggests two conceptual biases obscured the perception of the Nixon administration: First, the military balance of power so favored Israel that an Arab strike would be irrational because it would certainly fail. Second, the Egyptians would not start a war they were certain to loose when they knew that Kissinger had arranged for settlement talks between them and the Israelis in November of 1973.[178] Preparatory Egypt-US talks had in fact begun by January 1973, in the form of secret messages and meetings between Kissinger and his Egyptian opposite, Hafiz Ismail. Kissinger reported at length to Nixon from their first, February 23 meeting in Washington. Ismail had argued that there should be a full Arab-Israeli settlement which included Jordan and Syria.[179] When asked about the sequence of negotiations toward that end, Ismail thought an Egypt-Israel settlement would help "start the motors in other places."[180] Egypt's agreement to sign such a settlement deal would be contingent upon Syrian and Jordanian negotiations having started, running one step behind those for Egypt.[181] These 1973 talks never materialized in proper negotiations. But this negotiating procedure – separate talks with Egypt coming first, followed by Syria and Jordan – would be the recipe for what came in the wake of the 1973 October War.

---

[177] Ibid.

[178] One example is a mid-May warning sent from King Hussein to Kissinger, concerning Syrian-Egyptian preparations for war, found in *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 Volume XXV* (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2011), Document 61; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 100–106.

[179] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXV*, Document 4, 10, 19, 21, 26, 28.

[180] Ibid., Document 28.

[181] Ibid., Document 28, 29.

A long-lost, much vaunted May 31 memo by Ray Cline, Director of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, predicting a "better than even" chance of Egypt returning to war by the autumn of 1973, was re-discovered and released from US archives in March, 2013.[182] Focusing squarely on Egypt's motives and intentions, Cline noted that continuing reports of coordinated Syrian-Egyptian attack plans were "not very relevant to the credibility of any particular military scenario."[183] Syria was not a significant factor of Cline's analysis, which focused on Egypt. Cline's chiefs at the State Department in any case rejected his warnings.[184] On September 30, a Cline memo to Kissinger discounted recent reports of a planned "major Syrian military move against Israel".[185] Listing numerous worrying signs and indications, not least of which was the continued massing of Syrian forces near the Israeli border since May, Cline concluded that if a major attack was truly afoot, the Israelis "almost certainly would have approached us with considerable alarm".[186]

On September 22, Henry Kissinger formally succeeded William Rogers to the office of Secretary of State. President Nixon let Kissinger keep his post as National Security Adviser. Kissinger now combined – without precedent – two of the most influential non-elected foreign policy positions in Washington.

---

[182] Cline had succeeded Thomas Hughes to the position in October, 1969; "Memo - Ray Cline [Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research] to Acting Secretary [Kenneth Rush] - Growing Risk of Egyptian Resumption of Hostilities With Israel," May 31, 1973, Electronic Briefing Book 415, NSA-GWU, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB415/; William Burr, "National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 415 - State Department Intelligence and Research Predicted 1973 Arab-Israeli War," *The National Security Archive*, March 5, 2013, http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB415/.

[183] "Memo - Ray Cline [Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research] to Acting Secretary [Kenneth Rush] - Growing Risk of Egyptian Resumption of Hostilities With Israel," May 31, 1973, Electronic Briefing Book 415, NSA-GWU

[184] Burr, "National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 415 - State Department Intelligence and Research Predicted 1973 Arab-Israeli War."

[185] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXV*, Document 93.

[186] Ibid.

Shuttles to Isolation

It doesn't make a goddamn bit of difference as long as we can isolate the Syrians eventually.
- Henry Kissinger to Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz, January 28, 1974.[187]

The 1973 October War destroyed American and Israeli assumptions about Syria and Egypt's military impotence. The Soviet Union got involved and Arab oil supplies became a potent economic weapon. The Americans sensed the acute dangers inherent in a continued Arab-Israeli stalemate after the war, and got heavily involved in easing the tensions. Which policies did this entail toward Syria? How did the Syrian-American relationship evolve in the war's wake? How did Henry Kissinger assess and act toward Hafez al-Assad?

A Broken *Status Quo*

The morning of October 6, 1973 found Hafez al-Assad in his war room under Damascus. Throughout his adult life, he had seen Syria disgraced in repeated failures against her Israeli enemies, amid deep internal fractions, coups and tumult. With Soviet arms and an elaborate, secret war plan concocted with Anwar Sadat of Egypt, Assad hoped the day had finally come for overturning years of humiliations. It was his 43. birthday, but Assad had more important things on his mind. With few hours of forewarning, Henry Kissinger and his colleagues worked frantically to stave off the Arab attack. Devoid of direct contacts with the Syrians, Kissinger cast about for some way of getting in touch with Damascus – via the USSR, the UN Secretary General or sending a US diplomat in Moscow to the Syrian Embassy.[188]

Catching Israel off guard, the October War opened with Syrian and Egyptian triumphs. Striking back in Golan, Israeli forces captured a salient protruding towards Damascus. Both sides received massive arms supplies from their superpower backers. Seven months later, Henry Kissinger would describe it as a tactical victory for Israel, but a strategic defeat:

> The onset of the war shocked [the] Israelis out of their complacent assumptions that if they were only strong and stood firm, peace on their terms would eventually be theirs. [The] Israelis now knew that the outcome of the 1967 war had not been a true reflection of the politico-military balance in the area.[189]

While Egypt and Syria lost the war in a tactical sense, it was nothing like their 1967 collapse.

---

[187] "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," January 28, 1974, DS-HKT.

[188] Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History since 1947* (London; New York: Routledge, 2010), 130; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 185–219; "Telcon - Kissinger, Dobrynin," October 6, 1973, DS-HKT; "Telcon - Kissinger, Shalev," October 6, 1973, DS-HKT; "Telcon - Kissinger, Waldheim," October 6, 1973, DS-HKT.

[189] "Briefing Book - Nixon's Visit to Israel, June 1974," June 16, 1974, Box 141, RN-HAKO.

The war restored morals throughout the Arab world. Syria and Egypt now appeared as credible military threats. Israel could no longer assume that any Arab attack would easily be defeated. Effectively doing in public what they had previously done behind closed doors, Syria accepted UN Security Council Resolutions 338-340, which marked the end of the war in late October. These pointed directly to resolution 242 of 1967, which Syria now accepted, *if* interpreted as calling for full Israeli evacuation of all territories occupied in the 1967 War, and the restoration of Palestinian rights.[190]

To the US and USSR, the war demonstrated how unexpectedly the Arab-Israeli conflict could escalate and threaten a superpower confrontation. By provoking Arab oil states into using the 'oil weapon' through the imposition of a supply embargo, the war realized a scenario long feared by the Americans. American and Israeli leaders came to believe that a more stable Arab-Israeli arrangement had to be reached. Nixon and Kissinger grasped the emerging situation early on. In an October 8 phone call with Kissinger, the President described his hope of avoiding another massive Israeli victory which would let the Israelis remain intransigent in the face of their Arab neighbors:

> The one thing we have to be concerned about, which you and I know looking down the road, is that the Israelis when they finish clobbering the Egyptians and the Syrians, which they will do, will be even more impossible to deal with than before and you and I have got to determine in our own minds, we must have a diplomatic settlement there. […] You see, they could feel so strong as a result of this, they'd say: Well, why do we have to settle? Understand? We must not, we must not under any circumstances allow them because of the victory that they're going to win - and they'll win it, thank God, they should - but we must not get away with just having this thing hang over for another four years and have us at odds with the Arab world. We're not going to do it anymore.[191]

Kissinger declared himself in agreement with the President. His actions during the war reflected a self-avowed strategy of shaping ideal conditions for the post-war diplomacy.[192] Talking to American oil executives on October 26, Kissinger saw great diplomatic prospects:

> Beyond the present situation, we are in a better position for negotiations than at any time since 1948. Although the Israelis have won militarily, they have paid a tremendous price. They have suffered some 7,000 casualties, which would have been equivalent to some 300 to 400,000 casualties for us. They have found out that rapid spectacular victories are no longer possible and that in any war, they face a war of attrition which they cannot win over time. Our influence with Israel is greater than ever. They cannot go to war again without an open supply line from the U.S. They have to address what security they can now achieve by diplomacy. On the other side, the Arabs have fought with honor. Although they have lost the

---

[190] For the text of resolutions 242 and 338, se Appendix D and E. When the ceasefire called for by 338 failed, resolutions 339 and 340 were passed soon after, calling for all warring parties to adhere to 338; Donald Neff, *Warriors Against Israel* (Brattleboro: Amana Books, 1988), 297; Drysdale and Hinnebusch, *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*, 108.

[191] "Telcon - Kissinger, Nixon," October 8, 1973, DS-HKT.

[192] "Memcon - Special WSAG - Kissinger, Schlesinger, Rush, Clements, Moorer, Colby," October 13, 1973, GFD-M.

war, they lost like normal countries; their forces were not routed this time.[193]

Kissinger saw an opportunity to pull the Middle East out of the Soviet orbit. American weapons had stopped Soviet-armed Arab armies. The United States could now show itself as the only state with enough political leverage in Israel to facilitate fruitful diplomacy. The Soviet Union should be shown capable of bringing only weapons to the Arabs, not peace. As in the years preceding the war, the White House viewed Egypt as the key Arab state in the Arab-Israeli conflict. President Sadat sent clear signals that he wanted improved relations with Israel and the US.[194] But claiming the Egyptian prize required the appearance of movement on the other Arab-Israeli fronts, as NSC staffers Harold Saunders and William Quandt noted in a November 2 strategy paper for Kissinger:

> Assuming that some early progress on a first stage of an Egyptian-Israeli settlement can be made, the issue will arise of <u>arranging a comparable step offering something to the Jordanians, Syrians, and Palestinians</u>. Egypt can afford to get somewhat out in front of the other Arabs, but there will be limits on how far Sadat can go unless some momentum is also being sustained on other fronts.[195]

The most immediate objective was to negotiate the separation of Egyptian and Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula. On November 7, Kissinger flew to Cairo for his first ever meeting with Anwar Sadat. Kissinger knew that the Israelis needed to complete their postponed and very heated elections, before a disengagement deal with Egypt became possible. He meanwhile sought to create the impression of movement. An international peace conference in Geneva would create that illusion. Such a conference added two benefits. Kissinger's diplomatic experiences left him skeptical of conducting complex diplomacy in public. The Geneva Conference would be a smoke screen masking the real diplomacy he would conduct behind closed doors. Further, as designated conference co-hosts, the USSR would seemingly hold a role equal to that of the US in the negotiations. This gave Soviet leaders the impression that they were part of the diplomacy, but denied them a substantive role. In the final months of 1973, Kissinger and his subordinates strove to make Geneva a reality.[196]

Promises – Kissinger in Damascus

In preparation for Geneva, Kissinger led the first high level meetings of Syrian and American

---

[193] "Memcon - Kissinger, Oil Company Executives," October 26, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.
[194] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 133; "Memo - Saunders, Quandt to Kissinger - Strategy for Middle East Peace Settlement During Your Trip," November 2, 1973, Box 1188, RN-NSC.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 135–138; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 234–236; Hanhimäki, *The Flawed Architect*, 320–322.

officials in years. On November 2, he met Mohammad Ismail, Syria's Deputy Foreign Minister who was in the US for a meeting of the UN General Assembly. Kissinger's memoirs describe Ismail as having "no instructions of any sort; the fact of a first visit to Washington in many years by a relatively senior Syrian official seemed to be as much as the Damascus political situation could take."[197] President Assad pressed on six days later. Via Saudi intermediaries, he told Kissinger that he wanted direct talks. Kissinger's December 15 visit to Damascus followed. He became the first US Secretary of State there since John Foster Dulles in 1953.[198]

In the afternoon of December 15, he met Hafez al-Assad in the president's Damascus office. Their meeting revealed what would be Kissinger's first task between Syria and Israel: Bridging the distance between their positions on two specific matters – Syrian-held Israeli prisoners of war (POWs) and their linkage to a negotiated deal disengaging Syrian and Israeli military forces. Before attending the Geneva Conference, Assad demanded a disengagement deal with Israel, restoring nearly the entire Golan Heights to Syria. With the conference set to begin in six days, Kissinger saw no time for such a deal. Israel demanded a list of POWs as a precondition for talking to the Syrians. If Syria went to the Geneva Conference without handing over a list, the Israelis would likely stay home. That would make the conference pointless and publicly discredit it in its infancy. When Kissinger broached the POW issue, Assad demanded to know what Syria would get in return. Negotiations, Kissinger said.[199] Assad feigned disinterest: "Beginning talks are a loss to us. Our people do not want talks."[200] As further discussions on POW lists and disengagement stalled, Kissinger seemed frustrated:

> The only two people who can pull off a settlement are President Nixon and myself. If at the beginning you say "no conference", I will be totally discredited. If there is no conference after two trips to the Middle East I will be discredited. Perhaps the best thing for me is for there not to be a conference. I have no personal ambition in this. [...] When you make your decision, I hope you keep in mind the fact that it is a chance for the first time in 25 years. We must trust each other for at least a month or two. [201]

Assad stood firm. Syria would not go to the conference without a disengagement deal. But, to Kissinger's satisfaction, Assad did not oppose holding a conference without Syria. Had

---

[197] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 760–761; "Memcon - Kissinger, Khaddam, Ismail," February 25, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.

[198] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 760–761; "Cable - Washington to Cairo - Follow-Up Middle East Trip by the Secretary," November 30, 1973, Box 1188, RN-NSC.

[199] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 777–786; "Memcon - Assad, Khaddam, Kissinger, Sisco," December 15, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.

[200] "Memcon - Assad, Khaddam, Kissinger, Sisco," December 15, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.

[201] Ibid.

Syria actively opposed it, domestic pressures in Egypt and Jordan meant those countries would likely stay away, rendering the conference pointless. With Assad's acquiescence, Kissinger avoided an early fiasco.[202] Referring to the heavy pressure Eisenhower placed on Israel in 1956 to relinquish their Sinai conquests made during the Suez War, Assad argued:

> I understand from other Arabs that you believe things should move gradually. You believe that things require time. I believe when the US tells Israel to go back it will do so without hesitation. There is a precedent in 1956, and then it was even more complicated because the US and UK were allied with Israel. This is a fact not a miracle.[203]

To Assad, US behavior during the Suez War appeared to be a salient example of how the US could use its power to force Israeli concessions. In at least two later meetings with Kissinger, in 1974 and 1975, Assad raised this example as a relevant example of American power over Israel.[204] Returning to the December 1973 meeting, Kissinger told Assad he could only promise to use his influence with Israel in negotiations. He would not promise a specific outcome.[205] Assad simply replied that "Israel cannot say no when the US wants them to say yes."[206] Was this a reflection of a lacking understanding of the complex American-Israeli relationship? In later years, Hafez al-Assad became known as a seasoned and highly capable international politician. But the man who confronted Henry Kissinger in 1973 and 1974 had little such experience. This, Seale asserts, was Assad's "initiation into the great game of international diplomacy".[207] Seale further argues that decades dedicated to surviving domestic and regional tumult left Assad "uninformed" about American matters.[208] In his memoirs, Kissinger wondered whether he himself might be the first western leader which Assad had dealt with consistently. He describes how "almost every bargaining session began with an hour or so of perceptive questioning on the institutions and personalities of the Western democracies."[209]

Assad and Kissinger ended the meeting by agreeing that the US should establish an interest section in Damascus, allowing direct contact between them. Kissinger reported to Nixon:

---

[202] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 777–786.
[203] "Memcon - Assad, Khaddam, Kissinger, Sisco," December 15, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.
[204] Ibid.; "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC; "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (02)," March 9, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[205] "Memcon - Assad, Khaddam, Kissinger, Sisco," December 15, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.
[206] Ibid.
[207] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 230–231.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Ibid.; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 781.

> Asad is intelligent, tough, personable with a sense of humor, a leader who seems to be walking a tightrope in face of internal pressures from the Baath Party. There is no question, however, that he is the toughest and least conciliatory Arab leader that I have met.[210]

The mere fact of Kissinger's visit was monumental. In contemporary documents, American analysts noted the risks faced by Assad for talking to Kissinger. Abdelaziz Bouteflika, Algeria's Foreign Minister, echoed this in a meeting with Kissinger five days later: "I can say simply that Asad inherited a given policy -- a policy of refusal of a ceasefire, refusal of Resolution 242, refusal of Jarring, refusal of all initiatives. He couldn't shift overnight from black to white or white to black."[211] Looking ahead to the Geneva Conference, Kissinger reported to Nixon:

> Egypt, Jordan, and Israel will participate. Syria, historically the great spoiler of the Middle East, has decided for the time being to stay away. The Syrian non participation decision is very satisfactory for us -- a blessing in disguise. We narrowly averted a situation in which all three Arab states would go to Geneva while Israel, in the midst of an election campaign, would decide not to participate because of Syrian intransigence in refusing to give prisoner lists.[212]

Assad, he continued, should now be allowed to "stew in his own juice for a while and let moderate Arab pressures and possibly some Soviet pressure build on him as he watchfully, with suspicion and mistrust, awaits developments at Geneva."[213] The Geneva conference convened on December 21, 1973. A seven-sided table seated delegations from the US, USSR, UN, Egypt, Jordan and Israel. One side remained symbolically empty – that of Syria.[214] The delegation leaders made their speeches "largely with an eye to public consumption at home", and the Geneva Conference recessed, never to reconvene.[215]

Egypt First

Following Israel's December 31 elections, Kissinger launched the first round of what became known as 'Shuttle Diplomacy'. Acting as messenger and mediator, Kissinger flew between Middle Eastern seats of government. He carried ideas and proposals between leaders, and introduced his own ideas for acceptable compromises. He first focused on Israel and Egypt, toward disengaging their forces along the Suez Canal. Kissinger's mediations between the two had developed in preceding months. With Anwar Sadat eager for a deal, it took Kissinger

---

[210] "Memcon - Assad, Khaddam, Kissinger, Sisco," December 15, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC; "Cable - Jerusalem to The White House - Report on Meeting with Asad," December 16, 1973, Box 42, RN-HAKO.

[211] Gunnar Jarring led failed negotiation efforts in the years following the 1967 War. "Memcon - Kissinger, Bouteflika et al.," December 20, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC.

[212] "Memo - Scowcroft to The President - Kissinger's Message," December 19, 1973, Box 43, RN-HAKO.

[213] Ibid.

[214] "Briefing - The Beginning of the Geneva Peace Conference," December 22, 1973, Box 43, RN-HAKO.

[215] Ibid.

a week of shuttling before Israel and Egypt agreed terms. In an interview with Patrick Seale, Hafez al-Assad described a heated phone call to Sadat on January 17, 1974.[216] Having learnt that the Egyptian intended to sign a separate disengagement deal with Israel next day, Assad screamed: "Do you understand the meaning of what you are doing? […] It means that Israel will move to our front every tank and gun it has in Sinai."[217] Closely coordinated unity with Egypt, presenting Israel with a two-front confrontation, lay at the heart of Assad's strategy up to the 1973 October War. He needed this unity, these two fronts, as leverage against Israel. But whether he wanted to or not, Assad could not move as quickly as Sadat after the war towards negotiations with Israel. For decades, Syrians had known nothing but appalling relations with the US and Israel. A relatively new man in power in a coup-prone country, Assad likely felt far from secure in his domestic power base. Sensitive to perceived foreign threats, Syria's leadership and its public needed careful acclimatization before they could tolerate treating with Israel. Meanwhile, a sure-footed Sadat zoomed ahead and signed the first of several separate deals with Israel on January 18: the *Egyptian-Israeli Agreement on Disengagment of Forces in Pursuance of the Geneva Peace Conference* (later known as 'Sinai I'). The Syrian-Egyptian unity cracked.[218] Assad's anger notwithstanding, Sinai I generated "a mood of optimism" in the Middle East.[219]

Conceding the Principle

Next day, Kissinger returned to Damascus. Sadat needed a Syrian-Israeli deal before progressing to a second round of negotiations with the Israelis.[220] In an off-the-record remark to American journalists, Kissinger noted that "if Assad is at least getting his toes in the water", Sadat could not be called a traitor for his separate deal.[221] In his words, the January 20 meeting with Assad opened with "about 1-1/2 hours of the most violent diatribe against Sadat I've heard."[222] Assad and Kissinger then moved on to discussing a matter of

---

[216] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 130–143; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 237–238.
[217] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 237–238.
[218] "Cable - Jerusalem to The White House - Report on Meeting with Asad," December 16, 1973, Box 42, RN-HAKO; "Memcon - Kissinger, Bouteflika et al.," December 20, 1973, Box 1027, RN-NSC; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 185–238; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 141–143.
[219] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 141–143.
[220] Ibid., 143–144.
[221] "Cable - Kissinger to Washington - Secretary's Press Backgrounder on Plane between Damascus and Tel Aviv January 20," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.
[222] "Memo - Kissinger to the President via Scowcroft - Latest Meetings with President Sadat," January 16, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO; "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.

high priority in Israel: The return of POWs captured by Syria in the recent war. Perceiving the matter as one of few bargaining chips held by Syria, and hoping to extract maximum advantage from it, Assad refused to reveal the prisoner's names, or how many they were. American or Israeli goodwill was not a sufficient reward, he needed something tangible. A promise that the prisoners were well treated was all he offered. As the first concrete step in the Syrian-Israeli negotiations, Assad gave Kissinger three maps with his proposals for where and how Syrian and Israeli forces could separate in Golan. To Kissinger's surprise, Assad encouraged him to stop in Israel before going back to Washington and quickly present the proposal. Kissinger thus flew straight to Tel Aviv where he met Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon.[223] To Allon, he described that his intent toward Assad was

> to get him involved in the process, even if it blows up in four weeks. You know the joke about asking a girl, "Will you sleep with me for $1 million?" She says yes. Then you ask, "Will you sleep with me for $2?" She's offended, but she's conceded the principle.[224]

With Assad's approval, Kissinger briefed the press, in general terms, on the exchanges now underway. Years of absolute Syrian rejection of negotiating with Israel ended. The Israelis likewise agreed to a press statement saying they would carefully study the Syrian proposals. Both had publicly 'conceded the principle' of negotiating.[225] As the meeting in Tel Aviv went on, Kissinger assessed Israel's current position in the negotiations, and the road ahead:

> I thought at the end of October you were in bad shape politically. I think now you have an extraordinary chance. You can deal with each of these countries separately and give each of them something they want, and they will never get together again. […] What I would recommend you do, if your governmental system permits it and you not use the usual Israeli practice of saying no to everything […] you have an extraordinary chance to have things jell in a way that you are not in a desperate situation.[226]

Kissinger noted that even if negotiations with Assad "blows sky high, we must keep them engaged in the negotiations long enough so he can't undermine Sadat."[227] In a January 28 phone call, Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz gave Kissinger the Israeli response to Assad's proposal. It was a re-iteration of the demand for a list of POWs and Red Cross visits. Thereafter, the Israelis were open for proper disengagement talks. Assad's map proposals

---

[223] "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad, Khaddam, Saunders," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO; "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO; "Memo - Kissinger to the President via Scowcroft - Report on Discussions with Asad," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.

[224] "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.

[225] "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad, Khaddam, Saunders," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO; "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 849–851.

[226] "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.

[227] Ibid.

were "no good".[228] The Israeli Government refused committing to an official response, and refused to give Kissinger ideas for a disengagement plan they *could* accept. Perhaps detecting 'the Israeli practice of saying no to everything', Kissinger erupted:

> Mr. Ambassador, you remind me of a man who has won the grand prize in the lottery and is now trying to spend it as fast as you can. You have about two months to wreck the Arab coalition. […] We've now got the Europeans out of the game; we've got the Russians out of the game. Any hint of stalemate will bring them back into the game prematurely.[229]

Dinitz persisted, arguing that while his government sought progress, the stubborn Syrians had not "bent one inch." Frustrated and unusually incoherent, Kissinger launched back:

> That's a big concession for them to admit to talk to you at all. And the major thing we want from the Syrians is to be able to split -- I mean, one cannot -- Well, you know, you'll just get me mad again. It doesn't make a goddamn bit of difference as long as we can isolate the Syrians eventually. [...] And that we cannot do if all hell starts breaking loose again within the next two months [...] And so whether you withdraw 10 kilometers or 15 kilometers, if it -- once there is a disengagement agreement with the Syrians, they're pregnant. […] Then you can see what you can get from the Egyptians. And once you've done that, you can sit forever. Because the Syrians by themselves can do nothing.[230]

Kissinger alluded to this strategy during previous conversations in Jerusalem and Washington. But he always maintained his carefully measured language. In a rash of frustration, Kissinger lost his restraint. What remained, plainly spoken, was his true strategy toward Syria: Include the country in the negotiation process long enough for the Egyptians to conclusively break their pre-war alliance. An isolated Syria thereafter had no leverage against the Israelis, who could then keep Golan forever.

Oil

Despite temporary frustrations, Kissinger pushed on with the disengagement process in the following days. Numerous alternate procedures were discussed for achieving some movement.[231] In a January 23 cabinet meeting in Washington, Kissinger was hopeful:

> We still face enormous problems in the future. Our first need is to help prevent Sadat's isolation in the Arab world. That was the reason for my visit to Syria. They are wacky but it was an enormous step for them to send a disengagement proposal to Israel, which they did. It was unacceptable, but we can get a negotiation going and Sadat is no longer isolated. If we can get a Syrian disengagement, we can then move with Sadat for a permanent settlement.[232]

---

[228] "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," January 28, 1974, DS-HKT.

[229] Ibid.; Kissinger's strategy included working to avoid embargo-stricken Western Europe and the Soviet Union taking a significant role in the post-war diplomacy, which he thought would complicate matters greatly.

[230] Ibid.

[231] "Memcon - Cabinet Meeting - Secretary Kissinger's Report on Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement," January 23, 1974, GFD-M; "Cable - Washington to Beirut - Message from the Secretary to President Assad," January 29, 1974, Box 20, GF-NSA-KS; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Secretary's Message to Assad," January 30, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," January 30, 1974, DS-HKT.

[232] "Memcon - Cabinet Meeting - Secretary Kissinger's Report on Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement,"

Hafez al-Assad meanwhile maneuvered to preserve one of his best bargaining chips – the Arab oil embargo. Since October 1973, the Americans had worked continuously to lift it, and received repeated promises from Arab leaders to that end. The embargo's effects were widespread and diverse. A tangible and near-immediate consequence for ordinary Americans was that a far-flung Arab-Israeli war somehow provoked a rapid price increase on everyday necessities such as gasoline. As this energy crisis prolonged, Nixon hoped that ending it was one political success which could blunt his Watergate troubles. The Watergate break-inn on June 17, 1972 had unleashed a growing stream of scandal and controversy. By early 1974, it cast a massive shadow over Nixon's presidency.[233]

In the beginning of 1974, Thomas J. Scotes had become the Principal Officer at the new US Interest Section in Damascus, based in the old US Embassy building.[234] Kissinger later described Scotes as "extremely able and energetic."[235] On February 5, Scotes was told to convey a letter from Kissinger to Assad, which included the following:

> I have just been informed by the Government of Saudi Arabia that, following your visit to Riyadh, and in response to your request, the Saudi Government has taken the position that the oil embargo against the U.S. will not be lifted unless a disengagement agreement has been reached between Syria and Israel and is being implemented. We are informing the Saudi Government that, unless the embargo is lifted promptly, President Nixon will not authorize further efforts by the United States Government to achieve Syrian-Israeli disengagement.[...] This new development places President Nixon and me in an impossible position. Congressional and public opinion in the United States will not support continuing United States efforts, which will be both difficult and time-consuming, to bring about Syrian-Israeli disengagement, to say nothing of the further steps required to achieve the final settlement the Arab countries seek, while those countries continue their discriminatory measures against the United States.[236]

President Nixon was happy to see Kissinger succeed in Sinai, and soon, perhaps, in Golan. More than anything however, what he needed from Kissinger was good news on the energy crisis acutely felt by Nixon's constituents.[237] According to Kissinger, Nixon remained "in thrall

---

January 23, 1974, GFD-M.

[233] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 871–895; Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 534–538, 550–553.

[234] Upon its 1967 closure, the building was formally placed in the care of the Italian Embassy. The US Interest Section thus officially had its offices in the Italian Embassy; "Ceremony in Damascus Marks Renewal of U. S.-Syrian Ties," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1974; The first document found from Scotes in Damascus was dated January 19, 1974. "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Position on Geneva," January 19, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.

[235] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 947.

[236] *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 Volume XXVI*, Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 21; A conversation between Nixon and Kissinger strongly suggests this threat was Kissinger's idea. "Telcon - Kissinger, Nixon," February 5, 1974, DS-HKT.

[237] Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 534–538, 550–553.

to the idea that a dramatic lifting of the embargo under his personal leadership was the cure-all for his Watergate agonies."[238] As Nixon put it: "[M]y only interest is the embargo. That's the only thing the country is interested in. They don't give a damn what happens to Syria."[239] The President and his Secretary of State had hoped and believed the embargo would be lifted soon after the war. On January 19, Anwar Sadat promised Nixon and Kissinger he would have the oil embargo lifted within a week. The two believed they had a similar understanding with King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. Now it seemed the oil producers might link oil to every possible Arab grievance. Breaking complex problems into discrete, manageable issues was a key tactic in Kissinger's Middle East diplomacy. Syria should be broken from Egypt, from the Palestinian issue, from the Soviet Union. The oil embargo should be kept separate from the negotiations, whether with Egypt or Syria. Kissinger thought mixing too many elements would deadlock the process. On February 7, responding to a proposed five step plan by Kissinger for getting negotiations moving in earnest, Assad transmitted the exact number of Israeli prisoners held in Syria: 65. To Kissinger's February 5 threats concerning the oil embargo, Assad responded with a short, oblique message refusing the American demand.[240]

Much has been said of Henry Kissinger. But what of President Nixon? Judging by the documentary record, his role in the day-to-day conduct of Middle East diplomacy was slim. Kissinger controlled the operation, while keeping a supportive President abreast through frequent phone calls and written reports. Only rarely did Nixon act without Kissinger's knowledge, to the latter's immense displeasure. One such case was a February 7 meeting between the President and Saudi Ambassador Ibrahim Al-Sowayel. In a message directed at the Saudi King, probably hoping it would modify his oil embargo stance, Nixon told Sowayel:

> I am determined now that the Middle East be settled. [...] What I want you to know is I have made a commitment. We will work out a permanent settlement as quickly as possible. The full prestige of my office is dedicated to that.[241]

This was not out of line with what Kissinger told other Arab leaders – that they intended to

---

[238] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 947.
[239] "Telcon - Kissinger, The President," February 18, 1974, DS-HKT.
[240] "Memcon - Kissinger, Schlesinger, Colby, Moorer, Rush, Scowcroft," November 29, 1973, GFD-M; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Documents 15, 21; "Memo - Kissinger to the President via Scowcroft - Second Round of Talks with the Israelis," January 16, 1974, Box 44, RN-HAKO; "Telcon - Kissinger, the President," January 23, 1974, Box 24, RN-HAKT; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 939–940; "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," February 7, 1974, DS-HKT; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Message from President Asad to Secretary Kissinger," February 9, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[241] "Memcon - Nixon, Al-Sowayel, Scowcroft," February 7, 1974, GFD-M.

settle the Arab-Israeli conflict by some unspecified point in time. But Nixon raised the ante:

> I won't promise what I can't deliver, but there will be a settlement. I can't draw a line, but there will be a settlement. His Majesty can hold me to my commitment. I wanted you to hear it from me so His Majesty can convey it that I will use the full power of my office.[242]

Nixon seemed to commit to not only a full settlement *at some future time*, but would further use all his powers to achieve it *within his time in office*. Learning of the meeting and its contents after the fact, a "not amused" Kissinger interpreted it similarly.[243] As Nixon knew, the Saudi king maintained close contacts with Sadat and Assad.

On February 16, citing a high-level source in Damascus, Thomas Scotes reported on Assad's changing position concerning the embargo. At an Algiers meeting with Sadat, King Faisal and Algeria's President Houari Boumedienne, he allegedly agreed to a partial lifting of the embargo, followed by a complete lifting when Israeli forces began their actual disengagement. Assad had also agreed to turn over the POW list to the Americans for Kissinger to use in getting negotiations started.[244] Two days later, Kissinger met the Saudi and Egyptian foreign ministers Omar Saqqaf and Ismail Fahmy, who conveyed to Kissinger their government's acceptance, "in principle", of lifting the embargo in the next 10 to 14 days.[245] On February 20, apparently on Saqqaf and Fahmy's urging, Dr. Sabbah Kabbani, Syria's chief representative in Washington, gave Kissinger a sealed envelope. Within lay a list naming the 65 Syrian-held Israeli POWs.[246]

Stagecraft – The First Syria Shuttle

The oil embargo finally seemed to be ending. By delivering the Israeli POW list, Assad had completed his second required step according to Kissinger's five step plan. It now called for Israel to come up with a concrete disengagement proposal. In return, they would receive the POW list. After Red Cross visits to the prisoners began, proper disengagement negotiations would follow. Henry Kissinger planned a return to Damascus. On February 24, two days

---

[242] "His Majesty" refers to King Faisal of Saudi Arabia. Ibid.
[243] Kissinger was flying to Panama at the time. Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 948.
[244] Ibid., 893–895; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Position on Oil Boycott," February 16, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[245] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 949–953.
[246] In early 1974, Syria had sent a permanent delegation to represent it in Washington, led by Kabbani; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 240–241; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 949–952, "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," February 20, 1974, DS-HKT; "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 26, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.

before the visit, an unpleasant question arrived from Abdul Halim Khaddam, Syria's Foreign

Minister. Andrei Gromyko, Khaddam's Soviet counterpart, had declared his intention of

visiting Damascus on the same day as Kissinger to participate in the disengagement talks.

Had the US agreed to such a meeting, Khaddam wondered. Kissinger knew of no such plan.

Neither the US nor Syria wanted his complicating presence. Gromyko heeded Syrian wishes

and postponed his visit. Kissinger arrived on February 26.[247] In his third meeting with Assad,

Kissinger described a domestic American problem he foresaw complicating his role:

> [T]he public image of Syria in the United States is not very good. Partly because you have been isolated
> so long, and partly because there has been such a systematic campaign against Syria. So we need a little
> time to change this impression. So if there is a confrontation it does not look like we are backing a group
> of wild men. So I tell you quite honestly -- you will see when I come back to America. I will slowly be
> saying positive things about Syria and about President Asad. As I did with Sadat.[248]

Since Syria had done its part for now by delivering the POW list, he noted, the ball lay in

Israel's corner. A key goal for Kissinger's Damascus visit was to create the illusion that he had

received the POW list there, and personally carried it to the Israelis. He had in fact received it

ten days earlier, in Washington. This was stagecraft, an illusion of diplomatic drama played

out in public. It would, he argued, help improve Syria's image in the US as a reasonable actor.

Assad played along. Enjoying each other's company, they spoke for hours into the night, on

topics ranging from negotiating procedures to gossip on Uganda's President Idi Amin.[249]

Meeting again next morning, Assad queried Kissinger on the US relationship with Israel.

What power did Israel have to resist American pressure, when the whole world was against

the country? Kissinger cited Israel's strong domestic support in the US. Assad again raised the

example of Eisenhower and the Suez War as a counterpoint. Did the Suez Crisis define, in

Assad's perception, the true extent of American power over Israel? When it comes to the

inner workings of the private Hafez al-Assad, qualified speculation must suffice. As for

Kissinger, whose memoirs and biographies fill thousands of pages, more is known with

reasonable certainty. Kissinger viewed Eisenhower's actions at Suez as lamentable mistakes,

their consequences complicating his work even after the 1973 War. A great power, Kissinger

---

[247] The relevant memcons from this Damascus visit are somewhat confused as dates are concerned. Most likely, the visit took place from February 26 to 27; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 21; "Cable - Lahore to Washington - Syrian FonMin Message to Secretary Kissinger," February 24, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; "Cable - Washington to Lahore - Message for Syrian Foreign Minister," February 24, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 953–954, 956; "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 26, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.
[248] "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 26, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.
[249] Ibid.

believed, should not humiliate allies in such a fashion. President Nixon, like Lyndon B.

Johnson before him, drew similar conclusions.[250] They would see little gain in facing down

Israel to promote Syria's interests in Golan.

Kissinger and Assad's February 27 meeting clarified Syria's territorial goals for the coming

disengagement talks. Syria went to war on October 6, 1973 to undo Israel's Golan conquest

in the 1967 June War. Although the October War left Israel controlling more Syrian territory

than ever, Assad said his people viewed it as a Syrian victory. They would rebel, he argued, if

their great sacrifices merely meant returning to the October 6 lines. An acceptable deal

required the return to Syria of at least some land beyond those lines, land occupied by Israel

since 1967. It was a principle from which he never yielded. Extracting this Israeli concession

proved one of Kissinger's toughest negotiating challenges. As the meeting ended, Kissinger

raised the question of Syrian-American bilateral relations. The United States were ready to

expand these as quickly as the Syrians thought appropriate. [251] Assad responded favorably,

but noted that US attitudes to Israel was "the knot in this whole business".[252] Alluding to

negotiations beyond a disengagement deal, Kissinger asserted that the Americans were

"prepared to make as serious an effort for Syria as we did for Egypt. And having taken the

first steps, we would be prepared to take the second steps."[253] But this required patience.[254]

Stalling for Oil

Kissinger flew to Tel Aviv where he met Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and other Israeli

officials. He had promised Assad to bring a concrete Israeli disengagement plan when he

returned to Damascus in a few days. Now, he advised the Israelis to not give him one.[255]

Delaying under the pretext that the Israelis were revising their initial ideas, 10-14 days could

be won "which will get us beyond the oil ministers' conference".[256] The upcoming conference

Kissinger referred to was expected to end the oil embargo. He assumed Assad would reject

the first Israeli disengagement proposal, and might use the occasion to pressure the Arab oil

---

[250] "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 46–59; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 708; Nixon, *RN*, 179.
[251] "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Ibid.
[254] Ibid.
[255] "Memcon - Kissinger, Meir, et al," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.
[256] Ibid.

producers into extending the embargo. By drawing out the process until the embargo ended, Kissinger would rob Assad of a key bargaining chip. Further, it would win Nixon and Kissinger a tangible diplomatic triumph for their domestic audience – the normalization of Middle Eastern oil supplies.[257] "Naturally we accept your plan of working", Meir responded.[258]

The discussion turned to Golan. The records of this meeting show the Israelis and Americans viewing this issue at very different levels of analyses. Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan argued that their current positions in Golan were quite tenable, better than before the war.[259] While Dayan desired a political solution, the military facts on the ground gave Israel few reasons to seek one: "[W]e have artillery within range of Damascus and they know it very well."[260] Kissinger countered by pointing to the broader political implications of a deal:

> What Israel gets out of the Syrian negotiation is to have a radical Arab state sign a document with Israel; it is to remove the pressures on Egypt, which really only Syria can generate. [...] [i]t gives the moderate Arabs [...] an opportunity to legitimize their course. [...] And finally, with Syria having been drawn into this negotiation, the frantic Soviet effort to get itself involved will be thwarted[.][261]

Negotiations with Syria, he continued, should primarily be analyzed from a political, not military viewpoint. Their goal was to keep the Arabs divided and the US firmly in charge:

> The argument for [negotiating with] Syria is geo-political [...] It has nothing to do with the merits of the case or with Syria. In terms of merit, they don't deserve it [...] The relief that you get is to break the radical front of the area [...] and free Sadat for his course, and it thereby preserves the Egyptian agreement, which I believe basically is not disadvantageous but positively advantageous for Israel [...] [I]n terms of the overall geo-political situation, in terms of the fact that we, as the only steady friend you now have, must manage politically, that is what I see.[262]

Kissinger essentially argued that Israel should do this to bolster the deal with Egypt, and relieve their American friends from international pressures.[263] Following a final settlement with Egypt, Israel would "face only Syria".[264] Then Dayan's arguments about Israeli military supremacy would again be relevant. Syria alone could not threaten Israel militarily, Syria alone could not impose an oil embargo, and Syria alone could not unite Western Europe and the USSR in opposition to Israel and the US, as Kissinger thought the 1973 War had.[265] Syria

---

[257] Ibid.
[258] Ibid.
[259] Ibid.
[260] Ibid.
[261] Ibid.
[262] Ibid.
[263] Ibid.
[264] Ibid.
[265] Ibid.

thus isolated, Kissinger here argued, would be near powerless. Achieving this should be Israel's argument for negotiating a limited agreement with Syria.

Kissinger returned to Damascus on March 1. Assad asserted that Syria saw disengagement as a first step only, on the way to full Israeli withdrawal in Golan. Kissinger said he fully understood that "disengagement is not the last step. It is not a peace settlement."[266] Avoiding clear-cut promises, Kissinger alluded to a future Syrian-Israeli settlement process. With that in mind, Kissinger noted that a disengagement deal could include clauses stating it was only a step toward implementing UNSC resolutions 242 and 338. For now, restored October 6 lines were all he promised in a disengagement deal. A few kilometers beyond those might be achievable.[267] If Assad accepted limited withdrawals in a disengagement deal, Kissinger spoke of a "second phase" bringing further Israeli retreats.[268]

On March 18, the Arab oil states voted to end the oil embargo. Speaking to Nixon by phone, Kissinger foresaw the conclusion of a disengagement deal by the end of April. For Nixon, this was a mere beginning: "Well, of course, there must follow not only the disengagement, as you know, but…." Kissinger cut him off: "Mr. President, with all respect, we don't have to linger to any permanent settlement at this point. The major thing we need now is the disengagement."[269] But Nixon insisted on his ultimate goal:

> This is one thing we're going to do though, Henry. […] There is going to be a permanent settlement. […] [W]e don't want to leave any illusions […] with our friends here that this is it, you know, and the Israelis think that they can just dig in and this is it. […] Because then the same thing will come up to haunt us next Fall.[270]

Whereas Kissinger was all about a gradual, step-by-step approach, Nixon appears to have had a broader and more urgent vision for bringing about a full-fledged Arab-Israeli peace settlement. Historian David Greenberg describe Nixon as a man obsessed with earning a place in history as a peacemaker: "Nixon fancied himself a solitary prophet, tapped for leadership, endowed with uncommon skills to engineer world peace."[271] By now struggling

---

[266] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 29.
[267] Ibid.
[268] Ibid.
[269] "Telcon - Kissinger, Nixon," March 18, 1974, DS-HKT.
[270] Ibid.
[271] David Greenberg, "Nixon as Statesman: The Failed Campaign," in *Nixon in the World*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 47–48.

desperately in the Watergate vortex, Nixon also hoped that a spectacular foreign policy success might save his presidency. But Watergate meant Nixon lacked the time, energy and political capital to pursue any such envisioned Arab-Israeli settlement.[272] The documentary record indicates that Kissinger had scant hopes of a full-fledged Arab-Israeli peace settlement anytime soon. Perhaps he imagined a settlement as the distant conclusion of his step-by-step process. In the primary source documents consulted – whether speaking to Arabs, Israelis or Washington colleagues – there are only a handful of instances where Kissinger came close to discussing his visions beyond the near- and medium term future. Kissinger would take all the small steps he thought necessary. He received Israeli and Syrian envoys on March 30 and April 13. While making some progress on negotiation issues, these long-delayed visits mainly served to win time while the oil embargo ended.[273]

'The Meanest Merchant in the Souk' – Syrian Discontent with the Soviet Union

In late April, the White House sought Congressional approval for its 1975 foreign aid bill. The proposal included a $100 million 'Special Requirements Fund' at Nixon's disposal. Kissinger described its destination to Congressional leaders: "Asad may try a cautious move like Sadat did. We then may need some for Syria."[274] Kissinger informed the Syrians of this in early May. Scotes in Damascus reported that the state-owned *Syrian Arab Airlines* had been instructed to buy American-made airliners "for political reasons".[275] The Syrians were forging ahead in their new relationship with the Americans, who in turn promised significant opportunities.

But what of Syria's Soviet patrons? The Russians thought arms supplies gave them political influence in Syria, but feared that giving too much would entangle them in some unforeseen

---

[272] Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger*, 99–100, 248–249, 535–555; Greenberg, "Nixon as Statesman: The Failed Campaign," 45–64.

[273] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 130–131; Kissinger proposed the visits in late February, to take place mid-March. The envoys were Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan and Syrian Army Chief-of-Staff for Intelligence Hikmat Shihabi. "Memcon - Kissinger, Meir, et al.," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message to President Asad," March 30, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; "Memcon - Kissinger, Shihabi et al.," April 13, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.

[274] "Memcon - Nixon, Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Congressional Leadership / Memcon - Kissinger, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership," April 24, 1974, GFD-M; "The Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-559)," December 30, 1974, Federal Digital System, U. S. Government Printing Office, http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/STATUTE-88/STATUTE-88-Pg1795/content-detail.html.

[275] "Memcon - Kissinger, Khaddam," May 3, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC; According to Scotes' report, Lockheed, Boeing and McDonnell-Douglas requested and recieved lobbying help from the US Interests Section in Damascus toward this end. "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Purchase of U.S. Commercial Aircraft," April 20, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.

conflict. Syrian leaders, since the 1967 War seeking to push Israel to its pre-war borders, meanwhile needed massive arms supplies for a war which might become precisely the entanglement Moscow feared. The result: Syria received less arms than it wanted, while the USSR got less influence than it wanted. They instead faced a showdown with the US during the 1973 War. Neither party was happy. Still, their relationship survived and expanded after the 1973 War.[276] All was not well. On April 22, 1974 Thomas Scotes cabled a nine-page, widely distributed analysis of the current state of that relationship:

> Despite seemingly close Soviet/Syrian relations, I believe that Syria under President Asad will continue to pursue policies based on a Syrian assessment of what Syria's interests are with little, if any, consideration for Soviet desires in the matter. [...] As one foreign ministry official recently told me, Syrians are better businessmen than the Egyptians and they are not going to "Buy American" until they know a little bit more about the product. Nonetheless, there are strong local indications that the Syrians want to "Buy American" and if a disengagement is achieved on the Golan then it is only a matter of time before they do so. The question then is what can the Soviets do about it. Everything we see here leads us to say, "very little."[277]

Scotes believed the USSR would stay its present course and see its position wither, in Syria as in Egypt. The Syrians, Scotes believed, were glad to see the Soviets sidelined:

> As one reliable Foreign Office official recently told me, "All of our present [dealings] with the Soviets are a pretense and once we get a settlement of the Arab/Israeli question, the world will know how we feel on this subject." This statement may be an over simplification on the part of that officer but I think it accurately reflects the feeling of many Syrians and of many Arabs. [...] As another Foreign Ministry official told me, "even the meanest merchant in the Souk does not bargain the way the Soviets have bargained with us over the years" [...] He contrasted this "cheap behavior" with the "generous way the United States deals not only with its friends but even with its enemies."[278]

To make use of this opening, Scotes emphasized that a Syrian-Israeli disengagement was required. And "if a just and lasting peace" could be achieved, "the future for the West and particularly the United States is bright".[279] On April 18, the Egyptians declared the end of their exclusive reliance on Soviet military aid. It signaled a dramatic shift in their superpower relations. After years of frustrations with the USSR similar to those felt in Syria, the Egyptians decisively scuttled their long relationship with the Soviet Union. Anwar Sadat thereafter led Egypt into a strong, enduring partnership with the United States.[280]

As May approached, Henry Kissinger prepared for another round of Syrian-Israeli shuttle

---

[276] Seale, "Syria," 56–70.

[277] "Cable - Damascus to Washington et al. - Syrian/Soviet Relations," April 22, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.

[278] Ibid.

[279] Ibid.

[280] Adeed Dawisha, "Egypt," in *The Cold War and the Middle East*, ed. Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 37–41.

diplomacy. Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, again tried to invite himself to Kissinger's coming Damascus visit. As in February, neither Syrians nor Americans wanted the Soviets involved. As face-saving measures for the USSR, freshly humiliated by Egypt, Kissinger met Gromyko in Geneva on April 28 and on Cyprus on May 7.[281] From Cyprus, Kissinger reported to Assad: "No understandings were reached and no new ground was broken."[282]

The 34 Day Shuttle

On April 27, Henry Kissinger embarked on the final and by far most intense period of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement process. Vast energies went into negotiating minute details of disengagement lines, weapons limitation zones and the phrasing of official documents. While in Damascus, Kissinger heard explosions from artillery duels in Golan. This fighting, which had gone one since sometime in March was, Thomas Scotes believed, a calculated Syrian measure intended to underscore the need for a disengagement deal.[283] During one meeting with Assad, Kissinger asked whether the shelling could be toned down while he was in the area. After some discussion, Assad agreed to a "natural reduction" – 200 shells per day rather than 4000.[284] Drily, he added that this would put some Syrians out of work.[285]

In broad strokes, the first two weeks of the shuttle saw Kissinger visit numerous Middle Eastern capitals for advice and support, and Damascus and Tel Aviv seeking mutually agreeable disengagement lines. A particular sticking point was the disposition of Quneitra – a Golan Heights town which had been the capital of Syria's Quneitra Governorate until its capture by Israel in the 1967 War. Its return would give Assad something tangible to present to his people as a gain from the costly war with Israel.[286] In the evening of May 12, Kissinger reported to Nixon on his latest meeting in Damascus:

---

[281] "Telcon - Kissinger, Sisco," April 14, 1974, DS-HKT; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1033–36; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," April 24, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - President Asad's Reply to Message From Secretary Kissinger," April 24, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; "Cable - Jerusalem to Damascus - Letter to President Asad," May 7, 1974, Box 45, RN-HAKO.

[282] "Cable - Jerusalem to Damascus - Letter to President Asad," May 7, 1974, Box 45, RN-HAKO.

[283] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Messages for President Asad from Secretary ," April 14, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Cable - Damascus to Washington et al. - Syrian/Soviet Relations," April 22, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Memcon - Kissinger, Assad, Khaddam, Sisco," May 3, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC; "Memcon - Kissinger, Meir, et al.," May 14, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.

[284] "Memcon - Kissinger, Assad, Khaddam, Sisco," May 3, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.

[285] Ibid.

[286] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 140–141, 244–246; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1052; "Folder - Syria-Israel Negotiating Book," April 24, 1974, Box 1188, RN-NSC; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 47.

> Two things impressed me in particular about the Asad meeting: A) I had the impression that he wants an agreement but has a problem bringing along people who had thought of Israelis as devils for 26 years; and (B) he used the meeting to bring in key leaders in his administration—the Minister of Defense, the Chief of the Air Force and the Chief of Intelligence in addition to the Foreign Minister—for obvious way to build a consensus.[287]

The negotiations nearly collapsed on several occasion. On the morning of May 14, Kissinger cabled the White House. Facing Israel's unwillingness to make meaningful concessions, he recommended holding new military aid deals to Israel while delaying ongoing deliveries.[288] Nixon read the latest reports soon after and decided to outdo the Secretary. If and when the negotiations failed, Nixon would stop *all* aid to Israel which he had the authority to cut.[289] He instructed Kissinger to "make it unmistakably clear, if you reach that point, that the Israelis will be immediately shut off completely, without a nickel."[290] The President then set his NSC staff to work on a list of all applicable aid projects.[291] Alarmed, Kissinger responded:

> With respect to your recent message on cutting off Israel's aid, I must tell you as strongly as I can that such a course would be disastrous in terms of the immediate negotiation, the long-term evolution and the U.S. position in the Middle East.[292]

An unfolding tragedy at Ma'alot in Israel, near the Syrian and Lebanese borders, sharpened these concerns. Three Palestinians held 85 Israelis hostage, mostly children. Under these circumstances, Kissinger warned, a U.S. aid cutoff "would produce hysteria and maybe a military outburst".[293] In any case, the Israelis had, at the last moment modified their position sufficiently for Kissinger to persist.[294] Between the lines, Kissinger seemed to tell Nixon to calm down: "It is essential also that Washington maintain an attitude of public and private calm. A crisis atmosphere of meetings, leaks and innuendoes will ruin the last chance we have to bring this off."[295] The Ma'alot incident left 31 Israelis dead. Israeli retaliatory strikes against Palestinian refugee camps in Southern Lebanon killed at least 27. Despite anger on both sides, neither Israeli nor Syrian leaders wished to end or halt Kissinger's negotiations.[296]

---

[287] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 54.
[288] Ibid., Document 56.
[289] "Cable - The Situation Room to Bremer/Rodman for Sec. Kissinger," May 14, 1974, Box 47, RN-HAKO; "Cable - The Situation Room to Bremer/Rodman for Sec. Kissinger," May 14, 1974, Box 47, RN-HAKO.
[290] "Cable - The Situation Room to Bremer/Rodman for Sec. Kissinger," May 14, 1974, Box 47, RN-HAKO.
[291] Ibid.
[292] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 59.
[293] Ibid.
[294] Ibid.
[295] Ibid.
[296] "Dozens Die as Israel Retaliates for Ma'alot," *BBC News - On This Day*, May 16, 1974, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/16/newsid_2512000/2512399.stm; "Cable - Damascus to Jerusalem - Terrorist Attack on Ma'alot," May 15, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Cable - Damascus to Jerusalem -

Different Shades of Assad

Kissinger's shuttling continued. He repeatedly told Assad that disengagement was merely the first step toward a just final settlement, to which the US remained fully committed. But to American and Israeli colleagues, he argued that disengaging Syria equaled isolating Syria, leaving it powerless thereafter. A limited Syrian-Israeli agreement was merely an obstacle on the road to another Egyptian-Israeli deal, which would have the added benefit of isolating Syria from its wartime ally. Assad-biographer Patrick Seale spares little in his account of Kissinger's duplicity. It is not entirely unmerited. Seale simultaneously describes Assad as unprepared for what he terms the "Duel with Henry Kissinger":

> Asad was [...] uninformed about the United States and indeed about the Western world as a whole. The negotiation with Kissinger was his initiation into the great game of international diplomacy which was henceforth to occupy much of his presidency. [...] it was a field in which he was inexperienced: his energies and thoughts had been absorbed by domestic problems and preparations for the war. Now he found he found himself fighting a different sort of battle on unfamiliar ground.[297]

Seale describes Kissinger working a "confidence trick" on Assad, lavishing him with attention and persuading him that disengagement was merely a first step in the Golan Heights.[298] Seale suggests that Assad came to trust Kissinger's avowed intentions of bringing a just settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Egypt signed Sinai I in January, Assad's anger focused on Sadat for this perceived betrayal. According to Seale, Assad did not suspect Kissinger role in the deal. Nor did he, at the outset of the disengagement talks, foresee Kissinger's plans of isolating Syria from Egypt and others who might help the country regain territory from Israel. Did Assad fall prey to Kissinger's 'confidence trick'?[299] A May 14 memcon, where Kissinger recounts a meeting with Assad earlier that day, suggests several interpretations:

> He said that once he signs an agreement it will lead not only to a line, but obviously to a relaxation, to an effort to return to a period of civilian construction, and therefore to a prolonged freezing of the situation. [...] And therefore since he expected this to be a prolonged situation, he could not accept it with just a toe in the Golan. His people would not understand it. [...] To convey the mood, it was all said more in sorrow than in anger. He said if he couldn't get his minimum conditions he had no choice but to continue on a militant course, that the worst thing for him was to morally disarm his people without giving them anything tangible, and he realized that a disengagement agreement was to some extent a moral disarmament--the price of which he would pay, if it were proper. [...] He said, "There are two possibilities:" -- this is almost a direct quote – "if this is going to lead very quickly to another stage, then I

Suggested Angle for Secretary's Use during Meeting with President Asad," May 16, 1974, Box 46, RN-HAKO; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 58, footnotes 4–5; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1076–1079.
[297] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 230–231.
[298] Ibid., 246.
[299] Ibid., 226–249.

> don't need Kuneitra, because then we don't have to talk about reconstruction and resettling. But I am talking about reconstructing and resettling," he said, "and that takes time."[300]

Two conflicting interpretations spring to mind. With negotiations verging on collapse, Assad's talk of moral disarmament and long-term reconstruction plans might be a subtle way of telling the Israelis that he genuinely sought peace, and that the negotiations were worth it. Alternately, Assad realized, despite Kissinger's insincere assurances, that the disengagement deal with Israel would be the first and last negotiated step toward restoring Golan to Syria. By sticking to a slow and politically risky disengagement process, did Assad knowingly commit Syria to an indefinite territorial "freezing" in Golan? Which Assad was this? The Syrian nationalist acutely sensitive and militantly opposed to the foreign threats and occupations which filled the country's past and present? Or was it the careful pragmatic who in a few years of domestic and foreign policy reforms had foreswore the doctrinaire socialism of his formative years, alongside decades of rigid Syrian enmity towards the US and Israel?

A third interpretation unifies these two: Assad did, as Seale claims, enter negotiations genuinely believing Syria would regain its pre-1967 borders. Sadat's separate deal and Kissinger's 'confidence trick' led Assad to gamble his political prestige on groundbreaking negotiations with Israel. His inexperience with world affairs, as suggested by Seale, probably contributed. He had spent huge sums of money on arms, lost thousands of Syrian soldiers in war, lost Egypt as an ally and publicly 'conceded the principle' of negotiating with Israel. When Assad realized that the political process would not bring anything near the results he sought, he could no longer turn back. Without Egypt, returning Syria to its former militancy would almost certainly prove futile. The sacrifices of the October War would be for naught. Would the Syrian people forgive him? Would its political elite? In this interpretation, Assad chose political survival, negotiating stubbornly for every symbolical gain he could in Golan.

To the Finish Line

Describing a May 15 meeting with Assad, Kissinger told Yigal Allon that Assad was

> looking very hard to find an excuse in his domestic terms for making this agreement. [...] I have the

---

[300] No memcon was found from the Assad-Kissinger meeting. The memcon cited records a meeting between Kissinger, Golda Meir and her top ministers and officers. Kissinger was usually quite candid in these meetings, and it seems unlikely that he would greatly misconstrue Assad's words here. Kuneitra is one of several alternate spellings of the Golan town referred to in this thesis as Quneitra. *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 57, footnote 2; "Memcon - Kissinger, Meir, et al.," May 14, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.

> impression that the government has now talked itself into wanting disengagement, and this is supported in part by how they play my visit. It is five minutes on television every evening, always showing me smiling with Assad, always putting emphasis on the very friendly atmosphere, insisting that I say something at the airport, which they then can play.[301]

Just as Kissinger stage-managed the disengagement process to strengthen its domestic support in the US and Israel, so did Assad in Syria. But the Israelis still moved at a snail's pace. The major quarrel remained the disengagement lines in Golan, especially where they passed Quneitra. While willing to return the town to Syria, the Israelis wished to keep the tactically valuable hills immediately west of it. But the Syrians were not keen on having civilians in Quneitra living in the shadows of Israeli military positions atop those hills.[302] In a May 16 meeting, Kissinger again threatened the Israelis with a break in the negotiations:

> [L]et's be quite honest -- if there is a suspension, there will be a war of attrition, there will be Israeli retaliation, and the thing may disintegrate. Secondly, if there is a suspension between you and us and the Syrians, the true [negotiating] positions will come out. Once the positions come out [...] there is no possibility of a compromise any more. I do not believe [the negotiations] can be resumed. I might be wrong on this. But I think you came independently to the same conclusion.[303]

Again, the Israelis moved enough to avoid a break. On May 18, Kissinger notified Nixon of

> a significant breakthrough on the question of the [disengagement] line which now gives me hope that an agreement can be achieved. In accepting this proposal, Assad made it clear that he was doing so almost exclusively because of his confidence in the United States and the role that it is playing in the Middle East to achieve permanent peace. [...] Assad clearly made this decision in the hopes that this will bring further developments in the new trends in the area and closer relationships with the United States. To use his words, 'it is not for Israel but for the U.S. that I am doing this.'[304]

Syria and Israel agreed on two (approximate) disengagement lines in Golan, between which there would be Syrian civilian administration and some as of yet undefined UN presence. Several seemingly lesser issues remained: What type of military forces could either state post along, or near the lines? What would be the size and nature of the UN presence in the intervening buffer zone? What sort of civilian police force could Syria operate within the buffer zone? Where and how would a disengagement deal be signed, and by whom? What would be the exact wording of the deal and its various protocols? And finally, what would be the exact dividing lines? At their northern edge, who would control the various parts of Mount Hermon?[305] Practically every issue was subjected to detailed, bitter and frustrating

---

[301] "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon et al.," May 16, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.

[302] "Memo - Sisco, Atherton, Saunders to The Secretary - Checklist for Your Talk with President Asad -- May 12," May 12, 1974, Box 1191, RN-NSC; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Documents 54, 60.

[303] "Memcon - Kissinger, Allon et al.," May 16, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.

[304] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 64.

[305] The Israelis captured parts of Mount Hermon as late as March 1974, after the UNSC resolutions ending the October War. Disputes over who took what, when, and the legal implications of this troubled the later stages of

negotiations. One day at a time, Kissinger extended his mission. President Nixon's messages to Kissinger were consistently glowing. On May 21, he laid it on thick:

> Of all your superb accomplishments since we have worked together, the Syrian/Israeli breakthrough, regardless of what comes out in the odds and ends of bargaining which still lies ahead, must be considered one of the greatest diplomatic negotiations of all time. [...] I believe we should follow up this development with a trip to the Middle East at the earliest possible time. We will thereby be able to seal in concrete those new relationships which are essential if we are to be successful in building a permanent structure of peace in the area.[306]

In a meeting with Kissinger just after midnight on May 27, Assad seemed convinced that a deal would be reached. He questioned Kissinger's commitment to further diplomatic steps after finalizing this agreement. When would UNSC Resolution 338 be implemented? "Sometime during 1975", the American estimated.[307] Assad was not convinced:

> [T]his is the way it looks: With this action you have somehow contributed to removing pressure from Israel. I do not mean Syrian disengagement, but the whole picture of disengagement, including Egypt and Syria. Of course, it has other facets, but I am talking about it from this point. The disengagement concept itself, as seen from the Arab point of view, has been like deflating various balloons, taking away the certainty of the preparedness, the readiness, the unison of the Arabs. We know the Israelis could come to this point. But this is a difficult point of the Arabs—military, political. What the Arabs were beginning to achieve by not having disengagement, by having them alert—this concept of disengagement would cause them to slacken. [...] I as the leader in this country cannot help but to continue to prepare militarily, economically, and look for friends, supporters[.][308]

Driving to Damascus Airport in the evening of May 27, Kissinger's motorcade passed a cortege heading the opposite way. It was Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko, who had once again invited himself to the Damascus talks. To let Kissinger avoid meeting him, the Syrians had Gromyko's plane circle Damascus for 45 minutes while the American finished his meeting with Assad. A change of plans made Kissinger return next day, causing Assad to scrap his plans for Gromyko. A half hour courtesy meeting was all the time Assad would grant the Soviet Foreign Minister.[309] Then followed what evidently became a favorite anecdote for Kissinger, here re-counted to Saudi Crown Prince Khalid and other Saudi princes:

> Asad cancelled the dinner he had scheduled with Gromyko so he could see me, then after we finished the meeting I was going to leave and he said, no, let's eat Gromyko's food. Then [Defense Minister

---

the negotiations. "Memcon - Kissinger, Meir, et al.," May 23, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC; "Memcon - Nixon, Kissinger, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership," May 31, 1974, GFD-M.

[306] "Cable - The Situation Room to Bremer/Rodman for The Secretary," May 21, 1974, Box 47, RN-HAKO; Since February, Nixon had planned a triumphal tour of Middle East. When, a few weeks later, Kissinger mentioned the possibility, Assad instantly welcomed such a visit to Syria. "Memcon - Nixon, Al-Sowayel, Scowcroft," February 7, 1974, GFD-M; "Memcon - Kissinger, Asad," February 27, 1974, Box 1028, RN-NSC.

[307] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 74.

[308] Ibid.

[309] "Memcon - Kissinger, Khaddam, Shihabi," May 27, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 77; "Memcon - Khalid, Fahd, Saqqaf, Sultan, Kissinger et al.," June 15, 1974, GFD-M; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1094–1105.

Mustafa Tlas] spent 2-1/2 hours reciting Arab poetry to me which I didn't understand.[310]

To avoid public embarrassment, Kissinger also paid a courtesy call on Gromyko before returning to Israel, where he described the half hour meeting: "Gromyko was... very worrisome. He made a violent speech on the Palestinians, worse than anything Asad has made at his worst."[311] But it did not matter. Neither Syrians nor Americans shared information about the negotiations with the Soviets, nor wanted them involved.

On May 29, at 13.00, Richard Nixon took the podium in the White House briefing room to announce the success of the Syrian-Israeli disengagement negotiations. A deal would be signed in Geneva on May 31. The final documents composing the deal included a number of assurances from the Americans. Among them, a formal letter from Nixon to Assad, as negotiated between Kissinger and the Syrians, stated:

> I want to express to you my gratification at the conclusion of the agreement for the disengagement of Syrian and Israeli forces, and to affirm that the United States considers this agreement only a first step toward a just and durable peace. You have my assurance that the United States will give full, and continuing support, including our active involvement within the year in the next stages of the negotiations, to the achievement of the full implementation of Security Council Resolution 338 in all of its parts. In our view, the peace settlement should be in accordance with the interests of all the states in the area, consistent with their independence and sovereignty, and should take fully into account the legitimate interests of the Palestinian people.[312]

Until then, Kissinger had argued to the Israelis that they should conclude this deal with Syria so Egypt would have room to make another move. They could thus, step by step, isolate Syria from its wartime ally, whereafter no further Israeli concessions would be needed. A May 31 memcon from his meeting with US Congressional leaders suggests a changing analysis:

> This is an important first step, but we have monumental problems ahead of us --Jerusalem, Palestine. If there is no movement, this front could erupt again, because the Syrians are unstable. However, failure would have meant immediate hostilities, Syrian pressure for a new oil embargo, and international pressures against us. [...] It could blow up in six-to-nine months. But we now have maneuvering room.[313]

Had he begun realizing that a disengagement agreement was not enough on the Golan front, and that a second move would be necessary? Or was this mainly a rationale for eventually seeking progress on other fronts, such as a Jordanian-Israeli disengagement process, or a

---

[310] "Memcon - Kissinger, Khaddam, Shihabi," May 27, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 77; "Memcon - Khalid, Fahd, Saqqaf, Sultan, Kissinger et al.," June 15, 1974, GFD-M; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1094–1105.

[311] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1104–1105; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 78.

[312] For a map of showing the dividing lines agreed to in the Golan Agreement, see Appendix B-3; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 81.

[313] "Memcon - Nixon, Kissinger, Bipartisan Congressional Leadership," May 31, 1974, GFD-M.

second deal for Egypt?

Nixon in Damascus

The Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement paved the way for Richard Nixon's Middle Eastern triumphal tour of 1974. On June 10, Nixon left the ugly Washington struggle for survival to be worshipped in the Middle East as the international statesman he aspired to be. From Amman, a Mr. Salfiti sent Nixon a poem. Its second stanza read:

> Welcome Nixon
> And all your team
> This Holy Land
> Does boil as steam
> But peace has been
> Our goal and dream
> Maker of peace
> Let's shout and scream
> Nixon the Great
> Made true our dream [314]

After a wildly enthusiastic reception in Egypt, Nixon eventually arrived on June 15 in a more ambivalent Syria.[315] "Thousands of smiling, curious but mostly silent Syrians jammed the streets" of Damascus as Nixon and Assad drove through in an open car.[316] It was the first-ever American presidential visit to Syria.[317] Next morning, Nixon and Kissinger joined Assad and Khaddam for a private meeting. According to Kissinger's memoirs, Assad pressed Nixon, both for express assurances on the next steps towards Golan's restoration to Syria, and for the American's view of Israel's final borders.[318] Assad, Kissinger noted, "was far too Syrian to accept bromides and far too intelligent not to understand evasions", which was Nixon's preferred tactic.[319] Before Kissinger could end the meeting under the pretext that the group had to fly onward to Israel, Nixon, according to Kissinger's memoirs,

> edged ever closer to endorsing Asad's position on frontiers. Asad, unfamiliar with my chief's method of
> operation, would not have been far off the mark if he distilled from the conversation the idea that Nixon,

---

[314] "Poem - President Nixon and Mission Of Peace," June 16, 1974, Box 93, RN-WSFP.

[315] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1125–1132.

[316] "Nixon Warmly Welcomed on Arriving in Damascus," *The New York Times*, June 16, 1974.

[317] According to media reports, Nixon visited the recently occupied Golan in 1967 accompanied by the Israeli military; "Presidential Briefing - Fact Sheet on Syria," June 8, 1974, Box 100, RN-WCFC; "Briefing Book - Nixon's Visit to Syria, June 1974," June 15, 1974, Box 141, RN-HAKO.

[318] A memcon from the meeting exists: One copy in Kissinger's private collection at Yale University, another in the US Department of State's (DoS) archives. The first is accessible only with Kissinger's permission, or five years after his death. An application for access to the DoS copy remained unprocessed as this thesis went to print; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 1133–1135.

[319] Ibid.

in his own elliptical way, was agreeing to total Israeli withdrawal from the Golan.[320]

Kissinger describes this "method of operation" in his memoirs' treatment of Nixon's meeting with Sadat four days earlier. When asked what was the US position on Israeli territorial withdrawals in future Arab-Israeli negotiations,

> Nixon handled it as well as [the ambiguity of the US position] permitted. He resorted to his all-purpose approach of implying that he agreed with his interlocutor's goals and that tactical problems should be handled by others.[321]

As Sadat pressed for specifics, Nixon gradually gave ground, and made statements

> that Sadat could well have construed as fully agreeing with the Egyptian point of view. Nixon cognoscenti would have recognized Nixon's statements as a means to evade pressure that was becoming uncomfortably specific, as a way to end a difficult subject, not as a national commitment.[322]

Arguing that those with an intimate knowledge of Nixon's 'method of operation' would have understood him is a moot point. Neither Sadat nor Assad had met Nixon before. What impression did Nixon thus leave with Assad? Patrick Seale interviewed two of Assad's closest assistants. He asserts that Assad and his colleagues "came to believe that Nixon was ready to commit the United States to the search for a comprehensive settlement, but that Kissinger torpedoed the president's intentions."[323] Beyond noting that Assad "came down very very hard against any separate peace", Nixon in his memoirs shed no light on this exchange.[324]

Since the October War, the Syrian-American relationship had made rapid, striking improvements. Optimism abounded. Would Richard Nixon's visit mark the dawning of a new era in Syrian-American relations? Would the US, as Nixon publicly declared in Damascus, remain committed to "the achievement of a just and lasting peace in implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 338—a peace which will bring a new era of growth and prosperity and progress in the Middle East"?[325] Amidst the domestic turmoil consuming his final year in office, Nixon hinted publicly and privately of an ambitious vision for the Arab-Israeli conflict, broader than that of his Secretary of State. Nixon, however, was soon forced to leave that mantle to others.

---

[320] Ibid.
[321] Ibid., 1127.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 247–249.
[324] Nixon, *RN*, 1013–1015.
[325] "Remarks Following Agreement to Resume Diplomatic Relations, Damascus, June 16 - Remarks by President Nixon," in *The Department of State Bulletin*, vol. LXXI, No. 1829, 1974, 98–103.

Containment

Since we cannot at this stage meet any of Syria's desiderata, our immediate objective [...] is to buy time with Syria while we develop a strategy with Israel and the other Arabs that will contain the Syrians this fall as negotiations go forward on other fronts.
- Briefing paper for President Gerald Ford, August 21, 1974. Approved by Henry Kissinger.[326]

The Golan Agreement, signed on May 31, 1974, was a milestone in the rapidly developing Syrian-American relationship after the 1973 October War. But it was well understood that this could only be the beginning. Leaders in Washington and Damascus saw continued need for each other in the months to come, albeit for very different and largely conflicting purposes. Three questions help explore the Syrian-American relationship's development in the subsequent 18 months. Where did Syria fit into American Middle East diplomacy in the period? Did US policies toward Syria change? Which goals did Hafez al-Assad and the Syrian leadership pursue following the Golan agreement, and by which strategy? Did Henry Kissinger's assessment of Syria and Hafez al-Assad change?

Where to Now?

Despite the Sinai and Golan disengagement agreements of January and May 1974, the Arab-Israeli conflict remained precariously unresolved. Washington's policy experts and decision makers immediately began developing ideas for their next Middle East moves. Returning from his Middle East triumphal tour, President Richard Nixon told Congressional leaders:

> As we look to the future we can say: we need some time to digest what has happened. [...] Then we must find -- and we don't yet know -- what next step shows the most promise. There will be competition here between Egypt, Jordan, Syria and the Palestinians as to what comes next. But we can't do all of it in one jump. We will move carefully to build a permanent peace.[...] Sadat wants to be reasonable; Asad also, for a Syrian; Faisal and Hussein have the problem of radical pressures against them. Israel wants to wait two or three years. We can't wait. It won't be in the next 2-3 weeks, but we must move. [...] Asad was the most surprising of those I met. He is a potential asset and could be a terrible danger.[327]

Kissinger shared Nixon's appreciation of the situation's dangers. In a July 19 talk with Nixon, as fighting broke out between Turkey and Greece on Cyprus, Kissinger sounded gloomy:

> Nixon: [...] Thank God it isn't Syria and Israel or something like that -- that'd be worse wouldn't it?
> Kissinger: Well before your term is over Mr. President, we'll have that privilege too.
> Nixon: I hope not.
> Kissinger: I hope not, but I wouldn't lay odds on it.[328]

---

[326] "Memo - Niehuss, Kissinger to Scowcroft - Talking Paper for the President's Meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam," August 21, 1974, Box 30, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[327] "Memcon - Nixon, Kissinger, Bipartisan Leadership," June 20, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.
[328] "Telcon - Kissinger, President," July 19, 1974, DS-HKT; The call began on July 19 at 10:06 PM, Washington time. Local time on Cyprus would be 4 or 5 AM, July 20. Underlines added by the author.

Throughout the summer and fall, Kissinger invited envoys from Middle Eastern countries to Washington. It was the next concrete step in the US-led negotiations, and a way of buying time while figuring out another move. Israeli Foreign Minister Yigal Allon came first. In their July 30 meeting, Kissinger asked for Israeli help in avoiding an early breakdown with Syria: "Not to want to go down from Golan is one thing; but to announce it now only accelerates diplomatic pressures we're trying to avoid. So a measure of ambiguity in the public stance is essential."[329] He emphasized that Israel remained at risk of further attacks. And if another round of fighting broke out, a renewed Arab oil boycott threatened the oil-importing countries of Western Europe with economic collapse. Together with the Soviet Union, those states would then exert more pressure on Israel than the US could help resist. In the end, such a coalition would force Israel back to the pre-1967 borders. The Israelis should negotiate now, step-by-step, with the strong and friendly assistance of the US. There need not necessarily be progress, but the Israelis should not publicly foreclose it either.[330]

The *appearance* of progress was needed. But where? And how? A policy-paper draft authored by three leading US State Department policy experts argued that Washington's central aim should be the creation of "a political context within which Egypt and Israel can negotiate further move toward a settlement".[331] But for Sadat to be able to move without losing support in the Arab world, there must also be "some evidence", however cosmetic, of negotiations for Syria and the Palestinians.[332] Sadat remained eager and able to continue negotiations. But if fighting now broke out between Israel and Syria, Egypt might have to join, lest they be discredited within the Arab world. In Washington it thus seemed necessary to engage Syria to keep the Golan front quiet while mediating another Sinai deal.[333]

---

[329] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 93.
[330] Ibid.
[331] They were: Harold H. Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; Alfred Atherton, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs; and Winston Lord, State Department Director of Policy Planning; "Memo - Saunders to Atherton - Draft Paper on Next Steps in the Middle East and Strategy for the Next Six Months," July 9, 1974, Box 1185, RN-NSC; "Memo - Overall Strategy Paper for United States Action in Middle East Negotiations over next Six Months," July 8, 1974, Box 1185, RN-NSC.
[332] "Memo - Overall Strategy Paper for United States Action in Middle East Negotiations over next Six Months," July 8, 1974, Box 1185, RN-NSC.
[333] "Memo - Saunders to Atherton - Draft Paper on Next Steps in the Middle East and Strategy for the Next Six Months," July 9, 1974, Box 1185, RN-NSC; "Memo - Overall Strategy Paper for United States Action in Middle East Negotiations over next Six Months," July 8, 1974, Box 1185, RN-NSC.

During an August 1 meeting between Kissinger, Allon and Israeli Ambassador Simcha Dinitz, Allon asked about US views on Israel's final borders. Kissinger had avoided this controversial issue like the plague. His negotiating style entailed an unflinching focus on tackling the immediate issues one step at a time, always avoiding discussions of the end results.[334] His answer, as recorded from the meeting with Allon and Dinitz, is unusual in that it is the only instance in the documents studied where the Secretary reveals an opinion on the matter:

> [T]here is no United States opinion. [...] My personal opinion is that—and I haven't thought it through—if we do it in terms of the 1967 frontiers, I don't think it is impossible to do it with the 1967 frontiers with Egypt; I do think it is impossible to accept the 1967 frontiers with Syria, and I think it is impossible with Jordan. [...] On the Syrian side it can't be 1967 but it can't be the present line — because I think it may be necessary to go one more move with Syria. But it will be some clear distance from 1967. On the West Bank, I haven't thought it through. With Egypt, it seems not incompatible with Israel's security [...] But I have never discussed it with any of my colleagues—or with any Arab.[335]

What then, where the present prospects of a Golan move? An August 3 memo prepared by the NSC staff described the situation faced by Richard Murphy, the new US Ambassador to Syria. Full diplomatic relations had been restored on June 16, during Nixon's Damascus visit. It was unclear whether there could be further negotiations to satisfy Syria, and if so, when. A major objective for Murphy would thus be to sustain the dialogue with Syrian leaders and build confidence through a period with little diplomatic movement expected for Syria.[336]

The Nixon presidency entered its final throes in early August, against mounting evidence and pressure following the Watergate scandal. As Nixon's departure became a question of time, Kissinger strove to reassure Middle Eastern leaders that US policies there would remain as before.[337] On August 8, Vice President Gerald Ford asked Kissinger to remain in his post. "You can count on me, Mr. VP", Kissinger replied.[338] Under threat of impeachment by the US Congress, Richard Nixon resigned at noon next day. A message from the just sworn-in President Ford was cabled to President Assad in Damascus that same day:

> I specifically wish to affirm everything told you by President Nixon and Secretary Kissinger. In particular, I want you to know of my strong commitment to pursue our diplomatic strategy looking toward a just and durable peace in the Middle East with the same vigor that has characterized our efforts over the past

---

[334] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 94.

[335] Ibid.

[336] "Ceremony in Damascus Marks Renewal of U. S.-Syrian Ties," *The New York Times*, June 17, 1974; "Remarks Following Agreement to Resume Diplomatic Relations, Damascus, June 16 - Remarks by President Nixon"; "Memo - Niehuss to Scowcroft - Talking Points for Your Meeting with Ambassador Murphy," August 3, 1974, Box 631, RN-NSC.

[337] "Telcon - Kissinger, Sisco," August 7, 1974, Box 26, RN-HAKT; "Memcon - Kissinger, Kabbani," August 8, 1974, Box 1029, RN-NSC.

[338] "Telcon - Kissinger, Vice President Ford," August 8, 1974, Box 26, RN-HAKT.

nine months. The achievement of peace in the Middle East will remain one of the highest foreign policy objectives of the United States, and our endeavors to reach that goal will go forward without interruption with the full participation and support of Secretary Kissinger.[339]

Gerald Ford was a seasoned Congressional politician, but less experienced in foreign policy than Nixon.[340] He began holding frequent meetings with Kissinger, who briefed him on recent events and existing US policies. In one such meeting, on August 12, Kissinger told Ford that "Israel can't give up all the Golan, but it can be more flexible."[341] The high-level meetings between US and Middle Eastern representatives in Washington resumed. A memo, approved by Kissinger, was prepared for Ford ahead of his August 23 meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Abdel Halim Khaddam. One of the President's objectives would be:

> to develop a basis for keeping the Syrians from taking political or military actions that would disrupt the peacemaking process in the months ahead when activity is more likely to be focused on the Egyptian and Jordanian front. [...] Since we cannot at this stage meet any of Syria's desiderata, our immediate objective [...] is to buy time with Syria while we develop a strategy with Israel and the other Arabs that will contain the Syrians this fall as negotiations go forward on other fronts.[342]

The memo noted that Damascus had repeatedly threatened to resume hostilities if further negotiations did not rapidly lead to the return of occupied Arab territory and the restoration of the rights of the Palestinians. Syria's Army had been fully re-equipped since the last war and was in as good, if not better condition than in October 1973. Jordanian leaders believed a Syrian resumption of hostilities might come by the end of the year. Syria's threats, the memo argued, could not be taken lightly.[343] But the Israelis were "adamantly opposed to any further withdrawal from Golan."[344] With nothing specific to offer, Ford should, the memo recommended, reassure Khaddam of US intentions to reach a just and lasting peace, with the next steps coming "as fast as possible".[345] Before meeting Khaddam, Ford asked Kissinger whether he had told the Syrians that the US would not help them back to the 1967 borders. Recalling his and Nixon's meeting with Assad on June 16, 1974, the Secretary adviced:

> This is a very difficult point. I have bobbed and weaved all over the place on his. We can't be pinned down. Say you understand their position. We are for a just peace. They are not likely to consider as a just peace one which doesn't restore the borders. [...] You know Nixon didn't like confrontations. Asad really

---

[339] "Letter - Presidential Message to President Asad of Syria," August 9, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Presidential Message," August 9, 1974, Box 31, GF-RAC.

[340] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 156–157; Lewis L Gould, *The Modern American Presidency* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 174–175.

[341] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," August 12, 1974, GFD-M.

[342] "Memo - Niehuss, Kissinger to Scowcroft - Talking Paper for the President's Meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam," August 21, 1974, Box 30, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[343] Ibid.

[344] Ibid.

[345] Ibid.

launched on him and Nixon in the heat of the argument promised the 1967 borders.[346]

When Ford, Kissinger and Khaddam met on August 23, the Syrian in no way pressed for fulfillment of Nixon's promise. Apart from airing some grievances about Israel's behavior, since 1948 and in recent months, Khaddam's words ranged from conciliatory to laudatory:

> The Arabs love Americans and admire their background. Conditions for a good relationship exist. What we need is a man of courage like you and men like Dr. Kissinger who understands the problems. You will find great willingness on our side to cooperate. […] [T]hese statements reflect our official position and are made in sincerity and are true. I meant what I said. When you meet President Asad, you will find him a man who wants peace in all seriousness and wants good relations with the United States.[347]

Stalling

Since late July, the Americans had probed the possibility of launching a Jordan-Israel negotiation round for the West Bank. But with Israel unwilling to offer sufficient concessions, and the Americans unable or unwilling to demand them, it came to naught by mid-August. The focus now turned to a second-stage Egyptian-Israeli negotiation round, targeting further Israeli pull-back in Sinai.[348] In an August 30 meeting with Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger, Kissinger spoke of Syria in relation to this:

> Don't get me wrong -- over the next year they'll be a problem, yes, but not right now. The Syrians were willing to make another small step and not insist on the '67 borders in the next move. If we could get a third of the Golan, we could get two-to-three years. But the problem is the Israeli settlements [in the Golan Heights.] No Israeli Government would agree to move them. We would have to threaten a cutoff of everything and order it. […] [T]here is a 50-50 chance of [war] by next summer. The Egyptians are on the verge of copping out. But one more move and they would be out of the game.[349]

On September 9, Hafez al-Assad was interviewed by Arnaud de Borchgrave, editor of the American weekly news magazine *Newsweek*. To Ambassador Murphy, de Borchgrave conveyed his impressions from an off-the-record conversation after that interview.[350] Assad had described how he was "looking for any slight progress" in order to remain committed to a negotiated process.[351] Movement toward a West Bank deal would qualify. But when de Borchgrave asked whether another Israeli-Egyptian deal would also qualify, Assad angrily "exclaimed that Syria was against further steps in Sinai at this juncture and that, if [the] U. S. opted for [a] further step there, Syria would disengage from [the] negotiating process."[352]

---

[346] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," August 23, 1974, GFD-M.
[347] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Murphy, Khaddam, Kabbani, Joejati," August 23, 1974, GFD-M.
[348] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 157–161; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 358–370.
[349] "Memcon - Kissinger, Schlesinger, Scowcroft ," August 30, 1974, GFD-M.
[350] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - de Borchgrave Interview With Syrian President Asad," September 11, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid.

Assad's anger likely stemmed from a sense of betrayal at Anwar Sadat's hands following the 1973 War. His rapid move toward a separate disengagement deal with Israel weakened Syria's negotiating position against Israel. Another Egyptian-Israeli step would exacerbate this. Yitzhak Rabin had succeeded Golda Meir as Israeli Prime Minister on June 3, 1974. He met Ford and Kissinger in Washington on September 12. Rabin asserted that opportunities existed for further constructive moves with Egypt, and perhaps also with Jordan. He saw no prospects with Syria.[353] Meeting again next day, Ford explicitly reaffirmed a promise made by Nixon and Kissinger to the Israelis as they signed the disengagement deal with Syria in May 1974 – that the US "would not push Israel off the Golan".[354] Kissinger reported to Assad:

> In these talks our objective was to obtain a firm Israeli commitment to enter the next stage of negotiations. We have now with great difficulty achieved this. Furthermore, the Israelis have agreed to give us some ideas in the near future about what the elements of the next step might be.[355]

This was classic Kissingerian ambiguity. The memcons from the two Ford-Kissinger-Rabin meetings show the Israeli using Syria as an argument for receiving increased US arms supplies – not as a negotiating partner in the foreseeable future. Whatever Israeli "ideas" Kissinger alluded to, they would focus on Egypt and Sinai – the one place where Assad clearly *did not* want further movement.[356]

Doom and Gloom – Henry Kissinger Returns to the Middle East

Kissinger planned a return to Damascus on October 11. Setting the stage, Ambassador Murphy cabled a six-page analysis of the prevailing political views and mood in the city. He found Damascenes proud of Syria's efforts in the 1973 War and the subsequent war of attrition against Israel, relatively realistic in their assumptions about the army's current military capabilities, and soberly accepting the possibility that a return to war might be necessary to regain territory. If so, they saw this as a prospect for next year, not an imminent development. Nor were leading Syrian figures set against a return to war:

> Top officials concerned with economic development say they hope another war will not be necessary.

---

[353] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 226–252; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 160; "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Prime Minister Rabin's Visit," September 9, 1974, Box 16, GF-NSA-KS; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Keating, Scowcroft, Rabin, Dinitz, Gazit," September 12, 1974, GFD-M.

[354] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 100.

[355] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message from Secretary of State Kissinger," September 14, 1974, Box 24, GF-NSA-KS.

[356] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Keating, Scowcroft, Rabin, Dinitz, Gazit," September 12, 1974, GFD-M; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Rabin, Dinitz," September 13, 1974, GFD-M.

> They are keenly aware of what it has cost Syria in recent years to divert over half of its budget to defense. But economic considerations will neither oblige the regime to go to war or to refrain therefrom. Oil money is coming in from Arab states and Iran. No one is starving. We detect no popular war weariness strong enough effectively to inhibit the regime's stated determination to keep open its military option, the public in fact appears to support [the government's] policy to maintain [a] well-equipped army.[357]

As for Hafez al-Assad, Murphy thought he was

> beginning to echo Sadat in speaking out for peace. Two weeks ago in Damascus, Asad told a workers congress Syria intended to be as courageous in its search for peace as it had been on the battlefield. A few years ago no Syrian leader could have said even that much. […] Asad has opted for a negotiated solution while insuring that we are all aware he will have the capability and resolve to return to the battlefield at the time of his choosing.[358]

During their October 11 meeting, Kissinger found Assad suspicious of Sadat's intentions. The Syrian "probed to find out whether Sadat had indicated a willingness to go ahead with the Israelis on his own."[359] Kissinger disingenuously responded that his talks with Cairo were "general" and suggested Sadat remained uncommitted.[360] Kissinger noted President Assad's firm opposition to the continued reliance on a step-by-step approach to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Syrian wanted simultaneous negotiated progress on all fronts, towards total Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders and Palestinian rights restored through the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[361] Kissinger assured Assad of Ford's "firm intention to support further negotiations on the Syrian-Israeli front 'at the right time' in the future".[362] Assad was not impressed.[363]

In Amman, Kissinger found King Hussein "girding himself for a showdown".[364] He looked ahead to an Arab League Summit to be held soon in the Moroccan capital Rabat, where the chief topic looked to be determining who should negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. The King hoped to retain this authority.[365] Having visited Sadat, Assad and Hussein, Kissingers

---

[357] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Damascus Four Months Later," October 4, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.
[358] Ibid.
[359] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Conversation with Asad," October 11, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.
[360] Ibid.; "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Meeting with Sadat," October 10, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT; "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Second Meeting with Sadat," October 11, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.
[361] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Conversation with Asad," October 11, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.
[362] Ibid.
[363] Ibid.
[364] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Conversation with Hussein," October 12, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.
[365] Ibid.

report to President Ford noted that "it is not possible to fully reflect the tenseness, nervousness, and general insecurity, bordering on despair, I am finding in all of the Arab leaders I have met on this trip. It is a very gloomy climate, indeed."[366] In subsequent meetings with the Israelis, Kissinger found *some* willingness to take further steps with Egypt. He agreed to return in early November for meetings to that effect. But as the Rabat summit neared, Kissinger feared the Syrians might use it to build pressure against Sadat and block him from further moves.[367] Concluding his October trip, Kissinger glumly reported to Ford:

> I am convinced that the Middle East today remains the most dangerous trouble spot in the world; the seeds of war between Arabs and Israelis remain, as does the potential for a dangerous confrontation between ourselves and the USSR. But it goes beyond this; in view of our overall economic interests -- indeed the world's interest in the Middle East and the Arabian and Persian Gulf -- the interdependence between producer and consumer, and the need for developing a stable economic and monetary system based on cooperation, the settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute is even more crucial to our national interests today than at any time in its history. Our involvement therefore is imperative and inevitable; and we are the only ones who can do it -- if it can be done at all.[368]

Towards the end of October 1974, Hafez al-Assad saw no concrete signs of further moves towards restoring Syrian territory in the Golan Heights. He saw President Sadat reaching away from their united front, toward a second negotiated Egyptian-Israeli agreement, without Syria. And he saw King Hussein and the Israelis, each for their own reasons, hoping to avoid an expanded political role for the PLO. But the PLO offered Assad a countermove. Through their claim of leadership of the Palestinian people, the organization might harness some of the sympathy and support existing in the Arab world toward their cause. The Rabat Summit was an opportunity to have the Arab League formally invest the PLO with the political power it sought. Could Sadat or King Hussein negotiate anything with Israel if an Arab League-sanctioned PLO actively opposed it? Would Egyptian and Jordanian domestic audiences tolerate it? A political battle was brewing – for the voice of the Palestinian people and the legitimacy it carried in the Arab world. The Rabat Summit would be the battlefield.

Assad's Triumph – The 1974 Rabat Arab League Summit

The Arab League Summit took place between October 26 and 29, 1974. Assad and his allies

---

[366] Ibid.

[367] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of First Meeting in Israel," October 13, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT; "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Second Meeting with the Israelis," October 14, 1974, Box 16, GF-NSA-KS; "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report of Meeting with Asad," October 14, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT.

[368] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Kissingers Report after Seventh Mission to Middle East in 1974," October 15, 1974, Box 1, GF-NSA-KT; The same document, undated, is found in *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 110.

set their energies to drumming up support for the PLO, and against Sadat and Hussein. When the Arab League in Rabat recognized the PLO as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people", the ramifications went beyond that particular matter.[369] With an empowered PLO more or less at his side, Hafez al-Assad scored a significant victory in Rabat. King Hussein was effectively barred from negotiating the future of Gaza and the West Bank with Israel. That authority now belonged to the PLO, which the Israelis were not expected to talk to. It thus seemed that if there were to be a second Egyptian-Israeli negotiating round, Egypt either had to secure parallel negotiations for Syria, or negotiate separately. The latter option was an unhappy one for Egypt's leaders, threatening them with strong opposition among Arab audiences, both at home and throughout the wider Middle East. Had Assad's PLO strategy at the Rabat Summit dragged Sadat back into the united Arab front with Syria? In a memo to Ford, Kissinger assessed Rabat's consequences for US diplomacy:

> [T]here is no question that the decisions reached there have greatly complicated the task of engaging Israel in negotiations. [...] Nevertheless, our only real option is to continue our efforts to get movement started toward an eventual overall settlement.[370]

On November 5, Yitzhak Rabin went before the Israeli parliament to read, point by point, the decisions taken at Rabat, his analysis of these, and finally, his government's categorical rejection of their content. Referring to the PLO, he asserted that "the Government of Israel will not negotiate with terrorist organizations whose avowed policy is to strive for Israel's destruction".[371] While reiterating Israel's desire for continuing negotiations for peace with all its neighbors, his total rejection of talks with the PLO might make this irrelevant.[372] Kissinger returned to Damascus on November 7. A briefing book prepared for him warned that the Syrians were brimming with self-confidence after Rabat, convinced that they now wielded the "collective political and financial strength to force the issue" if Israel would not enter a second round of Golan negotiations.[373] From Damascus, Kissinger reported that his meeting confirmed Assad's PLO strategy as one aimed at blocking further Sinai negotiations without a

---

[369] Shlaim, *The Iron Wall*, 333–334; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 252–254; Shemesh, *The Palestinian Entity 1959-1974*, 306–309.

[370] "Memo - Scowcroft to The President - Kissinger's Judgement of the Rabat Conference," October 30, 1974, Box 3, GF-NSA-KT.

[371] "Speech - Statement by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin before the Knesset in the Wake of the Arab Summit Conference in Rabat," November 5, 1974, Box 16, GF-NSA-KS.

[372] Ibid.

[373] "Briefing Book - Houghton to Scowcroft - Briefing Book on Secretarys Visit to Middle East [3 of 4]," November 8, 1974, Box 3, GF-NSA-KS.

Golan parallel.[374] However, several times during the conversation, Kissinger detected

> anxiety on the part of Asad as to how now to proceed in light of Rabat. He punctuated this by several times asking: How do you see the next step; why can we not move commonly on all fronts? I sensed therefore both relief on his part that it was unlikely some negotiation would be going on that would exclude Syria, while at the same time concern over the probable impasse he has helped create as a result of the support he gave to the PLO at Rabat.[375]

Kissinger's next meeting, with Hussein, confirmed his retreat from the diplomatic process. The King blamed Israel for setting the stage for Rabat and would henceforth "sit tight."[376] At a meeting with key Israeli cabinet members in Jerusalem on November 8, Kissinger argued that some sort of negotiations with Syria might be necessary to enable Egypt to move.[377] However, Kissinger reported to Ford, "Rabin took a confident and tough line […] arguing that a firm stand would bring the Arabs back to reality."[378] Despite this, despite the complications brought on by Rabat, despite King Hussein's withdrawal and despite uncertainty over Anwar Sadat's ability to move without Syria, Kissinger remained optimistic. Concluding the November Middle East visit, he reported to Ford: "All in all, with luck and discipline, we may be able to bring off a successful Egyptian-Israeli negotiation by the end of February."[379] Egypt and Israel remained the focus of Kissinger's diplomacy. Syria's role, and thus the future of the occupied Golan Heights, would be determined by the degree to which Damascus could inject it into the US-Egypt-Israel triangle. By using the Rabat Summit to empower the PLO, an organization no more keen on a separate Egypt-Israeli agreement than he was, Assad made one successful move to keep the Egyptians from moving on their own. But would it suffice?

The November Crises

In November, Assad brandished another tool at his disposal for pressuring Israel and Egypt – his option of not renewing the mandate of the 1250-strong United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights buffer zone. The Golan agreement required both sides to renew the mandate every six months. The first term would expire at the end of November, 1974. Visiting New York on November 14, Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam

---

[374] "Memo - Scowcroft to the President - Kissinger's Report on Talks with President Asad," November 7, 1974, Box 3, GF-NSA-KT.
[375] Ibid.
[376] "Memo - Scowcroft to the President - Kissingers Report on Talks with Hussein," November 7, 1974, Box 3, GF-NSA-KT.
[377] "Memo - Scowcroft to the President - Meeting with Prime Minister Rabin," November 8, 1974, Box 16, GF-NSA-KS.
[378] Ibid.
[379] Ibid.

reportedly told Arab ambassadors "that he foresaw no prospect of any positive event before [the] end [of] November" which would make Syria renew.[380] This came amid a flurry of reports and rumors concerning Israeli and Syrian preparations for war. Ambassador Murphy in Damascus soon referred to this as the 'November 15-16 Crisis'. Both he and Kissinger blamed the crisis on Israel.[381]

While these mid-November tensions complicated matters, Syria renewed UNDOF's mandate in the end. Murphy believed it was President Assad in person who had made the decision, "largely in response to [Kissinger's] urgings".[382] These interlinked crises in late November seemingly shook the Americans. On November 26, with UNDOF's renewal all but confirmed, Ford wrote to Rabin. Regarding the November 15-16 Crisis, Ford warned

> I want to say, so that there will be no misunderstanding later, that Israel's sudden call-up of reservists at that tense moment without prior discussion with us is something that cannot be risked again. There may be some in Israel who feel it helped bring the Syrians [to renewing UNDOF]. I know from our efforts in Damascus that it did not and would be a serious mistake to follow that reasoning in the future.[383]

When American diplomats spoke to their Syrian counterparts, they took great care to note how resolving Syria's grievances with Israel was integral to their diplomatic efforts. Step by step, they promised, a just and final settlement approached. The Israelis promised no such thing. Rabin did not mince words about Syria in a December 3 interview in Ha'aretz, an Israeli newspaper. According to a summary cabled from the US embassy in Tel Aviv, he stated that

> Israel [...] must try to isolate Syria and thus block the tendency of Syrian policy which is to draw the region into a new war-- this time on three fronts-- against Israel. If [a] new war in 1975 cannot be avoided, it is in Israel's interest that it be confined to [the] northern front against Syria.[384]

Rabin's statements were probably aimed at impressing his domestic audience in Israel. But

---

[380] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Proposed Demarche on UNDOF Renewal," November 19, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[381] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Schlesinger, Scowcroft," November 15, 1974, GFD-M; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," November 10, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Cairo to Washington - Talk with Tahmy on Various Matters," November 14, 1974, Box 9, GF-RAC; "Telcon - Kissinger, Dobrynin," November 15, 1974, DS-HKT; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Reported Military Preparations ," November 16, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Chief of Staff Comments on Nov 15-16 Crisis," November 29, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," November 16, 1974, GFD-M; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Proposed Demarche on UNDOF Renewal," November 19, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Schmidt et al.," December 5, 1974, GFD-M.

[382] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Need for Negotiations on Golan," November 26, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[383] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 120.

[384] "Cable - Tel Aviv to Washington - Rabin on Israeli Strategy and Negotiations with Egypt," December 3, 1974, NARA-AAD; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 255.

he could not have been ignorant of how this would be read in Syria. Ambassador Murphy reported the Syrian government's "swift and angry" reaction at Rabin's avowed strategy.[385] Three days later, Kissinger told Ford that such statements might "blow up the negotiation" with Egypt.[386] Kissinger did not necessarily disagree with Rabin's statements – he had urged such an approach through early 1974. But saying so outright in the press was something else. It did little to reassure the Syrians that the ongoing diplomacy was worthwhile.

Lebanon in Ferment

Syria's Golan frontline with Israel was narrow. But to the west, Syria had a long, soft flank – its border with the militarily weak Lebanon, which in turn faced Israel not far to the south. In 1973, Israeli warplanes had overflown Lebanese territory to strike Syria, circumventing the air defense systems along the Golan front. Months later, Syria and Lebanon concluded a joint defense treaty, which also granted Syria early warning facilities in Lebanon. In January 1975, Syria's growing military and paramilitary presence in Lebanon caused worry in Washington. On January 8, Kenneth Keating, US ambassador to Israel, reported on a conversation with Foreign Minister Yigal Allon. The Israeli was concerned about the growing presence of Saiqa troops in Southern Lebanon. The Saiqa was a Palestinian militia armed and controlled by Syria. Allon alleged that Syrian Army personnel had been seconded to the Saiqa, suggesting they might thus also be present in Lebanon.[387] Defense Minister Shimon Peres had recently warned against "serious consequences", were the Syrian Army to enter Southern Lebanon, and thus approach the Lebanese-Israeli borderlands.[388]

On January 14, Kissinger chaired a meeting of the White House's chief crisis planning- and management group, the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), to review US contingency plans in case of renewed Arab-Israeli violence. Another round of American-led negotiations was being prepared. If they failed, a return to the battlefield was seen as a strong possibility. CIA director William Colby argued that resumed violence need not come in

---

[385] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Golan," December 5, 1974, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[386] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," December 6, 1974, GFD-M.
[387] Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 182; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 268–269; "Cable - Tel Aviv to Washington - Lebanon and Syria," January 8, 1975, Box 24, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[388] "Cable - Tel Aviv to Washington - Lebanon and Syria," January 8, 1975, Box 24, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

the form of another full-fledged war.[389] Rather, "the danger will be on the Lebanese-Israeli border", where the Israelis might attack pre-emptively in response to Syrian activities.[390] In an illustration of the worst possible implications of continued Arab-Israeli tensions, the discussion turned to the possibility of a Soviet military intervention in another Arab-Israeli war. Those present considered this unlikely. But Kissinger wanted to prepare for the worst:

> <u>Secretary Kissinger</u>: […] [I]n our contingency planning, we have to be prepared to prevent the Soviets from getting in. I'm more attracted to interception [of Soviet planes] by US aircraft. […] We can't start shooting down Soviet planes and not be prepared to go to war.
> <u>General Brown</u>: Then we will have to dust off the nuclear option.
> <u>Secretary Kissinger</u>: That shows where we are. We have to prepare some contingency plans for the scenario I have outlined.[391]

Next day, NSC staffer Robert Oakley sent Kissinger a six-page memo on developments in Southern Lebanon. Ongoing Israeli-Palestinian fighting near Israel's border threatened to become "a low-level Syrian-Israeli war of attrition […] fought on Lebanese territory."[392] Further Israeli escalation in the borderlands could provoke "a quantum jump in Syrian military involvement".[393] The Syrians were increasing the presence of Damascus-controlled Saiqa militia forces while reportedly offering advanced weaponry and training to the Lebanese Army. Oakley noted a longstanding Syrian fear that an Israeli attack might strike Damascus' lightly defended western flank via Lebanon. He thus alluded to the possibility that the growing Syrian presence in Southern Lebanon was defensive in nature. Oakley suggested Kissinger ask the Israelis to avoid cross-border strikes, since they would "most likely […] push Lebanon still further into Syrian arms and push more Syrian troops into Lebanon".[394]

Winter Maneuvers – Preparing for another Shuttle

On January 21, 1975, Kissinger told Ford that "the Syrians now are becoming more moderate and saying five-to-ten kilometers [of Israeli withdrawals in Golan] would be fine. But we can't mention that to Israel right now."[395] Ford and Kissinger met the British Prime Minister Harold

---

[389] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 126; Led by Henry Kissinger, the WSAG gathered top-level Washington officials to manage ongoing crises, or plan for such future events. It was created in 1969 as one component of Nixon and Kissinger's restructured NSC. For a study of the WSAG and its performance in four Nixon-era crises, including the 1973 October War, see *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making*.
[390] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 126.
[391] Ibid. Underlines added by the author. General George Brown was Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
[392] "Memo - Oakley to Scowcroft for Kissinger - Lebanese/Fedayeen/Israeli Situation," January 15, 1975, Box 24, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[393] Ibid.
[394] Ibid.
[395] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," January 21, 1975, GFD-M.

Wilson on January 31. The Arab-Israeli conflict was the main topic of one of their meetings.

Wilson asked what could be done with Syria, to which Kissinger responded:

> I assume this discussion will be confined to this room. I think if we could get a few kilometers [of Israeli withdrawals in Golan, the] Syrians now, for the first time, have indicated willingness to move step-by-step. We have not discussed this with the Israelis -- it will be a massive problem. […] The problem is the settlements that Israel has built on the Golan right up to the [disengagement] line.[396]

As Kissinger implied to Wilson, the Americans dared not now discuss this matter with the

Israelis. Any further Golan moves likely required moving Israeli settlements in Golan, which

Kissinger knew would be hugely controversial in Israel. Kissinger would not risk controversy

with Israel unless it facilitated his preferred next move – a second Egyptian-Israeli deal.

A February 6 memo from Robert Oakley of the NSC staff warned Kissinger that the

simmering Israeli-Lebanese border issue threatened to disrupt the Egypt-Israel negotiations.

The power to do so, he asserted, lay in the hands of President Assad and PLO's leaders. But

the PLO was unlikely to move without Damascus' support. Oakley's memo included analyses

and intelligence reports from the CIA, Defense Intelligence Agency and State Department.

One of these warned that the Syrians might move increasing numbers of nominally non-

governmental, but Damascus-controlled militias into Lebanon, while denying responsibility

for their actions. Detecting such movements and assessing who had ordered them would in

any case be very difficult.[397] Kissinger met Assad in Damascus on February 14. If the coming

negotiations failed to include Syria, Assad explicitly threatened to "cause problems for Egypt

both internally and in the Arab world if Egypt went it alone."[398]

In an off-the-record remark given by Assad to *Newsweek's* Arnaud de Borchgrave and passed

to the Americans on February 23, the Syrian president said it was "obvious to any casual

observer" that Kissinger's policies were designed to "divide the united Arab front".[399] In the

interview's on-the-record portion, which was published, de Borchgrave asked if another

Syrian-Israeli step could be a final peace treaty with Israel.[400] Assad replied:

---

[396] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Wilson, Callaghan," January 31, 1975, GFD-M.
[397] "Memo - Oakley to Kissinger - Lebanese-Israeli Border Problems," February 6, 1975, Box 24, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[398] "Memo - Scowcroft to the President - Kissingers Report on Meeting with Asad," February 14, 1975, Box 7, GF-NSA-KT.
[399] "Cable - Abu Dhabi to Washington - De Borchgrave Interview With President Asad February 21," February 23, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[400] Ibid.

> Yes, it could. When everything is settled it will have to be formalized with a formal peace treaty. This is
> not propaganda, we mean it -- seriously and explicitly. You look so surprised from the look on your face.
> This is not a new logic in Syria's policy. It is our fundamental position decided by party leaders.[401]

Two days later, the Syrian Foreign Ministry, apparently on Assad's orders, began spreading

the word that the interview published in *Newsweek* had been "distorted".[402] Murphy asked

the ministry's Director of American Affairs what exactly had been distorted. In the director's

opinion, Assad had prematurely revealed "Syria's true position" on a permanent peace treaty

with Israel.[403] On February 27, Ford, meeting with Kissinger, noted Assad's peace offer.

Kissinger did not believe the Israelis would make use of it.[404]

The Primacy of Egypt – The March 1975 Shuttle

Kissinger prepared for a March visit to the Middle East, during which he hoped to conclude a

second-stage Egyptian-Israeli deal. But the Syrians, fearing isolation from their wartime allies

in Egypt, looked increasingly intent on blocking another Sinai move. During a March 4

meeting with Ford, Kissinger noted the possibility of giving Assad a presidential letter

assuring him that they would work for a second Golan agreement after a new Sinai deal. Ford

asked how specific such a letter needed to be. Would it violate Nixon and Kissinger's promise

in May 1974 that the US would not force Israel off the Golan Heights?[405] Kissinger replied:

> No. Just promise a major effort. The promise is important -- but Nixon did promise the '67 borders to the
> Syrians. If Israel was smart, they would talk with the Syrians, move it to Geneva and let it get screwed
> up.[406]

Kissinger's shuttle lasted from March 7 to 22. His two Damascus visits focused on keeping

Hafez al-Assad from blocking Anwar Sadat's negotiating attempts. Meeting with Assad on

March 9, Kissinger spoke earnestly of where he saw Syria fit into US national interests:

> [W]e are prepared to make a major effort on the Golan as well. And there is nothing in it for us, except
> to maintain our relationship with the Arab world. The Golan is not an American interest.[...] Syria as such
> is not of such importance to the United States; Syria is important because of its symbolic significance in
> the whole Arab world.[…] You can rest assured there is no great popular demand in America for another
> Syrian negotiation[.][407]

Kissinger declared himself and Ford ready to do whatever they could to help Syria regain as

---

[401] Ibid.

[402] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Asad-de Borchgrave Interview," February 25, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[403] Ibid.

[404] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," February 27, 1975, GFD-M.

[405] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," March 4, 1975, GFD-M.

[406] Ibid.

[407] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (02)," March 9, 1975, GFD-HKR.

much land as possible, "with American pressure".[408] This presumably alluded to pressuring Israel. Assad asked whether exerting such pressure was being discussed, not just in general, but during the ongoing negotiations. Kissinger replied:

> Yes, but I don't want to mislead you. […] I'm preparing the political and psychological groundwork. But I'm telling you as a friend, whom I don't want to trick, that the preparation will take longer, to bring about conditions in which it will actually occur. I will, in fact, discuss it. Those things have to take an evolution. […] [I]t must be done in a way that can succeed and not just be a theoretical exercise.[409]

Kissinger's vague talk of doing groundwork was clearly a stalling tactic. But he was not entirely dishonest. The matter of Syria was discussed in Egypt, Israel and among the Americans.[410] After negotiating the Golan disengagement agreement in May 1974, Kissinger gradually shed his avowed strategy of isolating Syria. He came to believe that US interests within and beyond the region made another Syrian-Israeli negotiating round necessary. But Kissinger was not spending large amounts of energy or political capital doing this so-called groundwork. When discussing a second Golan move with other American leaders, he was not sanguine about its prospects. As Kissinger saw it, Israel's opposition to this meant that Ford would have to apply extraordinary pressure to achieve movement. As long as an easier, but eminently important second Sinai deal lay on the horizon, this remained Kissinger's focus.

Summarizing the March 9 meeting to Ford, Kissinger noted that Assad, deeply suspicious of being sidelined by a second Sinai agreement, now threatened that "a solution cannot come without another war".[411] However, Kissinger concluded that Assad had adopted a wait-and-see attitude as concerned the Egypt-Israel negotiations.[412] And whatever differences there were due to had these negotiations, Assad "did not want [these] to effect adversely the relations between the United States and Syria."[413] Neither Americans nor the Israelis felt certain that Syria would remain still. Kissinger met Rabin, Peres, Allon and Israeli Defense Force Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur on March 11 and 12. Gur rated the Syrian Army as a much better offensive force than that of Egypt. The Israelis all seemed to agree that the Syrians would not in another war try to retake the entire Golan.[414] Rather, they would combine

---

[408] Ibid.
[409] Ibid.
[410] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I and II," March 7-22, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[411] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (02)," March 9, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (05)," March 11, 1975, GFD-HKR; "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (06)," March 12, 1975, GFD-HKR.

offensive military power with political dynamics to, in Allon's words, "force the issue on the world".[415] If this was the goal, the Israelis argued, Syria was now well poised.[416]

Kissinger returned to Damascus on March 15.[417] To Ford, Kissinger reported that Assad made an "impressively eloquent statement in front of his colleagues", explaining why he was now saying publicly, for the first time, that Syria wanted peace with Israel.[418] In Jerusalem on March 16, Kissinger described Assad's talk of a peace agreement to the Israelis. Peres asked whether Kissinger believed a serious agreement was achievable with Egypt and Syria. "Yes," the American replied, "if they don't go too far with the PLO in the meantime in Syria".[419] While perceptions seemed to be changing in both Israel and Syria, they remained far apart, as Kissinger reported to Ford:

> Syrian suspicion is so strong, and Israeli opposition to giving up anything more on the Golan so great, that a stalemate is likely to result. […] [Assad] might relax his opposition to my present efforts, easing the way for rapid conclusion of a Sinai agreement, if we could find a credible way to guarantee him that a Syrian-Israeli negotiation would start […] before the implementation phase of any Egypt-Israel agreement begins. But our difficulties in Israel will be monumental requiring great Presidential pressure.[420]

The Sinai negotiations meanwhile entered a critical phase. Meeting the Israelis on March 18, Kissinger assessed the Egyptian leadership's attitude to other Arabs:

> My instinct is that if you offered [Sadat] the '67 frontiers in principle […] many things would be possible. I don't think he'd fight for the Syrians or for the Palestinians. At many luncheons, at many dinners I've had with him, I've never heard him speak about these except as friendly foreign countries to be manipulated. To him, Pan Arabism is a diplomatic card he'll play.[421]

Defense Minister Peres worried that a deal now with Egypt would cause the Syrian front to "blow up".[422] Kissinger had long worried that the Syrians would act on their threats of resuming hostilities lest their demands were met. His fears now seemingly waning, Kissinger simply replied that "[t]his I no longer believe."[423] Why this change of mind? Kissinger had by now heard many Syrian threats of return to war. He had heard other leaders worry that this would happen. And he had read reports by US diplomats and Washington analysts of military

---

[415] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (06)," March 12, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[416] Ibid.
[417] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (08)," March 14, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[418] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. I (10)," March 15, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[419] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. II (1)," March 16, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[420] Ibid.
[421] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. II (4)," March 18, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[422] Ibid.
[423] Ibid.

preparations. But he had seen few signs that the Syrians would act. Among Syria's strongest

negotiating cards on the Golan front was their threat of a return to war, placing potentially

unbearable international pressures on Israel and the Americans. That scenario threatened

another oil embargo, Soviet and perhaps also Egyptian involvement. Syria needed not win

militarily to gain politically. However, when Syria threatened war, but in the end always

pleaded for negotiations, those threats likely sounded increasingly hollow.

At a March 20 meeting with the Israelis in Jerusalem, Kissinger learnt that they were

rejecting Egypt's latest negotiation offer.[424] Kissinger read out stern warning pre-approved

by President Ford: The possibilities offered by a "hopeful shift towards peace, even in Syria"

would be lost lest the Israelis reconsider.[425] This threatened far-reaching consequences:

> The Soviet Union will remerge in an increasingly strong position. There will be a very great risk of a costly
> war of attrition between Israel and its Arab neighbors. I am convinced after my talks in Syria, Egypt and
> Jordan that this is the case. Failure of these negotiations will also have an adverse influence going well
> beyond the Middle East. The economic repercussions for the West could be disastrous, as well as the
> ensuing political shifts in Western Europe. We are being asked to finance a stalemate threatening our
> interests in all parts of the world. Israel's inability to be responsive enough to achieve a successful
> negotiation cannot but have far-reaching repercussions in the U. S. Failure of these negotiations will
> require an overall reassessment of the policies of the U. S. that has brought us to this point.[426]

With the strong implication that US support for Israel had limits, the warning continued: "We

cannot be in a position to isolate ourselves from the rest of the world simply in order to

stand behind the intransigence of Israel."[427] Giving the Israelis some time to reconsider,

Kissinger to no avail let the negotiations stretch on for two more days. Ford sent a letter to

Rabin, which was apparently read out to the entire Israeli Cabinet on March 21:

> The failure to achieve an agreement is bound to have far-reaching effects in the area and on our
> relations. I have directed an immediate reassessment of U.S. policy in the area, including our relations
> with Israel, with a view to assuring that the overall interests of America in the Middle East and globally
> will be protected. You will be informed of our decisions.[428]

On March 22, Kissinger informed President Assad of the suspension of talks, due to be

publicly announced a few hours later. The Shuttle had failed. Kissinger's message noted that

while a period of policy reassessment would follow, the US remained committed to the

---

[424] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. II (6)," March 20, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[425] Ibid.
[426] Ibid.
[427] Ibid.
[428] "March 7-22, 1975 - Kissinger's Trip - Vol. II (8)," March 21, 1975, GFD-HKR; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*,
Document 156.

peace effort. Kissinger hoped Syria would continue keeping its door open to diplomacy.[429]

Reassessment

On March 24, Kissinger and Ford briefed Congressional leaders on the March shuttle's failure. Kissinger noted that he, at the shuttle's outset, had "thought the biggest problem was Asad."[430] But by now, Kissinger was fairly certain that Assad would allow another separate Sinai agreement, while expecting new Golan negotiations to follow soon thereafter. When the shuttle failed, it had little to do with Syria. Records from the meeting show a clear frustration with the Israelis due to the failed negotiations. Ford and Kissinger met in private afterwards. Kissinger usually took great care to not assign blame over these negotiations.[431] However, while discussing privately with Ford how they might give the press a correct impression of the March effort's failure, Kissinger argued that he could

> say we went there in good faith and the two sides just couldn't bridge the gap. But that is not fair to Sadat. Sadat tried -- [US Ambassador to Egypt Hermann] Eilts said he had given so much that it was dangerous.[432]

Kissinger blamed Israel for the failure. On March 25, Murphy reported on Syrian reactions to the breakdown.[433] While visiting Cairo the day before, Khaddam had reportedly told a Lebanese newspaper that "[w]e are happy he (Kissinger) has failed. The situation in the Middle East is normal again. Let us now face the future as one solid united front."[434] But Murphy also conveyed information given to him by Edward Saab, a well-connected Syrian-born journalist, concerning confidential talks with two influential Syrians – Khaddam and Information Minister Iskandar Ahmad. A chief worry for them was that he US might decide to "wash its hands of all peace efforts in area" following the failed shuttle.[435] They needed not

---

[429] "Cable - Jerusalem to Damascus - Message to Asad on Egyptian-Israeli Negotiations," March 22, 1975, Box 20, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[430] Appendix C uses this and a parallel memcon recorded from the same meeting in comparing an discussing methodological issues relating to memcons as primary sources. While, as the appendix illustrates, this may not be be the exact words as spoken by Kissinger, it is likely close to what he said. The records of the negotiations Kissinger refers to show Kissinger and colleagues doing precisely what this quote summarizes - worrying about Assad and Syria, but in the end being frustrated by other obstacles. "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Bipartisan Leadership," March 24, 1975, GFD-M.

[431] Ibid.; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 160; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," March 24, 1975, GFD-M.

[432] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," March 24, 1975, GFD-M.

[433] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 163–164; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Reaction to Suspension of Kissinger Mission," March 25, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[434] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Reaction to Suspension of Kissinger Mission," March 25, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[435] Ibid.

have worried. At a March 28 NSC meeting, Kissinger argued:

> Even though the Soviets are now in a good tactical position, we still have the chips because everyone is still counting on us to move Israel. We can get the benefit of this basic situation if we can deliver. This is true bilaterally or at Geneva. If we do not deliver, the Arabs will conclude that only force can get anything from Israel.[436]

CIA director William Colby described an intelligence estimate just finished under his direction. It found the armies of Egypt, Syria and Israel at alert, with a substantial chance of hostilities breaking out in the early summer of 1975. The estimate suggested Israel was capable of beating the combined forces of Egypt and Israel in seven to ten days.[437] To this final assessment, Kissinger responded:

> We told Asad this was our estimate of how the war would develop, not Israel's estimate but our own. Asad told me we did not understand: "We learned in 1973 that Israel can not stand pain. We will lose a lot but we will not give up and we will use the strategy of inflicting casualties and fighting an extended war. We will lose territory and men but bleed Israel and draw the Soviets in."[438]

Syria remained capable of causing Israel and the US too much trouble to ignore. In a March 28 cable, Murphy reported that Syria's government-controlled press had "markedly stepped up its attacks on what it terms the "secret, cynical" goals of U.S. Diplomacy asserting [that] we aim solely at protecting Israel and dividing the Arabs."[439] He noted his unease about "the rapid drift in Syrian propaganda towards more open attacks on U.S. ME policy".[440]

Roads not Travelled – Syria First or a Comprehensive Approach?

On March 29, the US ambassadors to Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Israel were called back to Washington to participate in the reassessment process.[441] During a preliminary meeting with them on April 3, Kissinger discussed the possibility of abandoning the Egypt first-orientation followed in the negotiations so far. He elaborated on talks with former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, whose opinions Kissinger appears to have valued:

> Dayan […] says we should start with the Syrians. He says [that] until the Israelis bite the bullet on Syria we are wasting our time. He says the Syrians will start a war so it doesn't really matter what the Israelis do with Egypt.[442]

As the conversation progressed, Kissinger seemed to echo Dayan's argument: If the Syrians

---

[436] "Talking Points and Memcon - NSC Meeting," March 28, 1975, GFD-NCM.
[437] Ibid.
[438] Hafez al-Assad as quoted by Henry Kissinger in ibid.
[439] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Possible Message for Asad," March 28, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[440] Ibid.
[441] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Return for Consultations," March 29, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[442] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 170.

were willing and able to start another Arab-Israeli war in the event of a second Egypt-Israel agreement, the US and Israel might as well face the difficult negotiations with Syria now.[443] Kissinger thought that a sufficiently tough letter from President Ford could press the Israelis to make the necessary concessions in Sinai and seal a second-stage deal with Egypt:

> But where are we then. We have a massive problem with Syria in three months. Therefore, I'm reluctant to put forth a U.S. proposal which would make it look like the Egyptian one is the only important settlement. I think having driven us to this point and having gotten the Jewish community so upset, we should get more for it.[444]

When Kissinger spoke of the 'Jewish community', the term seems to have been largely analogous to what is today referred to as the 'pro-Israeli lobby'. These groupings would not be happy about such a letter. Presidential pressure could well make another interim Sinai agreement possible. But, alluding to growing American frustration with Israel due to the March shuttle's failure, Kissinger questioned whether they might as well aim higher:

> We are in a good psychological position now. The Jews are very nervous, they will go after me, and they'll try to destroy me. But the President is ready, the Leadership is ready, and I just don't think we should give that away for six kilometers in the [Giddi and Mitla] passes. I have always thought the confrontation [with Israel] was inevitable, but I thought it would happen over Syria. I am deeply worried that in six months we will be much worse off. Now everybody is pleading [for continued US negotiation efforts], but we are under no great pressure yet. When we try to pressure the Israelis, [Henry] Jackson, et al., that's when it will get rough. My previous strategy was to do Egypt and then close down the whole thing until after our elections. I was not, quite frankly, going to spill very much blood for Syria. Get it started maybe and then let it drag into 1976. I think Sadat was willing to do that.[445]

The last three sentences are revealing of Kissinger's attitudes toward further negotiations with Syria until then – if another Sinai deal could further defuse that front, a protracted stalling strategy could follow vis-à-vis Syria. The 1976 presidential elections would then give the United States a president elected by the people. Presidential power would be restored after the Watergate scandals. Afterwards, the president would have the popular mandate required to move forcefully for further Arab-Israeli negotiations, perhaps including heavy-handed pressure against the Israelis, and perhaps including a second Golan agreement.

But the March failure seemed to be changing Kissinger's analysis. It suggested that even reaching a second Sinai agreement demanded immense White House pressure on Israel, leading to a debacle with pro-Israeli groups and politicians in the US. If he and the President

---

[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid.
[445] Ibid.; When mentioning "the Leadership", Kissinger may have referred to leading figures in the US Congress. Control of the Gidi and Mitla passes in Sinai were among the key topics during the Egypt-Israel negotiations in March. Henry Jackson was an influential US senator, known for his pro-Israeli attitudes.

had to risk such a showdown in any case, so Kissinger's argument seemed to go, they might as well go for a comprehensive Middle Eastern peace settlement, which would include Syria. Hermann Eilts, US Ambassador to Egypt, questioned whether a negotiation process initiated under such conditions could succeed. What if the "Jewish community" decided to "destroy" Kissinger? The Secretary grandiosely declared:

> Well, as DeGaulle said, the graveyards are full of the tombs of the indispensable people. When sanity returns to the Jews here, we will find their options are not that great. It's going to be pretty hard to accuse a Jewish Secretary of State of anti-Semitism, though they will harass me. I am already spending three-quarters of my time with Jews. It's just the price we pay.[446]

As the meeting ended, Kissinger asked that they in their next meeting should discuss the US approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict "from the point of view of what is right and not what is at this point politically feasible in this country."[447] White House documentary records originating during and after the failed March shuttle show palpable frustration with Israel, bordering on anger. Historian William Quandt describes Kissinger as genuinely disappointed with an Israeli leadership he found to be "shortsighted, incompetent, and weak."[448] Ford was "irritated" with the Israelis and had publicly blamed Rabin for lacking flexibility during a newspaper interview on March 27.[449] In an April 8 follow-up meeting with the ambassadors, Kissinger asserted that the Israelis were now "dealing with a very friendly government, but no longer with a brother. They must pay a price."[450] However, when Ford delivered a special speech on foreign policy in Congress, there were no signs of a confrontation with Israel over Egypt, Syria or anyone else. Ford renewed US pledges to make "a major effort for peace in the Middle East" and noted that his administration was now examining how to proceed.[451]

Murphy and the other ambassadors met Ford and Kissinger to summarize their conclusions before returning to the Middle East. Kissinger argued, as he had for a while, that if a second Sinai agreement was achieved, something would have to be done on the Syrian front.[452] "Do you mean a good faith effort, or actually doing something?", Ford asked, distinguishing

---

[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 163–164.
[449] Ibid.
[450] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 171.
[451] "Speech - Address by President Gerald R. Ford Before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on United States Foreign Policy," *Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum*, April 10, 1975, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/750179.asp.
[452] "Memcon - Ford, Keating, Eilts, Pickering, Murphy, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Atherton," April 14, 1975, GFD-M.

between a cosmetic ('good faith') or real, sustained effort for Syria.[453] Kissinger replied:

> Things have changed. Before, I think a good faith effort would have done it, but Sadat has now been placed in a more difficult position, and the Syrians, who would have accepted most anything in March, are now in a stronger position.[454]

Records from the reassessment show a willingness among the Americans to discuss major strategy changes. These might include exerting strong pressure on Israel, prioritizing the Golan front, or focusing on a comprehensive diplomatic process to settle most or all Arab-Israeli fronts. The discussions of focusing on Syria can be characterized as no more than a quick dabble. The comprehensive option garnered more serious consideration. But insofar as these options ever stood a chance, a May 21 letter to President Ford helped kill them. Signed by 76 of 100 US Senators, it urged Ford to be "responsive to Israel's economic and military needs". Quandt calls this "a clear sign that continued pressure on Israel would be politically counterproductive."[455] Kissinger gradually concluded that resumed efforts toward a second Egypt-Israel agreement remained the only viable option.[456]

Back to Sinai

A June 1-2 meeting in Salzburg between Ford and Sadat would symbolize the conclusion of the American reassessment and the resumption of US-led diplomacy. An April 30 message from Kissinger informed Assad of the planned meeting, and offered him a similar meeting with Ford during a trip to Europe later in the summer.[457] Rabin met Kissinger and Ford in Washington on June 11. He refused the notion of evacuating any Israeli settlements as part of another Golan agreement. Israel would only consider this in the context of a full peace settlement. Kissinger pointed out the closeness of many of the settlements to the current disengagement lines. This in effect made impossible even small withdrawals of a kilometer of two.[458] Rabin described Israel's possible territorial offerings in another step-by-step agreement as "cosmetic".[459] Kissinger subsequently summarized the meeting to Defense Secretary Schlesinger: "On the Golan he would not tell us what he wants. He indicated he

---

[453] Ibid.
[454] Ibid.
[455] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 165.
[456] Ibid.
[457] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," April 30, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[458] "Memo - Kissinger to President - Your Meetings with Prime Minister Rabin -- June 11," June 10, 1975, Box 17, GF-NSA-KS; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Rabin, Scowcroft," June 11, 1975, GFD-M.
[459] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Rabin, Scowcroft," June 11, 1975, GFD-M.

was not willing to do too much. That's the gist of it."[460] Kissinger and Rabin met again on

June 15. Kissinger described his favorite idea of how to include Syria in the process:

> [T]he best way would be to start disengagement talks through us without me at that stage. We would both understand that they would not be likely to succeed. Then at a time when a stalemate appears near, you would make some cosmetic changes unilaterally as a gesture of good will. Then we would jointly recommend that the negotiations be moved to the overall stage.[461]

Kissinger's 'overall stage' referred to a reconvened Geneva Conference. In the available

primary sources, the prospect of multilateral, public negotiations at Geneva are frequently

discussed among the Americans. Geneva alternated between being their dread and desire.

When separate step-by-step negotiations went well, the Americans feared Geneva as a dead

end where the diplomatic process would gradually suffocate in a multilateral shouting match,

followed by another Arab-Israeli war. At times, they used this prospect to threaten the

Israelis, who feared Geneva for similar reasons. But when diplomatic progress with Egypt

convinced the Americans that they would not join another war, Geneva was seen as a useful

instrument. With Egypt detached from the conflict, the Americans could knowingly send the

negotiations there to die a slow, noisy death. There would be stalemate, but not another

Arab-Israeli War. Blame would befall all involved, not just the US or Israel. At no time did the

Americans discuss Geneva as a useful mechanism for achieving negotiated progress.

With Khaddam set to visit Washington on June 20, Ford received a 20 page briefing memo

from Kissinger. Its comprehensive nature makes it an interesting source on Kissinger's views

of Syria at the time.[462] He elaborated on the current thinking in Israel as concerned Syria:

> Key Israelis have long felt that Egypt is the main geopolitical threat to Israel and should be deal with in isolation. Rabin and Allon appear preoccupied with trying to "take Egypt out of the war." As Rabin said recently, "I tend to believe that the key issue in Arab-Israeli relations is the relationship between Egypt and Israel." This approach is consistent with the Israeli view of Egypt formed in the Nasser era, but it does not reflect present Arab and world realities.[463]

Kissinger did not mention it, but this was effectively what he himself had argued to the

Israelis throughout the months preceding the Golan agreement – the prospective deal was

merely a step toward isolating Syria from Egypt. Now, Kissinger's two primary arguments

against the Israeli isolation strategy were, firstly, that the Syrians and their Saudi and

---

[460] "Telcon - Kissinger, Schlesinger," June 11, 1975, DS-HKT.

[461] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 188.

[462] "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Your Meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Khaddam," June 18, 1975, Box 30, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[463] Ibid.

Palestinian allies were a much stronger force than before. Meanwhile, he argued, Egypt had experienced a relative decline in power, thanks to emerging centers of Arab power, particularly in the oil producer states. His second argument against Israel's perception of the Arab-Israeli conflict was that

> [t]he heart of the Palestine problem is in Palestine, not in the Sinai, and Israel cannot in the end win recognition and peace until the terms for the partition of Palestine are agreed and accepted in the Arab world. Syria is the ideological heartland of Arab nationalism and is deeply committed to the resolution of the Palestine problem. The Saudis may well support Syria and not Egypt on this issue if they are forced to make a choice.[464]

Kissinger then listed seven different ways Syria could make trouble for American interests vis-à-vis Egypt, the USSR, Israel, the oil supply, and so on. Assad's PLO strategy at Rabat was one specific example. In the June 20 meeting, Khaddam as expected argued in favor of parallel negotiations on all three fronts – Egypt, Syria and the PLO. Negotiations could proceed step-by-step, or immediately target a full settlement. He was flexible on where and how negotiations should take place, reflecting the Syrian desire, first and foremost, to not be left out of whatever the Americans planned. It was not to be. With another Kissinger-led Egyptian-Israeli shuttle set to begin on August 21, Murphy cabled a lengthy mood report from Damascus.[465] It described Syria's wait-and-see attitude:

> Syria views prospect of further interim accord on Sinai with ambivalence but also with more equanimity today than it did last winter. A better understanding with Cairo has increased Syrian self-confidence about the negotiating process in general[.] […] Damascus awaits its turn in peace negotiations deeply skeptical of Israeli intentions.[466]

Sinai II Kills Golan II

Kissinger visited Damascus once during the August shuttle, "to keep Asad calm".[467] In their August 23 meeting, Kissinger and Assad discussed Syria's prospects for further negotiations. Kissinger argued that Watergate and the "historic accident" of Nixon's resignation had cost precious time and weakened the American presidency.[468] But Ford was now recouping the authority of the White House. After winning the November 1976 presidential elections – a victory Kissinger declared as near certain – a re-invigorated White House could intensify its

---

[464] Ibid.

[465] Ibid.; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 193; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syria Ambivalent Over Further Sinai Step," August 18, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[466] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syria Ambivalent Over Further Sinai Step," August 18, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[467] "August 21-September 1, 1975 - Sinai Disengagement Agreement - Vol. I (3)," September 21, 1975, GFD-HKR.

[468] Ibid.; An itinerary of Kissinger's August 1975 shuttle can be found in "August 21-September 1, 1975 - Sinai Disengagement Agreement - Vol. I (1)," September 21, 1975, GFD-HKR.

efforts.[469] He added that Ford held "positive views on this problem, not unlike what former President Nixon unfolded before or during his visit to Damascus."[470] After suggesting that Syria send an envoy to Washington for continued talks, Kissinger reiterated the need for time while awaiting the US elections. Meanwhile, he claimed, he would work quietly to arrange US Congressional and public support for a post-election Syrian move. Another successful Egypt-Israel agreement would help in that respect. While appreciating the Americans need for time, Assad noted, they should likewise understand Syria's need for timely results, to convince its people that the US-led effort was more than mere talk.[471]

Following Kissinger's mediation, Egypt and Israel on September 4, 1975 signed another disengagement deal in Geneva, colloquially known as Sinai II. Secret, written American assurances and guarantees to Egypt and Israel formed a crucial element. Among these were assurances to Egypt that Israel would "not initiate military action against Syria", and to Israel that Egypt would not join in any Syrian-initiated fighting.[472] The Americans re-affirmed to the Egyptians, in writing, their intention of making "a serious effort to help bring about further negotiations between Syria and Israel", toward "a just and lasting peace on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 338".[473] However, one particular assurance practically eliminated that possibility. A letter from President Ford to Prime Minister Rabin stated:

> The U.S. has not developed a final position on the borders. Should it do so it will give great weight to Israel's position that any peace agreement with Syria must be predicated on Israel remaining on the Golan Heights. My view in this regard was stated in our conversation of September 13, 1974.[474]

On that date, Ford reaffirmed a promise given by Kissinger during the Golan disengagement talks: The US would not try pushing Israel off the Heights. During a July 1, 1975 meeting with Kissinger, Ambassador Dinitz had requested the re-affirmation of this promise. Kissinger had been noncommittal. It was now put to paper. Fords' letter contained no definition of what constituted 'the Golan Heights', or how much Israel would have to control to be 'on' them. The wording thus left some theoretical leeway for a future Golan II agreement. But the totality of the situation made such a deal impossible. Israel had few reasons to retreat unless subjected to massive pressure. In light of the Sinai II agreement and next year's presidential

---

[469] "August 21-September 1, 1975 - Sinai Disengagement Agreement - Vol. I (3)," September 21, 1975, GFD-HKR.
[470] Ibid.
[471] Ibid.
[472] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 226–234.
[473] Ibid.
[474] Ibid., Document 234; The meeting in question is recorded in ibid., Document 100.

elections, the Ford administrations motivations for exerting such pressure were waning. The Syrians meanwhile demanded much more of the Golan Heights than the Israelis were likely to offer. According to Quandt, the Golan letter remained secret until 1990. Washington thereafter reaffirmed its content on several occasions.[475] Other secret elements of the deal included a US guarantee to not recognize or negotiate with the PLO until it recognized Israel, and restrictions on how the US would approach a reconvened Geneva Conference. Most secret elements of the deal were leaked in the months following the deal.[476]

Perpetual Containment – American Policy after Sinai II

Notwithstanding Assad's acquiescence to the August 1975 negotiations, Damascus quickly and publicly denounced Sinai II, targeting both Egypt and the US.[477] A rift grew between Egypt and Syria. But Syria was not isolated. With significant military capabilities, economic support from Saudi Arabia and good relations with the PLO and USSR, the country remained capable of causing trouble for Israel and the US. The Americans realized this, and wanted another round of negotiations between Israel and Syria. But did they want it enough? At a minimum, Sinai II and the Syria-Egypt rift lessened their imperatives. On September 5, Yitzhak Rabin publicly declared that there was "virtually no chance" of a second Golan deal, since Israel could only offer around 100 to 200 yards of further withdrawals.[478] As far as Syria was concerned, Kissinger's tone changed quickly after Sinai II. On September 9, he argued to Joseph Sisco, one of his leading State Department subordinates, that "we should just take the God-damn thing to Geneva. Why should we beat our brains out on Syria?"[479] Six days later, Kissinger told Ford it was time to get the USSR involved with Syria: "I won't give much on

---

[475] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Documents 100, 183, 202, 234; Quandt, *Peace Process*, Chapter 5, endnote 96; Dore Gold et al., "Defending the Golan Heights," *Foreign Affairs*, April 2009, http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64655/dore-gold-and-shimon-shapira-richard-n-haass-and-martin-indyk/defending-the-golan-heights; Dore Gold, "The Golan Heights and the Syrian-Israeli Negotiations," *Jerusalem Issue Briefs*, May 22, 2008, http://jcpa.org/article/the-golan-heights-and-the-syrian-israeli-negotiations/.

[476] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 227; "Pledges Made by Washington to Israel in the Sinai Accord Are Qualified," *The New York Times*, September 10, 1975; "U.S. Said to Give A Pledge to Seek Syria-Israel Pact," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1975; "U.S. Documents Accompanying the Sinai Accord," *The New York Times*, September 17, 1975; "Ford Welcomes Sadat and Vows to Pursue Peace," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1975; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 259–260.

[477] "Sinai Pact Separates Foes but Divides Allies," *The New York Times*, September 2, 1975; "Syrians Denounce Egypt's Agreement with Israel on Sinai," *The New York Times*, September 5, 1975; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Frustration Over Sinai Accord," September 5, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 170–171.

[478] "Premier Rabin Sees Almost no Chance of Pact with Syria," *The New York Times*, September 6, 1975.

[479] "Telcon - Kissinger, Sisco," September 9, 1975, DS-HKT.

Syria -- It is shortsighted but that is a fact. So if we could get the Soviet Union involved, either

through Geneva or in a direct negotiation, it will deadlock and they will share the blame."[480]

When Ford asked about the preferred timeframe for this move, Kissinger suggested starting

in November. Then, a planned trip by Ford to China would "be an excuse to slip it to

January."[481] Meanwhile, speaking off-the-record to Newsweek editor de Borchgrave, Assad

threatened that Syria might resume hostilities with Israel. When de Borchgrave questioned

Syria's capabilities in that respect, Assad claimed the Syrians could succeed as they had

during the October War, creating "a major international crisis and an oil embargo."[482] And,

Assad suggested, if Israel then threatened Syria with total defeat, the USSR would not stand

idly by. In such a scenario, Assad would not discount the possibility of allowing Soviet troops

on the ground in Syria, thus forcing the US to "understand what it had to do."[483] Murphy

reported that the Syrians had yet to introduce concrete ideas of their own for what a second

Syria-Israel move might entail. Murphy knew of the Syrians demand for Israel's full return to

the pre-1967 borders, which they reiterated on every occasion. When Murphy spoke of ideas

for a second move, he presumably looked for more limited Syrian suggestions, which the

Israelis were not sure to reject. For now, Murphy reported, the Syrians kept its options

open.[484]

Kissinger gave a major foreign policy speech titled "Global Peace, the Middle East, and the

United States" in Cincinnati on September 16, 1975. After publicly proclaiming Washington's

intention of seriously encouraging Syrian-Israeli negotiations, he recognized that there would

be "no permanent peace unless it includes arrangements that take into account the

legitimate interests of the Palestinian people."[485] In a message to Assad, he emphasized that

this speech put on public record what he had already said in private.[486] A few days later,

---

[480] "Memcon - Kissinger, Ford, Scowcroft," September 15, 1975, GFD-M.
[481] Ibid.
[482] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Asad-De Borchgrave Sept 13 Interview - Off Record Remarks," September 15, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[483] Ibid.
[484] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Conversation With Fonmnin Khaddam, September 15," September 16, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[485] "Speech - Henry Kissinger - Global Peace, the Middle East, and the United States," September 16, 1975, GFD-HKPM, http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/hakpp.asp.
[486] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," September 20, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

Jordan's ambassador to Syria told Murphy of a September 18 talk with Khaddam.[487] Dubbing the Sinai II agreement an "unfriendly" act by the US, the Foreign Minister had declared that Syria would refuse further Kissinger-led negotiations concerning the Golan front alone.[488] Khaddam thus implied that any further negotiating efforts had to include the Palestinians. Despite growing Syrian rhetoric attacking the Sinai II agreement, and the US role in it, Kissinger remained optimistic.[489] On October 7, Kissinger argued to Ford that while Syria's current rhetoric was troubling, Assad would "subside after three or four months".[490]

That same day, a message from Assad arrived for Kissinger. It declared that while the Syrians were keen "to achieve a just peace in the area," the recent Sinai Agreement had made it impossible for Syria to proceed toward further negotiations.[491] Assad asserted the old theme that they could not negotiate separately: "[t]he only possible talks are those which would involve the Syrian and Palestinian fronts simultaneously."[492] In response, Kissinger proposed that Ford meet Assad somewhere in Europe on November 17 or 18. Countering that such a meeting might give the impression that Syria favored the Sinai II agreement, Assad rejected the offer. However, a meeting might be possible later, under more favorable circumstances. A subsequent offer for Hikmat al-Shihabi, the Syrian Army Chief of Staff, to make a low-key visit to Washington was also rejected.[493]

The Security Council Campaign

Ambassador Murphy met Assad on November 2. The President raised two concepts which would for the next few months be the focus of Syrian diplomatic efforts: The first called for

---

[487] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Khaddam Says Syria Will Not Negotiate Just About Golan," September 22, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[488] Ibid.
[489] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," October 3, 1975, GFD-M; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," October 7, 1975, GFD-M.
[490] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," October 7, 1975, GFD-M.
[491] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Message to the Secretary From President Asad," October 7, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[492] Ibid.
[493] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message from Secretary to President Asad," October 8, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Message From President Asad For Secretary Kissinger Declines Meeting With President Ford," October 17, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Shihabi Inquiry About Direction of US Middle East Policy Planning," October 26, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Your Return to Washington for Consultations," October 30, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Meeting With Asad -- November 2," November 2, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

Syrians and Palestinians forming a joint team for negotiations with Israel.[494] The second

involved using the UN Security Council (UNSC) as a "peace conference forum."[495] It would

replace the Geneva Conference, which Assad considered dead due to the secret American

guarantees given to Egypt and Israel in the Sinai II deal. Through November, Assad worked to

realize the UNSC peace forum idea, including an appeal for support from France, one of the

permanent UNSC members. The idea soon materialized as a Syrian precondition for

renewing UNDOF's mandate in late November: Only if the UNSC passed a resolution calling

together the peace forum Assad wanted would Syria renew. The Americans were not

enthusiastic.[496] Referring to offers of talks in 1977 made to Syria in recent months, a

November 27 message from Kissinger to Assad mixed carrot and stick:

> I […] want to be sure that the President understands that, when we speak of a major effort in 1977, we
> are not just talking about procedural ways of continuing the peace process or of further step-by-step
> agreements, but of a comprehensive peace settlement that would deal with all aspects of the problem
> on all fronts -- borders, the Palestinians, guarantees, etc. The President should furthermore understand
> this in the context of all of the conversations and communications he has had with two American
> presidents and with me. […] A needles confrontation between the Arabs and the United States would
> put this prospect in serious jeopardy.[497]

He was referring to Syria's UNSC initiative. Next day, Kissinger described to Ford the

resolution proposed by Syria, calling for a Middle East peace debate. The draft resolution was

"okay" except for inviting the PLO to attend. Kissinger was not overly worried.[498] Rather, he

took the occasion to voice frustrations over Israeli behavior:

> The Israelis will raise hell, but they have behaved disgracefully. If this weren't an election year, I would
> recommend smashing them next year. I think the Israelis want a war. They think a war in '76 is better
> than late. […] I would like [US Ambassador to Israel Malcolm] Toon to tell them their tone is
> unacceptable. We need either a negotiation or a unilateral move on Golan. They promised. We also want
> their conception of the future. Toon will say their conception is to do nothing.[499]

Kissinger's proclamations again suggest a genuine desire to move ahead with Syrian-Israeli

negotiations. But with Israel intransigent, American elections less than a year away, and now,

---

[494] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Your Return to Washington for Consultations," October 30, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Meeting With Asad -- November 2," November 2, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[495] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Meeting With Asad -- November 2," November 2, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[496] Ibid.; "Cable - Paris to Washington - Letter from Syrian President Assad to Giscard d'Estaing," November 7, 1975, Box 5, GF-NSA-PC-EUCA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Message for Secretary From Waldheim," November 27, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," November 27, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[497] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Message for President Asad," November 27, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[498] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," November 28, 1975, GFD-M.
[499] Ibid.

the Syrians taking diplomatic initiatives of their own against Kissinger's warnings, his control was slipping.[500] The Syrian UNSC draft resolution came to a vote on November 30, 1975. With an Americans 'Yes' vote, the UNSC passed Resolution 381. It called for a UNSC meeting on January 12, 1976, "to continue the debate on the Middle East problem including the Palestinian question, taking into account all relevant United Nations resolutions".[501] The resolution included an invitation for full PLO participation at the debate.[502] Describing the outcome to Ford on December 6, Kissinger said: "We got UNDOF extended with virtually no price. Anyone can get a Security Council debate."[503] The American Yes vote reflected neither a decline in American-Israeli relations, nor their desire to shift negotiations to the UNSC. Rather, it indicated how little value the Ford administration attached to a mere debate there.

Alfred Atherton, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, flew to Damascus on December 17 to make sure the Syrians perceived "the limits beyond which [the US] cannot go and [the] risks involved in pushing us beyond those limits."[504] If the Syrians during the UNSC debates proposed resolutions which: modified the meaning of resolution 242 or 338; forced the PLO's participation into future negotiations; made the USNC into a long-term negotiating forum; or otherwise altered "the existing framework and basis for negotiations", the US would veto.[505] Murphy called on Khaddam ten days later to reiterate this message.[506] The UNSC debate began as scheduled on January 12, 1976. Ten debate meetings followed, until a draft resolution was placed before the Council on January 26. It recognized the Palestinian people's right to establish an independent state in Palestine and affirmed that Israel should withdraw from *all* the Arab territories occupied since June 1967. The United States used its veto to block the proposal.[507] Two days later, Deputy Foreign Minister Rafa'i,

---

[500] Quandt, *Peace Process*, 166, 170.
[501] "Resolutions Adopted by the Security Council in 1975 - S/RES/ 381 (1975)," *United Nations Security Council*, November 30, 1975, http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1975.shtml.
[502] Ibid.
[503] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," December 6, 1975, GFD-M.
[504] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Assistant Secretary Atherton's Meeting With President Asad and Foreign Minister Khaddam," December 18, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[505] "Cable - Tel Aviv to Washington - Meeting with Prime Minister Rabin," December 23, 1975, Box 19, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[506] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Ambassadors' Return for Consultations," December 28, 1975, NARA-AAD; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Ambassador's Return for Consultations," December 28, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[507] "Annual Reports of the Security Council to the General Assembly since 1946 - 1975-1976 A/31/2," *United Nations Security Council*, 15–17, accessed September 30, 2013, http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/reports/.

summoned Murphy to express Syria's "deep dissatisfaction and sorrow" over the veto.[508] In his concluding assessment after the meeting, however, Murphy was not overly worried: "We are in for several days' [of] lambasting in [the Syrian] media, but Rafa'i's demarche can best be described as for the record."[509]

With Ambassador Murphy present, Assad on February 20 held a three hour meeting with the visiting US Senator Adlai Stevenson III. Stevenson reportedly came away discouraged at Assad's unwillingness to suggest how the current negotiation stalemate should be resolved. Murphy, however, observed that Assad's indirectness, avoiding explicit policy proclamations, was typical of his style.[510] In Murphy's view, Assad's statements, the cordial reception given to Stevenson, and the large amount of time Syria's leaders accorded him, reflected Assad's main messages – his "continued interest in a political solution," and that "the ball [was] now clearly in [the Americans] court".[511] But the Americans were not playing. With Gerald Ford's first presidential elections less than nine months away, Syria was not a top priority.

In the wake of Sinai II and the recent UNSC debacle, all was not well in the Syrian-American relationship. But both Washington and Damascus remained committed to their by now well-developed diplomatic contacts. Since its revival after the 1973 October War, the relationship had gone through highs and lows. Syria's state-controlled media might publicly rail against Sinai II, or the US veto in the Security Council. And the Americans may not have fulfilled their assurances of further negotiations on the Golan front. But behind closed doors, the diplomacy continued in a measured, friendly tone. That tone would prove its worth in the coming years. As Lebanon erupted into full-blown civil war, the Syrian-American relationship departed in a strange new direction.

---

[508] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Demarche Denounces US Veto," January 28, 1976, NARA-AAD; Rafi'i is only identified by surname. This may refer to an Assistant Foreign Minister Dr. Abd Alaghani Al-Rafi'i who appears in "Memcon - Kissinger, Khaddam, et al.," January 20, 1974, Box 140, RN-HAKO.
[509] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syrian Demarche Denounces US Veto," January 28, 1976, NARA-AAD.
[510] Senator Stevenson should not be confused with his father, Adlai Stevenson II, presidential contender to Eisenhower and later UN Ambassador. "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Asad Hinting About Further Steps in Peace Process," February 20, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.
[511] Ibid.

Concord and Collusion in Lebanon

We do not want to see a glorious victory and Syrian preeminence. In fact, we have worked against this, starting in March, and it is now not possible. My fear is the collapse of Asad.
- Henry Kissinger describing Syria's invasion of Lebanon to American officials, August 7, 1976.[512]

Overshadowed by the grand drama of the 1973 October War and the ensuing diplomacy, a different drama unfolded in Lebanon. Lebanon's descent into civil war was at once closely linked to the Arab-Israeli conflict, and a wholly different dynamic involving different actors and interests. The civil war's early years vividly illustrates where the Syrian-American relationship had come since 1973. While tensions had mounted for years, the war broke out in earnest on April 13, 1975. For its first two years, it mainly saw Maronite Christian factions fighting a loose coalition of Palestinians, radical Muslims and Druze.[513] At least as early as January 1975, Syria's growing role in Lebanon had caused worry in Washington. Intensified fighting between Israeli and Palestinian forces in Southern Lebanon seemed to draw in increasing numbers of Saiqa troops. These were Syrian-trained and controlled guerillas of Palestinian origin, possibly commanded by Syrian Army officers. The main fear had been that a Syrian-Israeli war of attrition might develop in Lebanon, to the point of threatening Kissinger's planned Egypt-Israel shuttle negotiations in February and March of 1975.[514]

Syria and Lebanon were deeply linked by history and geography. With Lebanon breaking down, Syria had much to lose. Weapons, violence and enemies of Assad's regime might feed into Syria. By threatening Israel with the prospect of a victory by Palestinian militias on its northern border, the war might precipitate an Israeli invasion. Syria was no more keen on seeing Israeli forces in Southern Lebanon than were Israel on seeing the Syrians there. Syria had significant political clout in Lebanon, backed by superior military (and paramilitary) power. When the war broke out, Damascus moved to stabilize the situation and find a political solution.[515] Washington soon took note. On August 18, 1975, Ambassador Murphy described Syria's role as one of "constructive mediation", helping quell the first round of fighting.[516] He perceived little mischief in Syria's involvement, but rather, a real desire for

---

[512] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 292.
[513] Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 187; The Druze, living mostly in Syria and Lebanon, are a relatively small religious sect which follows an eclectic offshoot of Shi'a Islam.
[514] See Chapter 5.
[515] Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 267–271, 275–277.
[516] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syria Ambivalent Over Further Sinai Step," August 18, 1975, Box 31, GF-

restoring calm across their western border. Fighting escalated in early October. Henry

Kissinger wished to limit US involvement. In an October 10 Washington Special Actions

Group (WSAG) meeting, CIA Director William Colby argued that US aims in Lebanon should

include political reforms giving the Muslims a greater role.[517] But Kissinger cautioned:

> I want to define our own interests. I have no particular interest in Lebanon's internal affairs if they do not involve outside countries. I don't want us involved in their internal affairs. Our concern is to prevent outside interference.[518]

By interference, he mainly pointed to Israel and Syria. The group met again on October 13.[519]

They agreed to work for some sort of political "change" in Lebanon in cooperation with

Syrian and Saudi leaders, whom they viewed as the most influential.[520] Kissinger asserted:

> We can tell the Syrians that we are interested in the independence and security of Lebanon but not necessarily in any one specific arrangement. We're open-minded. What is their thinking? It is our judgement that if there is foreign military intervention, Israel may come in. If there is no foreign military intervention, we could probably prevent Israeli intervention.[521]

He thus defined the essence of the US approach for the coming eight months: Encouraging

the Syrians in efforts toward a political solution for Lebanon, while warning against major

Syrian or Israeli military moves. Murphy formally opened the Syrian-American dialogue on

Lebanon during an October 16 meeting with Assad, who responded favorably.[522] The Syrians

were at the time demonstrating their unhappiness with the US over Sinai II, but apparently

made no linkage to the Lebanon issue.[523] In late January, 1976, significant numbers of Syrian-

controlled paramilitary forces from the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA) and Saiqa reportedly

moved from Syria into Lebanon. The move was "controlled and strictly limited", aimed at

backing ongoing work to achieve a cease-fire. While the Americans noted their concern to

Assad, they and Israel in effect acquiesced.[524]

By mid-March, the situation in Lebanon was deteriorating badly, raising fears of large-scale

---

NSA-PC-MESA.

[517] Political power in Lebanon was unequally allotted between the country's different religious sects. The system greatly favored the Maronite Christians; Ibid.; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 264.

[518] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 264.

[519] Ibid., Documents 264, 265.

[520] Ibid., Document 265.

[521] Ibid.

[522] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - October 16 Meeting With Asad," October 16, 1975, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[523] See Chapter 5.

[524] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Lebanese Situation - PLA Movements," January 21, 1976, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 267.

Syrian intervention. A US intelligence report noted the introduction of around 1000 Syrian army regulars, disguised as PLA personnel. The Syrians wanted to intervene in greater force, but had to avoid an Israeli countermove. The Israelis would not let Lebanon become a Syrian vassal, but recognized the importance of some stability there, and Syria's unique position to enforce it. In the coming months, American diplomats became the channel through which Syrians and Israelis probed each other, searching for a compromise. On March 23, Lebanon's Maronite president, Suleiman Frangieh, formally requested a full-scale Syrian intervention. The Syrians asked the Americans for their input. Frantic meetings followed in Washington.[525] Kissinger met Ambassador Dinitz, and afterwards summarized Israel's position: Israel did not trust the Syrians to go in, restore order, and retreat in a speedy manner. Thus, if Syria intervened in force, "the Israelis would then quietly take over strategic points in Southern Lebanon and in effect hold them hostage till the Syrians leave."[526]

Such a situation would either divide the country into Syrian and Israeli dominions, or ignite another war between the two. Neither was acceptable to the Americans, who put heavy pressure on the Syrians to stay put. A March 27 message to Khaddam specifically warned against any publicly declared Syrian move into Lebanon, the introduction of heavy weaponry or formations above brigade size, or moving forces south of the Beirut-Damascus axis. Moves of irregular or mixed forces, in smaller formations, north of the axis might, however, be acceptable. An understanding later known as the 'Red line agreement' was taking shape. There was no full-fledged invasion in March, but the gradual, poorly veiled movement of Syrian forces into Lebanon continued unopposed.[527]

---

[525] "Intelligence Memorandum - Syrian Intervention in Lebanon," March 17, 1976, Box 10, GF-RAC; "Cable - Wahington to Damascus - Lebanon," March 27, 1976, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Fonmin Khaddam Requests USG Views Regarding Deterioration of Situation in Lebanon and Possible Syrian Intervention," March 23, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Situation in Lebanon," March 24, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Situation in Lebanon," March 25, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," March 27, 1976, DS-HKT; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 1039–1047; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Documents 268–273.

[526] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 268.

[527] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Lebanese Developments Shihabi Discusses Syrian Army Intervention," March 14, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Lebanese Developments," March 15, 1976, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Wahington to Damascus - Lebanon," March 27, 1976, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Situation in Lebanon," March 24, 1976, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Meeting With Asad April 1 -- Lebanon," April 1, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; David M. Wight, "Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon," *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 1 (2013).

In Lebanon, Syria had long supported a coalition of Palestinians, radical Muslims and Druze against nominally conservative Maronites. This was fully in line with Syria's traditional backing of the Palestinian cause, and leftist political alignment. By March, Maronite forces stood on the brink of collapse. This faced Assad with the prospect of a clear-cut radical victory in Lebanon. Desiring a balanced outcome, he thus turned to backing the Maronite Christians. A March 24 memo for Ford noted unhappiness among Syrian-controlled Palestinian forces in Lebanon over the fact that they now had to fight other Palestinians. Dissatisfaction with Assad – due to his policies in Lebanon – was also growing in Syrian political circles. On April 2, NSC staffer Robert Oakley warned of how the radical regimes in Libya and Iraq were seeking a radical win in Lebanon. They hoped the war would lead to Assad's fall, replacing his regime with a more radical one. Oakley clearly saw Assad's survival as preferable to any possible successors. And the only way to avoid that was to get Lebanon stabilized, which absolutely required a major Syrian intervention. Henry Kissinger shared Oakley's worry over regime-change in Damascus, but largely opposed overt intervention. On April 22, US intelligence estimated Syrian troop numbers in Lebanon at around 5000, PLA forces not included.[528]

Throughout, the Americans viewed Assad's behavior on the Lebanon issue as moderate and constructive.[529] On April 14, Ford asked a US senator visiting Damascus to convey that "we think he has been a real statesman" concerning Lebanon.[530] On May 15, Ambassador Murphy conveyed to the Syrians a message from Ford and Kissinger, seeking to restart the dialogue on the Arab-Israeli conflict.[531] This initiative led to little, but is noteworthy for the opinions it revealed during discussions in Washington. A few days earlier, Kissinger had described to Ford his optimism about peace prospects following the President's election in

---

[528] Waage, *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*, 227–229; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Documents 269, 276, 286, 290; "President's Thursday Brief - Precarious Position of Syrian President Asad," March 24, 1976, Box 10, GF-RAC; "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Alawite Military Opposition to Asad Regime," March 26, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Memo - Oakley to Scowcroft - Lebanon," April 2, 1976, Box 24, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger," April 13, 1976, GFD-M; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 261–266; Wight, "Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon."
[529] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Syria Ambivalent Over Further Sinai Step," August 18, 1975, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; "Memo and Memcon - Meeting of the National Security Council - Lebanon," April 7, 1976, GFD-NCM; "Memcon - Ford, Javits, Scowcroft," April 14, 1976, GFD-M; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 289; "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft, Murphy," July 31, 1976, GFD-M.
[530] "Memcon - Ford, Javits, Scowcroft," April 14, 1976, GFD-M.
[531] "Cable - Damascus to Washington - Presentation to Asad on Peace Process," May 15, 1976, Box 32, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, 1051–1058.

Chapter 6 – Epilogue - 1976

November:

> I think after November we can move swiftly. For you to veto [military aid to Israel] and have the Jews begging for a chance to work it out rather than beating you to death about it ….. I tell you, they are worried. [...] We really have them off balance and I think we should keep it that way. After November I think we can move very quickly to a settlement. Things are really looking right.[532]

In the night of May 31, approximately 6000 Syrian soldiers and 250 tanks crossed into Lebanon. The invasion was a fact. Israel stayed put. After examining archival sources similar to those used for this study, historian David Wight found no indication that the Syrians moved with an explicit Israeli or American approval.[533] The documents studied for this thesis do not counter that assertion. But the Syrians did not ignore American or Israeli views. The preceding months of careful Syrian-Israeli contacts via the Americans gave Damascus a good idea of what they could, and could not do *if* they invaded. Israel's acquiescence to the disguised involvement of Syrian Army forces likely helped convince the Syrians that they could move unopposed. When they did, they adhered to the unspoken Syrian-American-Israeli 'Red line agreement'. Worked out in the preceding months of diplomacy, it suggested that Syria would be less likely to attract Israeli countermoves if its forces kept out of Southern Lebanon, especially heavy weaponry such as artillery and missiles. There lay Israel's sphere of interest.[534] Meeting Ford and the Cabinet on June 18, Kissinger assessed the situation:

> It looks now like no one will gain an overwhelming victory [in Lebanon]. What is likely to emerge is an Arab solution with no one in predominance [...] The end result should be a strategic situation which is favorable to us [...] A spectacular Syrian defeat probably would overthrow Assad. With this probable moderate outcome, we are in a good position for peace.[535]

Four days later, Kissinger described to US Middle East ambassadors the next Arab-Israeli negotiated move the administration would pursue. Kissinger asked Murphy to make clear to the Syrians that he hoped to attain 5-10 kilometers of Israeli withdrawals in Golan during the next negotiating round, planned for soon after the American elections.[536] Further, Kissinger ordered, the ambassadors should tell their respective clients that

> after November we're absolutely determined to get the negotiating process started because it's in the national interest of the United States. It's not just to delay until November. But they have to help us with the process because it'll be bloody difficult.[537]

Meanwhile, the Americans were lobbying their friends in Saudi Arabia and Iran to assist

---

[532] "Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Scowcroft," May 10, 1976, GFD-M.
[533] Wight, "Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon."
[534] Ibid.
[535] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 289.
[536] Ibid., Document 290.
[537] Ibid.

Assad. Soviet aid to Syria had been severely cut over the Lebanon issue, where the two states now supported opposing forces. In an August 7 meeting, Kissinger declared that a Syrian defeat in Lebanon would be disastrous. It would squeeze Assad between radicals in Iraq and Lebanon.[538] A Syrian defeat in Lebanon would thus "probably mean the overthrow of Asad."[539] That, he repeated again and again, was a prospect he feared.[540] Kissinger eventually elaborated on where he hoped to take the Arab-Israeli negotiated process:

> Our approach, our strategy is to bring Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria and Egypt together and to go for an overall settlement. After the overall attempt, we might end up with a Sinai III [agreement] but it would only be after starting for an overall [settlement] and exhausting everything else. I would prefer significant territorial progress on all three fronts, Egypt, the Golan and the West Bank, with Jordan beginning to get back into the West Bank. But the 1967 boundaries are unrealizable in a first stage. This approach would keep the PLO out of negotiations where they would not be helpful, at least at the outset. We need first to get them under control and bring them in only at the end of the process.[541]

To his American colleagues, Kissinger spoke repeatedly, and with apparent conviction of the Arab-Israeli negotiations he hoped to push for after Ford's election in November. He described his fears of Hafez al-Assad's overthrow. And he sought to bolster that regime indirectly by asking US friends in the region to replace recently cut Soviet aid. By mid-1976, the survival of Assad's regime as a relatively moderate and well known force in Syria had become a priority of Kissinger's policies. Not on the same level as Egypt or Israel, but a priority nonetheless. On January 14, 1977, six days before leaving office together with the defeated President Ford, Kissinger sent a warm farewell letter to Assad.[542] He asserted that he had "been urging upon the members of the new administration an active role for the United States in pursuit of a just and durable peace in the area", and now saw approaching another "moment of historic opportunity for the cause of peace" in the Middle East.[543] Would this include Syria? It was no longer in Ford or Kissinger's power to decide.

---

[538] "Memo - Scowcroft to President - Meeting with Ambassador Richard Murphy," July 30, 1976, Box 30, GF-NSA-PC-MESA; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 292.

[539] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 292.

[540] "Telcon - Kissinger, Dinitz," March 27, 1976, DS-HKT; *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 292.

[541] *FRUS 1969-76, Vol. XXVI*, Document 292; An interesting side-note from this document is how Kissinger describes as true recent rumors of a secret meeting between Syrian and Israeli officials in Geneva.

[542] "Cable - Washington to Damascus - Secretary's Farewell Message to President Asad," January 14, 1977, Box 31, GF-NSA-PC-MESA.

[543] Ibid.; Seale, *Asad of Syria*, 286–287.

From Sleeping Dog to Pseudo-Ally – Seven Years of American Diplomatic Relations with Syria

At its outset, this study posed three interrelated questions:

How did the Syrian-American diplomatic relationship develop in the 1969-76 period, and why? Which policies did Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford and Henry Kissinger pursue, and why? Insofar as the chosen primary sources help illuminate this: How can Hafez al-Assad's goals and policies be understood?

The preceding chapters suggest a number of conclusions, concerning both the overall development of the Syrian-American relationship, and on a personal level, the views and strategies of key actors, and their relationship with each other.

Letting Sleeping Dogs Lie – Evasion and Ignorance Makes Poor Foreign Policy

When Secretary of State William Rogers in 1969 characterized Syria as a "sleeping dog" best left undisturbed, he distilled into few words the prevailing American attitude. While Washington analysts perceived Hafez al-Assad's regime as relatively moderate compared to his neo-Ba'th predecessors, this translated into no change to the basic policy. Apparently with President Richard Nixon's blessing, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger sought to defeat Arab opposition to Israel through perpetual stalemate. This likely reinforced the attitude that Syria's new regime was best left to its own devices. When Syria invaded Jordan in September 1970, it pushed the Americans toward a dangerous showdown with the USSR, and forced them to consider the unpleasant prospect of asking Israel to save the friendly regime of Jordan's King Hussein. While the Israelis proved willing to help, and seemed very capable of intervening, Jordan beat back the Syrian invasion without direct Israeli involvement. The Americans might have derived several different lessons from the affair. One lesson would be that Syria need not succeed in a war to cause serious trouble for American interests. Even that half-hearted attack created a minor superpower crisis and for a while seemed poised to topple King Hussein. Nothing indicates that such conclusions were drawn in Washington. Rather, the lesson learnt was that Israel had proved itself a strategic asset for projecting US power against Soviet clients – in this case Syria and the Palestinians. Israel's survival and strength looked increasingly important and valuable to the Americans. It was,

perhaps, not the lesson learnt by all in Washington. But Henry Kissinger drew this conclusion.

Washington analysts perceived President Hafez al-Assad as a leader more moderate than the ones he unseated, seeking an end to Syria's international isolation. But nothing indicates that this translated into serious attempts at a diplomatic rapprochement. When Syrian authorities wished to purchase 4000 Chrysler trucks in January 1972, Rogers read this partly as a Syrian attempt at breaking its dependence on the USSR. Following Kissinger's advice, however, President Nixon denied the sale.[544] A secret meeting between Syria's Prime Minister and an official from the US Embassy in Beirut in June, 1972 was reported as the "promising" start of a dialogue, but apparently led to little.[545] Perhaps Assad and the Syrians sought a quiet rapprochement with the Americans. Or perhaps it was a ruse, designed to cover Assad's preparations with Egypt for a game changing surprise attack on Israel. Regardless, ignoring the Syrians did not help the Americans foresee what Egypt and Syria were secretly preparing. In the White House documentary records from the years preceding the 1973 October War, the few mentions of Syria were cursory in nature.

As the 1973 October War broke out, Henry Kissinger struggled to find a way to contact the Syrians, so complete was their break. Introducing his first Damascus visit in his memoirs, Kissinger wrote: "Syria's image was so forbidding that reality could not possibly match what I had been told before our arrival."[546] He found Syria's leaders less willing (or able) than Sadat to be flexible, move quickly and make grand gestures in negotiations. But they were not simply "extremists", as Washington analysts had recently described them. It soon became apparent that they might conceivably play a constructive diplomatic role.

A Post-War Strategy – The Primacy of Egypt

By triggering a brief superpower crisis and an enduring energy crisis, the 1973 October War forced upon Washington a change of perspectives. Tackling the Arab-Israeli conflict became one of the United States' central foreign policy objectives. Syria thus assumed prominence in

---

[544] "Memo - Rogers to The President - Proposed Sale of Trucks to Syria," January 27, 1972, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Memo - Kissinger to The President - Proposed Sale of American Trucks to Syrian Army," April 18, 1972, Box 631, RN-NSC; "Memo - Davis to Eliot - Proposed Sale of American Trucks to Syria," April 21, 1972, Box 631, RN-NSC.
[545] "Cable - Beirut to Washington - Syria: Conversations with Prime Minister," June 14, 1972, Box 621, RN-NSC-D.
[546] Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 777.

Washington, but largely as a potential obstruction to achieving the key objective of drastically improving Israeli-Egyptian relations. Anwar Sadat's regime was not expected to stay in power if it negotiated disengagement agreements with Israel wholly on its own. His wartime allies in Syria also had to gain something from the American-led negotiations. Thus, the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement for the Golan Heights came about on May 31, 1974. In their approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict between 1969 and 1976, winning Egypt for Israel was the greatest prize for Americans negotiation efforts. Of all the Arab states, improving Egypt's relationship with Israel was seen as the one achievement above any which could drastically improve Israel's security. This would greatly lessen chances of another Arab-Israeli war, with all its dangerous consequences. Seasoned scholars of Middle Eastern history may see this assertion as self-evident. But few studies spell it out. With few and fleeting exceptions, Egypt remained the focus of US negotiations efforts throughout this period. When the Golan Agreement was worked out, the Americans did this to give Egypt leeway to deepen their negotiated process with Israel. Henry Kissinger himself repeatedly made this argument to Israeli leaders.

Shifting Perceptions – Isolation Becomes Containment

During the months of diplomacy leading to the Golan Agreement, Kissinger repeatedly told the Israelis that they should make the deal so that Syria might be isolated from Egypt. An essentially powerless Syria could then be ignored, while Israel could keep most of Golan. By the deal's conclusion, Kissinger seemed to shift toward seeing another Golan move as necessary. Syria remained too dangerous to ignore, and proved difficult to isolate. With one minor exception, Kissinger always spoke of a second Golan agreement as something to be pursued *after* a second Egypt-Israel deal. Until then, containment would be the strategy of choice. Immediately after the Golan Agreement, the Americans spent a few months pursuing some sort of Jordan-Israel deal. Israeli unwillingness to move on that front weakened that option. The Rabat Summit's October 1974 recognition of the PLO as the representatives of the Palestinian people killed it. The Americans then embarked on a process seeking a second Sinai agreement, culminating in Kissinger's failed March 1975 Egyptian-Israeli shuttle. The Americans blamed the failure squarely on the Israelis, and launched a 'reassessment' of their approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict. They briefly dallied with the thought of either focusing on Syria in whatever negotiation step would be pursued next, or pursuing a comprehensive

settlement. However, the Americans quickly returned to their default position – focusing on Egypt. Building upon the March failure, Kissinger's August 1975 shuttle successfully brought about the Sinai II Agreement.

After Sinai II, the Americans judged circumstances unconducive to another Golan move. Since May 1974, Israel had showed no sign of a willingness to make anything but cosmetic concessions to Syria in Golan. And the Americans had, as part of Sinai II, given Israel written assurances on the limits of what a second Golan move might entail. Even within those limits, extracting significant concessions from Israel would require massive American pressure against Israel. Ford and Kissinger hoped to win a popular mandate for Ford in the November 1976 presidential elections. Until then, challenging Israel and its influential backers in the United States would be suicidal. In any case, Kissinger eventually seems to have realized that the Syrians were unlikely to act on their many threats of war against Israel. So there was no hurry. After Sinai II, Kissinger quite earnestly told the Syrians that they could expect little until Ford had been properly elected. Containment would continue for the time being. While visiting Damascus in June 1974, Nixon appears to have promised Assad the return of Golan, or at least promised much more than Kissinger was comfortable with. One of Gerald Ford's first acts as president was sending a letter to Assad affirming everything Nixon and Kissinger had told him. But neither Nixon, Kissinger nor Ford ever appeared to press for the fulfillment of that specific promise. Perhaps more strangely, the Syrians evidently never did either.[547]

Concord and Collusion – Lebanon Takes Center Stage

In early 1976, the escalating civil war in Lebanon opened a new chapter in Syrian-American relations. After worrying over a growing Syrian military presence in Lebanon since January 1975 (if not earlier), the Americans eventually came to see the Syrians as a responsible, moderating force in the war. Israel and Syria found common interests in avoiding Lebanon's total collapse. The Israelis would avoid having Lebanon become a haven for Palestinian militants on their northern border. The Syrians meanwhile wanted to avoid an Israeli invasion to forestall such an event. And they feared spillover into Syria, of weapons, dissidents and so

---

[547] A memcon from this meeting exists, in at least two copies. One, in Kissinger's private archive at Yale University, is only available with his express permission, or five years after his death. Another copy, stored on microfilm at the US State Department's archive, may be accessible through a 'Freedom of Information Act' application. Such an application, filed by the author, remained unprocessed as this thesis went to print.

on. The Syrians apparently sought to re-impose some sort of balance of power between Lebanon's sects and factions, as opposed to a clear-cut win by one side. In June of 1976, they thus invaded Lebanon outright to save the Conservative Maronite Christians, allied with Israel, from defeat at the hands of Syria's longtime Palestinian and leftist allies. This came about only after Israel, via American diplomats, gradually gave their guarded, unspoken approval, with strict limitations as regarded Southern Lebanon.

Syria's involvement in Lebanon had an important side-effect: Its leaders became less able to focus on what had been a key aim in the preceding years: Recovering Golan. The available records from 1976 reflect this, with the Lebanon issue dominating Syrian-American contacts. The Arab-Israeli conflict was still discussed. However, neither Americans nor Israelis were offering much, while the Syrians were not in a position to press the matter.

The Lebanese Civil War confronted Henry Kissinger and his colleagues with numerous paradoxes, and a long range of mostly unsavory scenarios. Kissinger's views on one such scenario illustrates the growth since 1969 of Syria's presence on his horizon: In an August 7, 1976 meeting, he emphasized what he had said throughout the year – a Syrian defeat in Lebanon would likely mean the overthrow of President Assad, and be a 'disaster' for American interests. The survival of Assad's regime, which Kissinger evidently expressed no desire to deal with until the 1973 October War, had grown into an explicit priority for the Americans. It was not among their top priorities. But Assad and his colleagues had qualities Kissinger appreciated, qualities that he did not expect from any successor regime. Assad was a known entity. The relative moderation and reliability of his regime had been firmly established through years of contacts, of strict adherence to the Golan Agreement, and finally, its careful approach to the Lebanese Civil War. The Syrians had both requested and heeded American input in the months leading up to the June 1976 invasion.

A Genuine Desire vs. Deceit and Cynicism – Henry Kissinger and the Golan Heights
Henry Kissinger meanwhile spoke increasingly of his plans for Syria in the Arab-Israeli peace process following President Ford's election in November 1976. Once Ford was empowered by a popular mandate and presidential authority had been restored after Watergate, Kissinger declared himself ready to be tough with the Israelis. It is worth noting that he said this not

just to the Syrians, but also in private to Americans within Washington's policymaking apparatus. Kissinger made a point of not explicitly promising anything he thought himself incapable of delivering. He would rather resort to vague stock phrases of his desire to promote "a just and durable peace", or the likes. There was little vagueness involved when, in late June, 1976, he asked Ambassador Murphy to specify to Assad that Israeli withdrawals of 5-10 kilometers in Golan were his goal for the next round. Would he have made good on his promises? We may only speculate.

By now, it is clear that Henry Kissinger did not exert maximum efforts to help Syria regain Golan. Utilizing vague formulations about helping achieve a 'just and durable peace' within an unspecified timeframe, Kissinger could seem to promise much, without truly promising anything at all. There was certainly a large degree of cynicism involved. But the records suggest he may not have been totally dishonest when he told the Syrians about his desire and intention of helping them get a maximum of concessions from Israel. Upon getting fully involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict in October 1973, Kissinger repeatedly, in closed meetings with American colleagues, voiced the opinion that something needed to be done on the Golan front. And by the time of the Golan agreement in May 1974, he had become convinced that Syria could and would create trouble for US and Israeli interests in the future, lest a second negotiated agreement was reached. He repeatedly pushed for such moves from the Israelis. But he did not push very hard. While Kissinger focused on Egypt and Israel, Syria was not a priority. After Sinai II, Kissinger increasingly told both the Syrians and his American colleagues of a process toward a full settlement in 1977. This extended to the point of asking Murphy to specify to Assad the territorial gains he foresaw for Syria. What would Kissinger have done, had Ford won the 1976 election? This is the realm of counter-factual history. Suffice to say that, while Kissinger did seem to promise significant movement, Syria was not in early 1977 in a great position to demand much from the Americans and Israelis. After Sinai II, Syrian-Egyptian relations were ice cold. Syria was preoccupied with Lebanon, while Iraq made threatening noises on its eastern border. Perhaps Kissinger *wanted* another Golan agreement. But it would cause a mess with Israel and its American backers, requiring time, energy and political capital that might give greater yields if spent elsewhere.

The above assessment in a way presupposes that Kissinger or the presidents he served,

should care about, and help Syria. But would anyone expect their foremost objective to be regaining territory on behalf of a small country thousands of kilometers away? Nixon, Kissinger and Ford did not involve the US in the Arab-Israeli conflict *primarily* to aid, contain or counter Syria, Israel, Egypt and Jordan. Their task was to promote US national interests – as they themselves construed them, and as their electorate did. As it happened, Israel was a major priority for influential parts of that electorate. Syria was not, and Hafez al-Assad knew it. He needed other avenues to make Syria a key factor in American Middle East policy.

Containment vs. Calibrated Crises – Assessing Two Strategies in an Asymmetric Duel

When Henry Kissinger faced Hafez al-Assad in a protracted diplomatic process following the October War, theirs was a highly asymmetric duel. Assad had come to power quite recently, leading one of the most politically unstable countries in the world. He commanded a country that was neither wealthy, particularly powerful in a military sense nor influential. Kissinger was by 1973 perhaps the most powerful Secretary of State in the history of the most wealthy, militarily powerful and influential country in the world. This at a time when its president – Richard Nixon – was too preoccupied with Watergate to take full charge of US foreign policy. To have any chance of achieving his goals against such a powerful opposite, Assad needed to move skillfully in forcing Syria's relevance into the American perspective. Kissinger's Syria-strategy – isolation at first, followed by a shift to containment – is described above. As is the American preference, which was also Kissinger's preference, of dealing primarily with Egypt. How could Hafez al-Assad evade Kissinger's containment, and force Syria's case sufficiently to bring about the negotiated return of occupied Golan territory?

Assad's actions in the period, as reflected in American documentary records, suggests a strategy that could be described as the continued, carefully calibrated maintenance of crises conditions. After the first, testing Kissinger-Assad meetings, the Syrian President and his subordinates became ever more vocal about their preference for a negotiated solution to their conflict with Israel. In February 1975, he took the extraordinary step of publicly describing Syria's willingness, under certain conditions, to conclude a final peace treaty with Israel. At the same time, Assad strove to make sure the Americans and Israelis knew he would keep all options open until Syria's goals were met. Through the first half of 1974, Kissinger's mediations for a Golan disengagement agreement developed to the thunder of

artillery fire in Golan, where Syria kept a war of attrition going with Israel. Several documents suggest that this was an intentional and carefully calibrated Syrian policy to maintain pressure on the Israelis. Assad sensed that Israel, with a mere three million inhabitants, could not afford perpetual war with Syria, neither in its cost in lives or money. The barrages also made it vividly clear to the visiting Kissinger that Syria was neither pacifist nor pacified.

Following the Golan Agreement, Assad saw to it that Syria meticulously adhered to its terms. Meanwhile, Syria's army was re-equipped and trained for offensive operations against Israel. The Syrians made sure the Americans, Israelis and their contacts in Jordan, Egypt and elsewhere understood that Syria were neither isolated, militarily impotent or irreversibly committed to a negotiated settlement. The Syrian tactic of empowering the PLO at Rabat suggests that they also sought to improve their capacity for exerting political pressure. And when some political act by the Americans or Syrians caused their relationship to take a downward turn, the Syrians usually, after spending sufficient time demonstrating their unhappiness, announced their continued desire for good relations with the US, and a continued American role in Arab-Israeli negotiations. This state of perpetual crisis was carefully maintained – not so tense that it led to an actual outbreak of war with Israel, nor so slack that anyone thought the Syrians had given up.

The strategy worked relatively well for more than a year. Throughout 1974, Americans, Israelis, Jordanians and Egyptians seemed intensely worried that a Syrian return to war lay in the near future. Such a war could drag Egypt in, bring the Soviet Union back into play, and by re-imposing the oil embargo, might make the affected states of Western Europe and Japan unite with the USSR in opposition to US and Israeli policies. But however much the Syrians prepared for war, and however many threats they made, they never seemed close to opting for another war. Every time Kissinger made a diplomatic move seemingly focused on a second Sinai Agreement, threats arrived from Damascus. But the American never heeded them, and the Syrians never acted. By March 1975, Kissinger seemed to be concluding that the Golan front, despite Assad's threats, would remain quiet through another round of Egyptian-Israeli negotiations. In September, the Sinai II agreement was signed. The Syrians kept still. Kissinger soon informed them that they should not expect significant negotiations until after the 1976 presidential elections. Apart from launching a highly visible but

ineffectual political campaign in the UN Security Council, the Syrians again kept still.

In observing the failure of Assad's perpetual crises strategy, one fundamental fact should be kept in mind: Assad and Syria was fighting an utterly unequal duel with Israel and their American friends. The latter did what they could to promote their policies without angering the Israelis and their backers in the United States. President Assad operated quite nimbly, on multiple fronts. Relative to Syria's weak position when he took power in 1970, Assad's achievements by 1976 were remarkable. Syria's internal political stability was probably greater than at any time since the country became independent. It had proven itself militarily in the October War, and in its wake achieved at least some small concessions in Golan. Syria's relationship with Arab states had been improved on a wide front, with money flowing from the Arab oil producer states. The long-time relationship with the USSR was largely maintained, while bilateral relations with the US bloomed.

Despite Our Differences – Hafez al-Assad's Quest for Good Relations with the United States
In areas where the Syrian-American relationship could develop isolated from the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it was quite a happy tale. Due to space constraints, this study demonstrates this only fleetingly. In terms of bilateral trade and aid, cultural-, scientific- and educational exchanges and so on, the Americans were quite willing to seek improvements. The Syrians, meanwhile, proved decidedly eager. Numerous primary source documents suggest Hafez al-Assad personally encouraged or ordered the expeditious handling of whatever Syria could do in this regard. When and where the Israeli wedge was not a major factor, Syrian-American relations grew on fertile ground.

Bilateral aid and trade, however, were tiny factors in a relationship dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict. But there too, Hafez al-Assad's desire for good relations with the US shone through, and was to a significant degree reciprocated. A message from Assad or one of his subordinates might convey Syria's displeasure at some recent American initiative – fresh military aid to Israel, another round of separate Egyptian-Israel negotiations, rumors of an American guarantee that Israel would never need to leave Golan. But rare were the instances were such messages did not end by noting that the Syrians hoped that, whatever their other differences, Syria and the US should maintain and develop their good relationship.

Chapter 7 – Findings

Consequences

The Americans attempted a difficult balancing act between Cold War considerations, good relations with the Arabs, and support for Israel. The 1973 War showed that Syria could threaten these interests. But by 1976, Syria had been isolated from Egypt by the two Sinai agreements, proved itself unwilling to fight Israel alone and gotten entangled in the Lebanese Civil War. Unlike Israel, it had few friends in the United States to lobby its case. Unlike Egypt, it was not seen as a crucial Arab state, nor did it have a relatively simple territorial dispute with Israel, as the Egyptians did. Syria was in a poor position to force its case as an immediate American priority. Their American counterparts of the time were not inclined to make a huge political effort for Syria when there seemed to be so little to gain. In his heart of hearts, Henry Kissinger may have hoped to make the 'just and durable peace' he so often spoke of, perhaps including the full or partial restoration of Golan to Syria. And had Ford been elected in 1976, it cannot be fully ruled out that he would have made the promised effort. But the consequence of his step-by-step approach, his focus on Egypt and attempted containment of Syria, was to create a gulf between the two wartime allies. With Egypt essentially removed from the Arab front by Sinai II, Syria remained the only significant frontline state opposing Israel. The country was left in limbo – neither fully isolated nor having had its grievances with Israel satisfyingly redressed.

The Syrians regained little territory by their expenditure of blood and treasure in the 1973 War. Israel's concessions in the Golan Agreement were largely symbolic. But one major potential gain came out of these years of diplomacy: Syria greatly improved its relationship with the United States. Hafez al-Assad's first six years in power transformed the country. The radical and unstable Syria of the 1950's and 60's was gone. Assad's Syria behaved with relative moderation in its relations with other Arab countries, and with the United States. Syria's careful response to the Lebanese Civil War made Assad's regime seem like a positive asset for the Americans, one they sought to bolster, however indirectly. If maintained, and if the right circumstances arose in the future, this could prove an asset for Syria. A complex relationship with the United States had just begun.

Appendix A – Directory of People, Terms and Abbreviations

People

Aflaq, Michel – Syrian philosopher and politician. Co-founder of the Ba'th Party.

Ahmad, Ahmad Iskandar – Syrian Minister of Information (September 1974 - December 1983).

Allon, Yigal – Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs (June 3, 1974 - 1977), Deputy Prime Minister (1968 - 1977).

al-Assad, Hafez – Syrian. Also spelled 'Asad'. Air Force Officer. Syrian Minister of Defense (1966 - 1970). Prime Minister (1970 - 1971). President (1971 - 2000).

al-Atassi, Dr. Nureddin – Syrian. Also spelled 'Atasi'. President of Syria (1966 - 1970).

Atherton Jr., Alfred Leroy "Roy" – American. US Second Secretary-Vice Consul in Damascus (1952 - 1956), Consul in Aleppo (1956 - 1959). US State Department Country director for Israel and Arab-Israel Affairs (1967 - 1970). Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern & South Asian Affairs (1970 - 1974). Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs (1974 - 1978).

Bitar, Salah al-Din – Syrian politician. Co-Founder of the Ba'th Party.

de Borchgrave, Arnaud – American journalist. Editor of *Newsweek*.

Bouteflika, Abdelaziz – Algerian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1963 - 1979). President of Algeria (1999 -).

Colby, William E. – American. Director of Central Intelligence (CIA, September 4, 1973 - January 30, 1976).

Dayan, Moshe – Israeli officer. Minister of Defense (June 5, 1967 - June 3, 1974).

Dinitz, Simcha – Israeli Ambassador to the United States (1973 - 1979).

Dulles, Allen Welsh – American. Director of Central Intelligence (CIA, 1953-1961). Brother of John Foster Dulles.

Dulles, John Foster – US Secretary of State (1953 - 1959). Brother of Allen Dulles.

Eisenhower, Dwight D. – President of the United States (1953-1961).

Fahmy, Ismail – Egyptian Foreign Minister (1973 - 1977), Deputy Prime Minister (1975 - 1977).

Faisal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud – King of Saudi Arabia (November 1964 - March 1975). Assassinated in 1975.

Ford, Gerald R. – American. US House (of Representatives) Minority Leader (January 6, 1965 - December 6, 1973). Vice President of the United States (December 6, 1973 - August 9, 1974), President of the United States (August 9, 1974 - January 20, 1977).

Frangieh, Suleiman – President of Lebanon (September 23, 1970 - September 22, 1976) and Maronite Christian warlord.

Haig, Alexander ("Al") M. – American. NSC Military Assistant to National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (1969-70), Deputy National Security Advisor to Henry Kissinger (1970 - 1973), White House Chief of Staff (April 30, 1973 - September 21, 1974).

Hughes, Thomas L. – US Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research, also known as Director of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, at the US State Department (April 28, 1963 - August 25, 1969).

Hussein bin Talal – King of Jordan (1952 - 1999).

Ismail, Mohammad Zakaria – Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister (1973 - ?).

Jarring, Gunnar – Swedish diplomat. UN-appointed Special Envoy for the Middle East peace process in the wake of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Led what became known as the 'Jarring Mission', an effort to achieve a peaceful Arab-Israeli settlement.

Johnsen, Lyndon B. – President of the United States (1963-1969).

Kabbani, Dr. Sabbah – Syrian diplomat. Leader of the Syrian delegation to the United States (February - June 1974), Ambassador to the United States (June 1974 - 1981).

Kennedy, John F. – President of the United States (1961-1963). Assassinated in 1963.

Khaddam, Abdul Halim – Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1970 - 1984), Vice President of Syria (1984 - 2000).

Kissinger, Dr. Henry A. – US National Security Advisor (January 20, 1969 - November 3, 1975), Secretary of State (September 22, 1973 - January 20, 1977).

Lord, Winston – American. White House National Security Council staff (1969 - 1973). US State Department Director of Policy Planning (1973 - 1977).

Meir, Golda – Prime Minister of Israel (March 17, 1969 - June 3, 1974).

Murphy, Richard W. – US Ambassador to Syria (September 9, 1974 - April 23, 1978).

Nasser, Gamal Abdel – Prime Minister of Egypt (1954-1962). President of Egypt/the United Arab Republic (June 23, 1956 - September 28, 1970).

Nixon, Richard M. – Vice President of the United States (January 20, 1952 - January 20, 1960), President of the United States (January 20, 1969 - August 9, 1974).

Oakley, Roger B. – American. NSC Senior Staff Member, Middle East & South Asia (1974 - 1977).

Peres, Shimon – Israeli Minister of Defense (June 3, 1974 – June 20, 1977).

Rabin, Yitzhak – Israeli Ambassador to the United States (February 1968 - 1973). Prime Minister of Israel (June 3, 1974 - April 22, 1977).

Rogers, William P. – US Secretary of State (January 22, 1969 - September 3, 1973).

Sadat, Anwar – Vice President of Egypt (December 19 1969 - October 14, 1970). President of Egypt (September 28, 1970 - October 6, 1981). Assassinated in 1981.

Saunders, Harold "Hal" H. – American. NSC staff member/Senior staff member (1961 - July 1974). Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (July 1974 - December 1975). Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research (December 1975 -1978).

Schlesinger, Dr. James R. – American. Director of Central Intelligence (CIA, January 2 - July 2, 1973) US Secretary of Defense (July 2, 1973 - November 19, 1975).

Scotes, Thomas J. – American diplomat. Chief of US Interests Section in Damascus (ca. January - June 16, 1974). US Embassy Chargé d'Affaires ad interim (June 16 - September 9, 1974). Deputy Chief of Mission (September 9 - December 17, 1974). US Ambassador to Yemen (December 20, 1974 - 1978).

Scowcroft, Brent – American officer. Military Assistant to President Nixon (February 1972 - August 1973). Deputy National Security Advisor (August 1973 - November 3, 1975), National Security Advisor (November 3, 1975 - January 20, 1977).

al-Shihabi, Hikmat – Syrian officer. Chief of Military Intelligence (April 1971 - August 1974). Army Chief of Staff (August 1974 - July 1998).

Shishakli, Adib – Syrian officer. Ruled Syria as a strongman behind the scenes after taking power in a *coup d'etat* in late 1949. Formally became Prime Minister and President in July 1953. Resigned and fled Syria on February 25, 1954, during a revolt against his rule.

Sisco, Joseph "Joe" J. – US Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs (1969 - 1974). Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (1974 - 1976).

Tlas, Mustafa – Syrian officer. Also spelled 'Tlass'. Syrian Army Chief of Staff (1968-1972), Minister of Defense (1972-2004).

Toon, Malcolm – US Ambassador to Israel (1975 - 1976).

Truman, Harry S. – President of the United States (1945-1953).

Terms and Abbreviations

Ba'th Party – Formally the Arab Socialist Ba'th Party (*Hizb Al-Ba'th Al-Arabi Al-Ishtiraki*). Also spelled 'Ba'ath', 'Baath' and 'Bath'. A pan-Arabist political party formed in the 1940's. Syria's ruling party since 1963.

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency. Part of the United States Intelligence Community.

DIA – Defense Intelligence Agency. Part of the United States Intelligence Community.

Druze – Ethno-religious group, mainly centered in Syria, Lebanon and Israel. Follows a heterodox version of Shi'a Islam.

Geneva – See *Geneva Conference*

Geneva Conference – Also referred to by the metonymy *Geneva*. In this thesis, the name refers to one of two overlapping concepts:
1) The actual Geneva Conference which convened in Geneva, Switzerland on December 21, 1973. Held under UN auspices, it was co-hosted by the US and the USSR, with Israel, Egypt and Jordan participating, while an open place at the table was reserved for the absent Syrians. After opening speeches were held, the conference recessed, never to be reconvened for its intended function as a multilateral Arab-Israeli negotiating venue. The Sinai I, Golan and Sinai II agreements were all signed in Geneva, formally as parts of the Geneva Conference, but with negotiations taking place elsewhere.
2) The future prospect of a reconvened Geneva Conference as the venue for Arab-Israeli negotiations. Discussed repeatedly among the various actors in this study, alternating between a feared and desired prospect.

GOI – Government of Israel. Abbreviation for the Israel government frequently used in US documentary sources.

Golan I - See Golan Agreement**.**

Golan II – Denotes a hypothetical second-stage Syrian-Israeli agreement to follow the Golan (I) Agreement of May 31, 1974. The term was not found in American primary sources from the period under study.

Golan Agreement – Also known as the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement. Signed in Geneva on May 31, 1974 at the end of a diplomatic process begun by Henry Kissinger in late 1973. Included Israeli withdrawals to their Golan Heights positions before the 1973 October War, and some minor retreats beyond those lines. Created a de-militarized buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian military lines, supervised by UNDOF, a UN observer/buffer force created for that purpose. The buffer zone was placed under Syrian civilian administration. The agreement further created zones adjacent to the Syrian and Israeli military lines where their respective militaries could station very limited forces.

Golan Heights – Or simply Golan. Hilly/mountainous area, originally belonging to Syria, largely occupied by Israel since the 1967 June War.

INR – US State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research. Part of the United States Intelligence Community.

Ma'alot – Town in northern Israel. A local school became the site of a hostage taking carried out by the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine on May 15. Ended in a bloody shootout next day. Became a minor factor in Henry Kissinger's ongoing Syrian-Israeli disengagement negotiations.

Mount Hermon – The highest peak in Syria, reaching 2814 meters above sea level. Situated in the south-eastern part of the Syrian-Lebanese border, and at the northern end of the Golan Heights. Largely occupied by Israel since the 1967 June War. The scene of heavy fighting during the 1973 October War. Known as 'Jabal ash-Shaykh' in Arabic and 'Har Hermon' in Hebrew.

NEA – US State Department Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs.

NSA – National Security Adviser, formally known as "Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs" – Leader of the National Security Council and one of the American President's chief foreign policy advisors. Henry Kissinger was NSA from January 20, 1969 to November 3, 1975, when Brent Scowcroft took over the position for the rest of Gerald Ford's presidency.

NSC – National Security Council – Denotes two overlapping concepts:

1. A formalized meeting of top Washington figures involved in policy making and execution. Includes the President, National Security Advisor (NSA), Secretaries of State, Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
2. An institution led by the National Security Adviser. Originated as a small group tasked with coordinating policies between the White House and various government branches, and with preparing briefings for NSC meetings. During Henry Kissinger's tenure, the NSC as an institution had its staff levels doubled to around 70, and in effect became a 'miniature State Department', increasingly formulating and overseeing the execution of high-level foreign policy, not merely coordinating it.

Olive Harvest, Operation/Mission – U-2 surveillance flight operations conducted by the United States over the Golan Heights following the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement of May 31, 1974. Flown with Syrian and Israeli approval and coordination to oversee both parties' adherence to the provisions of the agreement.

PLA – Palestine Liberation Army. A military/militia force with several branches. It's Syrian branch was largely armed, trained and hosted by Syrian authorities. Its forces were used as Syrian proxy forces in Lebanon during the early years of the Civil War.

PLO – Palestine Liberation Organization. A political organization formally set up in 1964 with the aim of creating an independent State of Palestine. Became an increasingly active player in the Middle East from the end of 1969 and onwards in the 1970's. In 1975, the Rabat Arab League Summit Conference recognized the PLO as "the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people".

Quneitra – Variously referred to as Kuneitra, Kinetra, or similar. A Golan Heights town which was the capital of Syria's Quneitra Governorate until captured by Israel in the 1967 June War. After being a key issue during the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Negotiations of 1974, Quneitra and its immediate surroundings was placed in the de-militarized zone, with a UNDOF presence alongside Syrian civilian administration.

Rabat – Metonymy referring to the Arab League Summit at Rabat, Morocco, held in October 1974.

Reassessment – Term used by Washington officials for a period of policy reassessment towards the Arab-Israeli conflict, launched when Henry Kissinger's March 1975 shuttle diplomacy failed. Lasted until May/June, when American diplomatic efforts were resumed.

Red line agreement – An unspoken Syrian-American-Israeli understanding of the conditions under which Syria's intervention into Lebanon would be met by an Israeli counter-move, and of the conditions which would *not* result in an Israeli move. It was worked out through the first half of 1976, with the Americans in a mediating role. A key element was the provision that the Syrians should stay out of Southern Lebanon. This was roughly understood to equate to the area south of the Litani River. Large Syrian moves into Southern Lebanon, closing in on Lebanon's border with Israel, would not be acceptable, and was understood as likely to cause an Israeli counter-invasion.

Saiqa – A Syrian-controlled-, armed- and trained militia/guerilla, espousing Ba'thist political ideals. Used by Syria as a proxy force against Israel in the 1960's and early 1970's, in Southern Lebanon in 1975, and during the early years of the Lebanese Civil War.

SARG - Syrian Arab Republic Government – Abbreviation for the Syrian Government frequently used in US documentary sources.

SCP – Syrian Communist Party

Sinai I – Formally known as the *Egyptian-Israeli Agreement on Disengagment of Forces in Pursuance of the Geneva Peace Conference*. Following American mediation in the wake of the 1973 October War, the deal was signed on February 18, 1974. It provided for the separation of Egyptian and Israeli forces facing each other in Sinai, near the Suez Canal. Included some Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory occupied in the war.

Sinai II – Also known as the Sinai Interim Agreement. Signed in Geneva on September 4, 1975, after mediation by Henry Kissinger. Provided for further Israeli withdrawal from Egyptian territory occupied in the war.

Sinai Peninsula – Or simply Sinai – A large peninsula between the Mediterranean, Suez Canal and Gulf of Aqaba/Eilat. Part of Egypt. Occupied by Israel during the Suez War in 1956 but soon evacuated. Occupied again during the 1967 June War and held until the Sinai I and Sinai II agreements from 1974 onwards gradually began returning Sinai to Egypt.

Shuttle Diplomacy – In this study, the term describes the diplomatic tactic used by Henry Kissinger as a mediator on the various fronts of the Arab-Israeli conflict following the 1973 October War. Typically consisted of Kissinger, a team of White House/State Department staffers and a press corps flying between Middle Eastern heads of government to convey proposals and ideas for furthering negotiations.

Suez – Metonymy either referring to the Suez Canal or the Suez Crisis/Suez War of 1956.

Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement – See Golan Agreement.

Tapline – Also known as the Trans-Arabian Pipeline. Oil pipeline running from Saudi Arabia to Lebanon's Mediterranean coastline, via Jordan and across the Golan Heights in Syria. Its construction was an object of disagreement between Syrian and American leaders in the years after World War II. Construction began in 1947, pumping began in 1950. Only partly operative after 1976.

United Arab Republic (UAR) – Name of the union between Syria and Egypt from 1958 until Syria's secession in 1961. Thereafter the formal name of Egypt until its old name was restored in 1971.

UN – United Nations

UNDOF – United Nations Disengagement Observer Force – Observer/buffer force, 1250-strong, in the demilitarized zone of the Golan Heights. Formed as part of the Syrian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement on May 31, 1974 to oversee adherence to agreement by both Israel and Syria, particularly with respect to Syria, which gained civilian administration over the demilitarized zone.

UNGA – United Nations General Assembly

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

USINT – United States Interests Section – US diplomatic posts a step below embassy status. Interests Sections were established in Cairo and Damascus prior to those countries full restoration of diplomatic relations with the US in 1974.
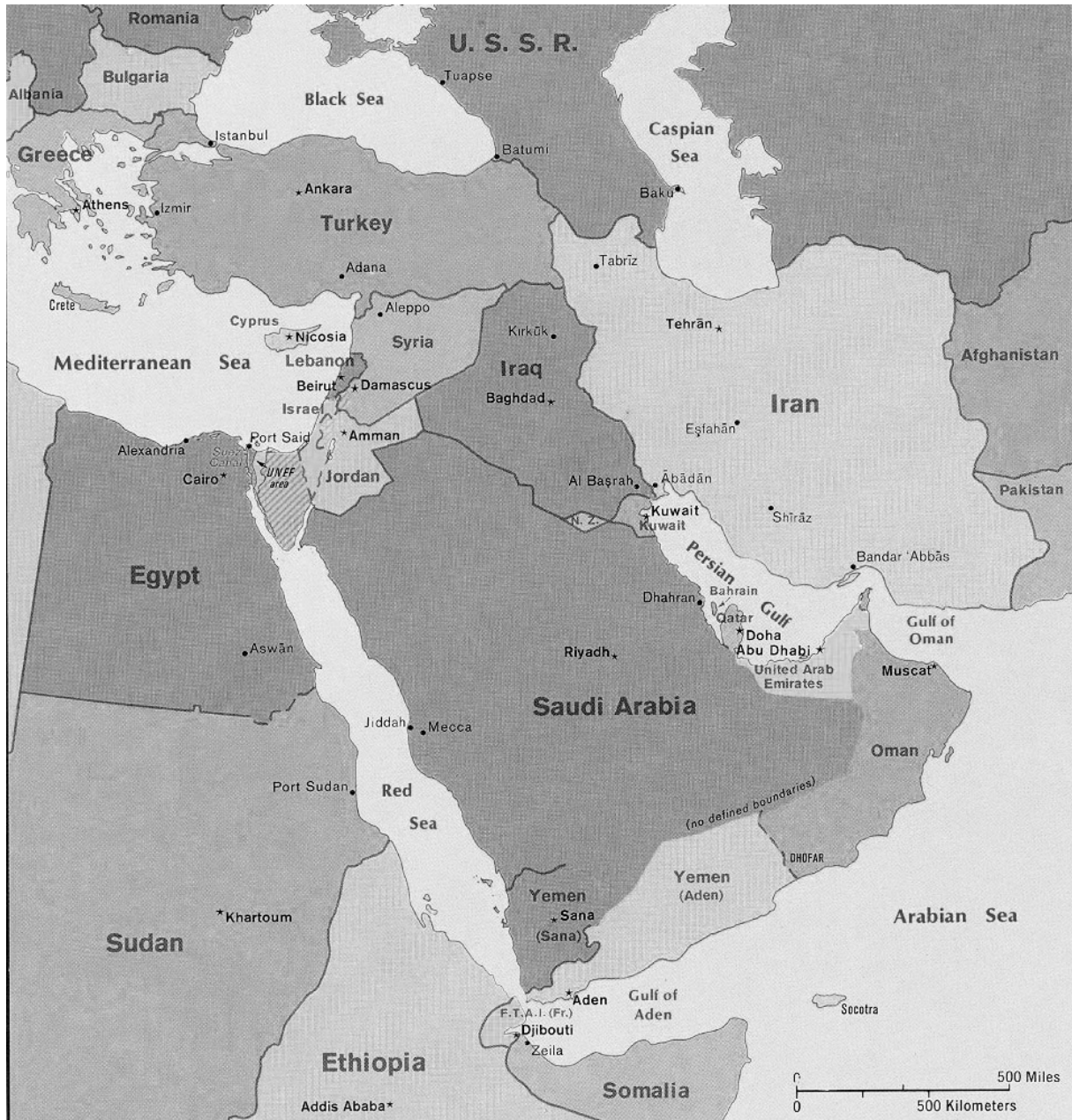
USG – United States Government. Abbreviation frequently used in US documentary sources.

USSR – Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, or 'the Soviet Union'.

WSAG – Washington Special Actions Group. A crisis management forum created as part of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger's restructuring of the National Security Council system.

Appendix B – Maps

B-1: The Middle East, 1976 [548]

A map of the Middle East, 1976, showing countries including U.S.S.R., Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Yemen, Oman, and others, along with major cities and bodies of water such as the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Arabian Sea.

---

[548] "Syria Maps," *Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection*, accessed November 10, 2013, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/syria.html.

B-2: Syria, 1976 [549]
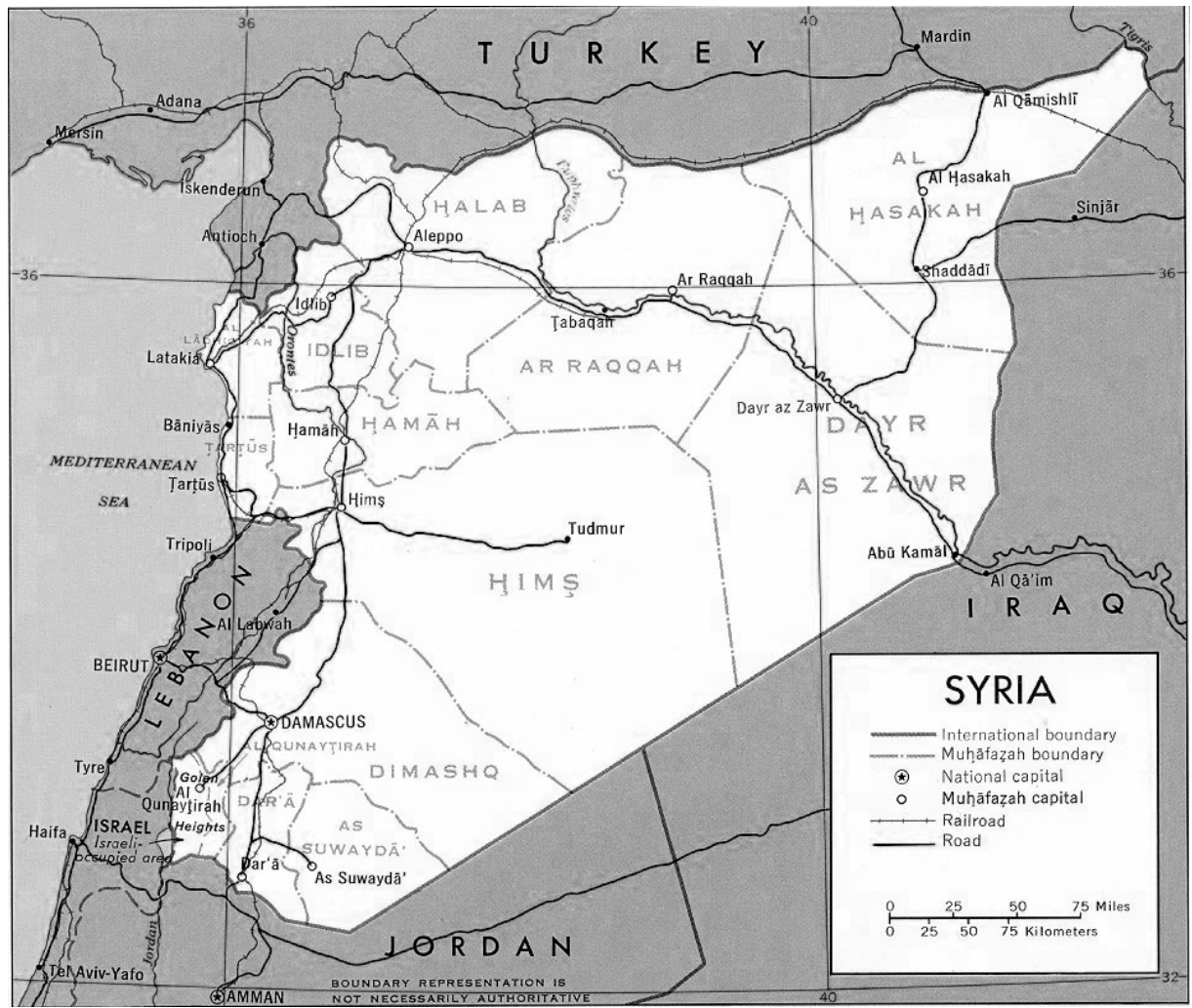
[549] Ibid.

B-3: Syrian-Israeli disengagement lines agreed to in the May 31, 1974 Golan Agreement [550]

The Israeli-Syrian Disengagement Lines

Line A (to the left) is the Israeli military line. Line B (to right) is the Syrian military line. The area between the two became a demilitarized zone, under Syrian civilian control.

---

[550] "Briefing Book - Nixon's Visit to Syria, June 1974," June 15, 1974, Box 141, RN-HAKO.

Appendix C – Discussion and comparison of two memoranda of conversation (memcons) recording the same meeting

Among the most valuable primary source documents used in this study are the memoranda of conversation (memcons) recording conversations between figures such as Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger, Hafez al-Assad, Golda Meir, and so on. These records were typically taken by hand by an aide/associate present at the meeting, and then machine typed for the archives. In many of the meetings recorded and cited in this thesis, that task fell to NSC staff members, especially Brent Scowcroft, Peter Rodman or Robert Oakley.

By providing something roughly resembling the actual words spoken at key meetings, these memcons form an invaluable counter or supplement to what would otherwise have been the main documentation from such meetings – brief and selectively edited post factum reports, typically written by Henry Kissinger to the President.

But these memcons come with methodological problems. In the case of meetings between English- and Arabic-speaking individuals, the quality of work performed by the translator(s) forms one potential source of error. Second, there are no guarantees that the designated note-taker for a given conversation was able to accurately or fully record the words said.

Hundreds of such memcons, from hundreds of meetings, were studied for this thesis. In a single case – a meeting between Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger and US Congressional leaders on March 24, 1975 – two separate memcons were found. The two documents clearly cover the same meetings, with the same topics, in the same sequence. But their significant differences illustrate how differently one such meeting *could* be recorded.

As found, there is little to suggest who created the documents. Two explanations for their origins seem likely:

1. One is the original memcon, as recorded by someone present at the meeting. The other is a somewhat edited and condensed version of the original.
2. Two memcons were independently recorded by two individuals at the same meeting.

These two documents turned up during research for this thesis, with very little contextual information suggesting their origin or accuracy. This is the case for much of the archival material used. This does not mean that they should for that reason be discounted as sources. But the appropriate reservations must be taken. In the case of these two memcons, and possibly, other such documents, they should not be read as <u>verbatim</u> records of given conversations.

Reproduced beneath are the first parts of the two memcons, apparently covering the same portion of the meeting in question, but with different wording and emphasis. Sections of text have been staggered for easier parallel comparison. Otherwise, no changes were made from the originals documents.

Memcon A Source: *Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Kissinger Papers, CL 281, Presidential File, March 1975. Secret; Nodis, as provided in Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 - Volume XXVI - Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1974-76 (Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012), Document 160.*	**Memcon B** Source: *"Memcon - Ford, Kissinger, Bipartisan Leadership" March 24, 1975, GFD-M.*
<u>The President</u>: We are not assessing blame. We want to tell you factually and forthrightly the new sequence of events.	<u>President</u>: There have been better meetings. I start with the assumption we shouldn't assess the blame, but we have to be factual and forthright. Here's where we got where we are: From August the things we did were with a view to a new settlement.
Everything that we have done with respect to the Middle East we have done with the consultation of the parties and has been primarily at their request. I had two full meetings with Rabin—another meeting with Allon and Mrs. Meir, as well as a number of Foreign Ministers from the Arab World.	The things we did were with the full support and at the suggestion of the parties. I met with Rabin, Allon, Golda.
Secretary Kissinger went to the Middle East with the full cooperation of the parties. A further agreement did not materialize. We are disappointed and I think we are going to see a situation where tension will	Kissinger went over there expecting full cooperation and he didn't get it.

develop instead of steady progress towards peace.	
It is likely that the Geneva Conference will be reconvened with all of its potential dangers. What happened will give the Russians an opportunity to reassert themselves, tend to unify the Arabs, the Europeans are unified, and Geneva is hardly going to be a very happy place to conduct diplomacy.	Inevitable now Geneva, united Arabs, Soviet Union, united Europeans – it won't be a happy place.
And on top of all of this there is the PLO question.	And of course the volatile PLO.
	Now I would like Kissinger to give a play-by-play. I don't know how anyone could have that burden and with more patience. I am sure everyone is grateful even though the results didn't materialize.
Secretary Kissinger: First, let me tell you a little bit about the history.	Kissinger: Let me outline why we tried this route, what happened and where we are.
(The Secretary then gave a rundown of how the October war led to the step-by-step strategy which was designed both to help and protect Israel and that it was undertaken with their full knowledge and cooperation and that Israel was the principal beneficiary of that policy.)	After the October war it was the unanimous conclusion of the world community that Israel should return to the' 67 borders. In the face of that we cooperated in a strategy with Israel to reduce Soviet Union influence in a step-by-step process. I must emphasize that every step was coordinated and usually at the instigation of Israel.
An approach was designed to reduce Soviet influence and protect the Israelis from having to take final decisions on Jerusalem, borders, the West Bank and Gaza and to give them an opportunity to take decisions on a piece-by-piece basis. For these reasons we always in the past have been very leery of the Geneva Conference.	We wanted to separate radical from moderate Arabs, isolate the Soviet Union, and move the area from war to peace. We avoided Geneva because it would join the Arabs, make the Soviet Union their lawyer and put them under the radicals. Therefore, we sought step-by-step to keep the radicals and moderates separate and to demonstrate that progress could come only through cooperation with the U. S. This was the basis of our strategy, put together over many months in close cooperation with Israel, indeed with both sides.

The full contents of these documents seem to suggest that the two memcons were created independently, by two separate people with different backgrounds, different knowledge and frames of reference. Either note-taker would be likely to pick up and/or emphasize different things. Both memcons may thus record – literally or thematically – things said at the meeting, but neither does so completely.

The full versions of both documents are freely and easily available from online sources – Example A as Document #160 in Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XXVI, Example B from the collection of digitized memcons available at the Gerald Ford Presidential Library's website.

Appendix D – United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 (1967)

Resolution 242 (1967)

of 22 November 1967 [551]

The Security Council,

Expressing its continuing concern with the grave situation in the Middle East,

Emphasizing the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war and the need to work

for a just and lasting peace in which every State in the area can live in security,

Emphasizing further that all Member States in their acceptance of the Charter of the United

Nations have undertaken a commitment to act in accordance with Article 2 of the Charter,

1. Affirms that the fulfilment of Charter principles requires the establishment of a just
   and lasting peace in the Middle East which should include the application of both the
   following principles:
   (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;
   (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and
   acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence
   of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized
   boundaries free from threats or acts of force;

2. Affirms further the necessity
(a) For guaranteeing freedom of navigation through international waterways in the area;
(b) For achieving a just settlement of the refugee problem;
(c) For guaranteeing the territorial inviolability and political independence of every State
   in the area, through measures including the establishment of demilitarized zones;

3. Requests the Secretary-General to designate a Special Representative to proceed to
   the Middle East to establish and maintain contacts with the States concerned in

---

[551] "Resolution 242 (1967)," *United Nations Security Council*, November 22, 1967,
http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136.

order to promote agreement and assist efforts to achieve a peaceful and accepted settlement in accordance with the provisions and principles in this resolution;

4. Requests the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council on the progress of the efforts of the Special Representative as soon as possible.

Adopted unanimously at the 1382nd meeting.

Appendix E – United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 (1973)

Resolution 338 (1973)

of 22 October 1973 [552]

The Security Council

1. Calls upon all parties to the present fighting to cease all firing and terminate all military activity immediately, no later than 12 hours after the moment of the adoption of this decision, in the positions they now occupy;

2. Calls upon the parties concerned to start immediately after the cease-fire the implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967) in all of its parts;

3. Decides that, immediately and concurrently with the cease-fire, negotiations shall start between the parties concerned under appropriate auspices aimed at establishing a just and durable peace in the Middle East.

Adopted at the 1747th meeting

by 14 votes to none

---

[552] "Resolution 338 (1973)," *United Nations Security Council*, October 22, 1973,
http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7FB7C26FCBE80A31852560C50065F878.

Primary Sources

Archives

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/

- **GF-NSA-KS**: National Security Adviser – Kissinger-Scowcroft West Wing Office Files
    - Box 3
    - Box 16
    - Box 17
    - Box 20
    - Box 24
- **GF-NSA-KT**: National Security Adviser – Trip Briefing Books and Cables for Henry Kissinger, 1974-1976
    - Box 1
    - Box 3
    - Box 7
- **GF-NSA-PC-EUCA**: National Security Adviser – Presidential Country Files for Europe And Canada, 1974-77
    - Box 5
- **GF-NSA-PC-MESA**: National Security Adviser – Presidential Country Files for the Middle East and South Asia, 1974-77
    - Box 19
    - Box 24
    - Box 30
    - Box 31
    - Box 32
- **GF-RAC**: Remote Archive Capture Program (RAC): Photocopies, 1969-77
    - Box 9
    - Box 10
    - Box 31

Nixon Presidential Library & Museum, Yorba Linda, California.
http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/

- **RN-HAKO**: Henry A. Kissinger Office Files
    - Box 42
    - Box 43
    - Box 44
    - Box 45
    - Box 46
    - Box 47
    - Box 140
    - Box 141

- **RN-HAKT**: Henry A. Kissinger Telephone Conversation Transcripts (Telcons)
    - Box 24
    - Box 26
- **RN-NSC**: National Security Council Files
    - Box 631
    - Box 646
    - Box 647
    - Box 1026
    - Box 1027
    - Box 1028
    - Box 1029
    - Box 1185
    - Box 1188
    - Box 1190
    - Box 1191
- **RN-NSC-D**: Archived in the National Security Council Files, but found via the Nixon Library website http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/releases/dec10.php
    - Box 621
- **RN-NSC-IF**: National Security Council Institutional ("H") Files
    - Box H025
    - Box H020
    - Box H029
    - Box H032
    - Box H031
    - Box H110
- **RN-WCFC**: White House Central Files – Subject Files – County Files
    - Box 100
- **RN-WSFP**: White House Special Files – President's Personal File
    - Box 93

Digitized Archives and Collections

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library Digital Collections
http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/docs.asp

- **GFD-NCM**: National Security Council Meetings File, 1974-77
  http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/nscmeetings.asp
- **GFD-HKPM**: Public Papers of Henry Kissinger – Major Addresses
  http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/hakpp.asp
- **GFD-HKR**: Kissinger reports on USSR, China and Middle East Discussions, 1974-76
  http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Kissinger_Reports.asp
- **GFD-M**: Memoranda of Conversations, 1973-77
  http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/guides/findingaid/Memoranda_of_Conversations.asp

The U.S. National Archives – Access to Archival Databases (AAD)
http://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp

"Central Foreign Policy Files, created, 7/1/1973 - 12/31/1976, documenting the period 7/1/1973 ? - 12/31/1976".
http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-description.jsp?s=4073&cat=all&bc=sl

U.S. Department of State – Freedom of Information Act

Henry Kissinger Telephone Transcripts
http://foia.state.gov/Search/Collections.aspx.

U.S. Department of State – Office of the Historian – Foreign Relations of the United States
http://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments

Daigle, Craig, and Nina Howland, eds. *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 Volume XXV, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1973*. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2011

Schwar, Harriet Dashiell, ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1964-1968 Volume XIX, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967*. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2004.

Howard, Adam M., ed. *Foreign Relations of the United States - 1969-1976 Volume XXVI, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1974-1976*. Washington D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2012.

The United Nations Security Council

"Annual Reports of the Security Council to the General Assembly since 1946 - 1975-1976 A/31/2." *United Nations Security Council*. Accessed September 30, 2013. http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/reports/.

"Resolutions Adopted by the Security Council in 1967 – S/RES/242 (1967)" *United Nations Security Council*, November 22, 1967. http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1967.shtml.

"Resolutions Adopted by the Security Council in 1973 – S/RES/338 (1973)" *United Nations Security Council*, October 22, 1973. http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1973.shtml.

"Resolutions Adopted by the Security Council in 1975 - S/RES/ 381 (1975)." *United Nations Security Council*, November 30, 1975. http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions/1975.shtml.

Speeches

Dwight D., Eisenhower. "Special Message to the Congress on the Situation in the Middle East," *The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara*, January 5, 1957. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=11007&st=&st1=.

Ford, Gerald R. "Address by President Gerald R. Ford before a Joint Session of the Congress Reporting on United States Foreign Policy." *Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library & Museum*, April 10, 1975. http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/speeches/750179.asp.

Kennedy, John F. "Address of Senator John F. Kennedy Accepting the Democratic Party Nomination for the Presidency of the United States - Memorial Coliseum, Los Angeles." *The American Presidency Project, University of California Santa Barbara*, July 15, 1960. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=25966.

Kissinger, Henry A. "Global Peace, the Middle East, and the United States." September 16, 1975. GFD-HKPM. http://www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/hakpp.asp.

Nixon, Richard M. "Remarks Following Agreement to Resume Diplomatic Relations, Damascus, June 16 - Remarks by President Nixon" In *The Department of State Bulletin*, LXXI:98–103. No. 1829, 1974.

Rogers, William P. "Statement by Secretary of State Rogers." *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs - Historical Documents*, December 9, 1969. http://www.mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/mfadocuments/yearbook1/pages/9%20statement%20by%20secretary%20of%20state%20rogers-%209%20decemb.aspx.

Rabin, Yitzhak. "Statement by Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin before The Knesset in the Wake of the Arab Summit Conference in Rabat." November 5, 1974. GF-NSA-KS, Box 16.

News Media and Magazines

BBC News

"Dozens Die as Israel Retaliates for Ma'alot." *BBC News - On This Day*, May 16, 1974. http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/16/newsid_2512000/2512399.stm.

Foreign Affairs

Gold, Dore, Shimon Shapira, Richard N. Haas, and Martin Indyk. "Defending the Golan Heights." *Foreign Affairs*, April 2009. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64655/dore-gold-and-shimon-shapira-richard-n-haass-and-martin-indyk/defending-the-golan-heights.

Meade, Walter Russell. "The New Israel and the Old." *Foreign Affairs*, June 1, 2008. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/64446/walter-russell-mead/the-new-israel-and-the-old?page=show.

Jerusalem Issue Briefs

Gold, Dore. "The Golan Heights and the Syrian-Israeli Negotiations." *Jerusalem Issue Briefs*, May 22, 2008. http://jcpa.org/article/the-golan-heights-and-the-syrian-israeli-negotiations/.

The New York Times (NYT)

- "Ceremony in Damascus Marks Renewal of U. S.-Syrian Ties." *The New York Times*. June 17, 1974.
- "Ford Welcomes Sadat and Vows to Pursue Peace." *The New York Times*. October 28, 1975.
- "Nixon Warmly Welcomed on Arriving in Damascus." *The New York Times*. June 16, 1974.
- "Pledges Made by Washington to Israel in the Sinai Accord Are Qualified." *The New York Times*. September 10, 1975.
- "Premier Rabin Sees Almost No Chance of Pact With Syria." *The New York Times*. September 6, 1975.
- "Sinai Pact Separates Foes but Divides Allies." *The New York Times*. September 2, 1975.
- "U.S. Documents Accompanying the Sinai Accord." *The New York Times*. September 17, 1975.
- "U.S. Said to Give A Pledge to Seek Syria-Israel Pact." *The New York Times*. September 12, 1975.

Yale Daily News
"Kissinger Visits Yale to Donate Papers." *Yale Daily News*, August 31, 2011. http://yaledailynews.com/blog/2011/08/31/kissinger-visits-yale-to-donate-papers/.

Miscellaneous Digital Sources

"Memo - Ray Cline [Assistant Secretary of State for Intelligence and Research] to Acting Secretary [Kenneth Rush] - Growing Risk of Egyptian Resumption of Hostilities With Israel," May 31, 1973. Electronic Briefing Book 415. NSA-GWU.

http://www2.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB415/.

"The Foreign Assistance Act of 1974 (Public Law 93-559)," December 30, 1974. Federal Digital System. U. S. Government Printing Office. http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/granule/STATUTE-88/STATUTE-88-Pg1795/content-detail.html.

Bibliography

Monographs and Edited Volumes

Ashton, Nigel J., ed. *The Cold War in the Middle East : Regional Conflict and the Superpowers, 1967-73*. London: Routledge, 2007.

Bass, Warren. *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the U.S.-Israel Alliance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Bregman, Ahron. *Israel's Wars: A History since 1947*. London; New York: Routledge, 2010

Bundy, William P. *A Tangled Web: The Making of Foreign Policy in the Nixon Presidency*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1998.

Cleveland, William L., and Martin P. Bunton. *A History of the Modern Middle East*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 2009.

Copeland, Miles. *The Game of Nations: The Amorality of Power Politics*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1969.

Dallek, Robert. *Nixon and Kissinger*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007.

Dawisha, Adeed. "Egypt." In *The Cold War and the Middle East*, edited by Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Drysdale, Alasdair, and Raymond Hinnebusch. *Syria and the Middle East Peace Process*. New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 1991.

Ford, Gerald R. *A Time to Heal: The Autobiography of Gerald R. Ford*. London: W.H. Allen, 1979.

Gould, Lewis L. *The Modern American Presidency*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003.

Greenberg, David. "Nixon as Statesman: The Failed Campaign." In *Nixon in the World*, edited by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Greene, John Robert. *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1995.

Hanhimäki, Jussi M. "An Elusive Grand Bargain." In *Nixon in the World*, edited by Andrew Preston and Fredrik Logevall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Hanhimäki, Jussi M. *The Flawed Architect: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Hook, Steven W. *U.S. Foreign Policy: The Paradox of World Power*. Washington D.C.: CQ Press, 2011.

Hopwood, Derek. *Syria 1945-1986: Politics and Society*. London; Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988.

Karsh, Efraim. "Israel." In *The Cold War and the Middle East*, edited by Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Khoury, Philip S. *Syria and the French Mandate : The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Kissinger, Henry. *Crisis - The Anatomy of Two Major Foreign Policy Crises*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Kissinger, Henry. *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1979.

Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Renewal*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999.

Kissinger, Henry. *Years of Upheaval*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1982.

Kyle, Keith. *Suez : Britain's End of Empire in the Middle East*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2003.

Lesch, David W. *Syria and the United States: Eisenhower's Cold War in the Middle East*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992.

Lesch, David W. "Syria: Playing with Fire." In *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, edited by Avi Shlaim and Wm. Roger Louis. Cambridge: Cambridge university press, 2012.

Louis, Wm. Roger, and Avi Shlaim, eds. *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Ma'oz, Moshe. *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus: A Political Biography*. New York: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1988.

Mearsheimer, John J., and Stephen M. Walt. *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. London: Allen Lane, 2007.

Moubayed, Sami. *Syria and the USA: Washington's Relations with Damascus from Wilson to Eisenhower*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2012.

Neff, Donald. *Warriors Against Israel*. Brattleboro: Amana Books, 1988.

Nixon, Richard M. *RN : The Memoirs of Richard Nixon*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.

Nye Jr., Joseph S. *Understanding International Conflicts: An Introduction to Theory and*

History. New York: Pearson/Longman, 2007.

Perthes, Volker. *The Political Economy of Syria Under Asad*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1995.

Preston, Andrew, and Fredrik Logevall, eds. *Nixon in the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Quandt, William B. *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2005.

Reynolds, David. *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century*. Harlow, Essex, U.K: Longman, 2000.

Rusk, Dean. *As I Saw It: A Secretary of State's Memoirs*. London: I.B. Tauris, 1991.

Sayigh, Yazid. *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949-1993*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Seale, Patrick. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

Seale, Patrick. "Syria." In *The Cold War and the Middle East*, edited by Yazid Sayigh and Avi Shlaim. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Seale, Patrick. *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics 1945-1958*. London: Oxford University Press, 1965.

Shannon, Vaughn P. *Balancing Act*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.

Shemesh, Moshe. *The Palestinian Entity 1959-1974: Arab Politics and the PLO*. London: F. Cass, 1988.

Shlaim, Avi. "Israel: Poor Little Samson." In *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, edited by Avi Shlaim and Wm. Roger Louis. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Shlaim, Avi. *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2000.

Siniver, Asaf. *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Traboulsi, Fawwaz. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

Van Dam, Nikolaos. *The Struggle for Power in Syria : Politics and Society Under Asad and the Ba'th Party*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2011.

Waage, Hilde Henriksen. *Konflikt og stormaktspolitikk i Midtøsten*. Kristiansand: Cappelen

Damm akademisk, 2013.

Yapp, M.E. *The Near East since the First World War*. London: Longman, 1991.

Yaqub, Salim. "Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict." In *Nixon in the World*, edited by Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Journal Articles, including reviews

Deeb, Marius. "Review: Asad of Syria by Patrick Seale and the Sphinx of Damascus by Moshe Ma'oz." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1, 1992).

Drysdale, Alasdair. "Review of Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East by Patrick Seale." *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 1990).

Lesch, David W. "When the Relationship Went Sour: Syria and the Eisenhower Administration." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1998): 92–107.

Little, Douglas. "Cold War and Covert Action: The United States and Syria, 1945-1958." *Middle East Journal* 44, no. 1 (1990): 51–75.

Ovendale, Ritchie. "Review of Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East by Patrick Seale." *International Affairs* 67, no. 2 (April 1, 1991).

Preston, Andrew, Schoenbaum, David, and Smith, Tony. Review of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt. Edited by Christopher L. Ball. *H-Diplo Roundtables* VIII, no. 18 (December 15, 2007). http://www.h-net.org/~diplo/roundtables/PDF/IsraelLobby-Roundtable.pdf.

Wight, David M. "Kissinger's Levantine Dilemma: The Ford Administration and the Syrian Occupation of Lebanon." *Diplomatic History* 37, no. 1 (2013).

Miscellaneous Digital Resources

Burr, William. "The Kissinger Papers." *The New York Book Review*, May 20, 1999. http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1999/may/20/the-kissinger-papers/

"Syria Fact Sheet." *U.S. Department of State - Bureau of Public Affairs*, October 24, 2012. http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/3580.htm.

"Syria Maps." *Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection*. Accessed November 10, 2013. http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/syria.html.