

US POLICY, JANUARY-OCTOBER 1973

BARRY RUBIN *

It is now apparent that the United States' policy in the Middle East from 1967 up to the October 1973 war followed the path of least resistance in maintaining US interests in the region.

While it is true that, during this period, US economic interests in the Arab world were greater than in Israel, the incentive to protect these was counter-balanced by two factors. First, on a political-strategic level the US wanted to maintain Israel as a junior partner, a sub-imperialist power in the region. As such, Israel, along with Iran and the most conservative Arab regimes, would protect the US stake in the region: maintaining US investments, keeping out Soviet influence, fighting revolutionary movements within the Arab states, and the Palestinian movement itself.

Secondly, during the six-year period between the two wars the US found the status quo satisfactory. In short, the US was able to give almost complete support to Israel without suffering significant losses in the Arab world, at least up to the summer of 1973.

These two factors led to a reinforcement of the US-Israel alliance for, as Robert Stephens points out, if the US did not want a complete settlement — or was unwilling to pay the price asked by the Arab states — the US still had to find “ways to contain the conflict.”¹ Since the Arab states would gain the most from a war to regain the occupied territories — in the absence of a peaceful settlement in their interests — the US decided that the strengthening of Israel would be the best way to prevent such a war, thus maintaining stability.

The failure of this stability, the Arabs' ability to prove that they could indeed fight and the war crisis itself have forced a re-examination of this approach. Critics of the United States' policy in the Middle East, and pro-US Arab

* Barry Rubin is a member of the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) and has written on the Middle East and international affairs for a number of journals including the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, *American Report* and *Afrique-Asie*.

¹ Robert Stephens, “The Great Powers and the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, II, 4 (Summer 1973), p. 8.

regimes are likely to say, as they have for the last six years, that the disadvantages of the Nixon administration's strategy now outweigh the advantages more clearly than ever before. This may well be true. Nevertheless, the US government may be able to find enough gains in the events surrounding the war to justify a continued pro-Israeli policy.

Before examining the direct effects of the war on US policy, however, it is important to go back and analyse the direction of US diplomacy over the last year in light of these latest developments.

THE US AND THE MIDDLE EAST BEFORE OCTOBER 6

Central to US strategy was the impression made by the Israeli victory of 1967. With relatively little help from the US in the actual fighting, Israel won a stunning victory. No one believed more in Israeli invincibility than US policy-makers and thus no one was more shocked by the Arab successes in the first days of the October 1973 war. This is reflected in the constant emphasis of the US media on the importance of the Arabs proving their ability to fight and on their shattering of the very myth that those magazines and newspapers had done so much to perpetuate. Israel, it had seemed, could handle the situation adequately, even if faced by a united Arab front.

This attitude of the US government encouraged satisfaction with the status quo and blunted efforts at a settlement — especially since the latter would involve pressuring and weakening an ally that had, after all, done so well. Moreover, such an outlook interlocked with the long-term US defence strategy — the Nixon Doctrine — and with the arguments put forward by the Israeli government itself.

Israel's success in protecting US interests and in doing the fighting, asking only for US material aid, is almost an embodiment of the Nixon Doctrine.² As Nixon defined this in his February 18, 1970 address to Congress: "Its central thesis is that the United States will participate in the defence and development of allies and friends, but that America cannot — and will not — conceive all the plans, design all the programmes, execute all the decisions, and undertake all the defence of the free nations of the world. We will help where it makes a difference and is considered in our interest." One of the main reasons for this policy is to avoid the kind of internal dissent that marked US involvement in Vietnam. US involvement in the Middle East, of course, has almost the opposite effect on public opinion of helping the ailing Nixon administration.

All of this is summed up in a recent speech by Senator Henry Jackson. Although not typical of administration policy in general, Jackson's views

² See Barry Rubin, "America's Mid-East Policy: a Marxist Perspective," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, II, 3 (Spring 1973), pp. 51-67.

here merely make Nixon's policies more explicit than the administration would:

Such stability as now obtains in the Middle East is, in my view, largely the result of the strength and Western orientation of Israel on the Mediterranean and Iran on the Persian Gulf. These two countries, reliable friends of the United States, together with Saudi Arabia, have served to inhibit and contain those irresponsible and radical elements in certain Arab states — such as Syria, Libya, Lebanon and Iraq — who, were they free to do so, would pose a grave threat indeed to our principal sources of petroleum in the Persian Gulf. Among the many anomalies of the Middle East must surely be counted the extent to which Saudi Arabia and the sheikhdoms — from which, along with Iran, most of our important oil will flow in the years ahead — will depend for regional stability on the ability of Israel to help provide an environment in which the moderate regimes in Lebanon and Jordan can survive and in which Syria can be contained.³

One of the flaws in this argument, which otherwise contains much truth, was shown by the October war and the oil policies of the above-mentioned countries, in that the Arab peoples and the radical states could develop quite a bit of pressure of their own for mobilization in the struggle against imperialism.

For their part, the Israelis knew how to skilfully play on the US analysis. Their arguments are outlined in a March 7 article in *Haaretz* which outlines the kinds of reasoning — eagerly received in Washington — used by Israeli Premier Golda Meir during her visit.⁴ The article discusses three arguments. First, “We have made it clear to the American administration and people that there is not going to be another Vietnam and that no American blood will be shed. Just as Churchill once said to Roosevelt, we too have said: ‘Give us the tools and we will finish the job.’” Hence, Israel promised fulfilment of the Nixon Doctrine at little human cost to the US, a Middle Eastern form of ‘Vietnamization.’

Second, “a strong Israel with the means of deterrence will not only cause the Arabs to despair of military solutions, and consequently bring the possibility of peace nearer, but will also prevent the conflict becoming a world conflict.” Hence, Israel promised regional stability and containment of the Soviet Union.

Third, “Israel is really a safeguard for the maintenance of American interests in the area. We showed that the Israeli army — with its absolute

³ *MERIP Reports*, No. 21, p. 20.

⁴ Yoel Marcus, *Haaretz*, March 7, 1973; quoted in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, II, 4 (Summer 1973), pp. 125-27.

not its relative strength — is the first line of defence for American interests in the Mediterranean basin.... We are also the main safeguard for the protection of the Islamic regimes that are loyal to them in the area.” Hence, Israel promised that the US did not need friendly relations with the Arabs, since the latter would be kept in line with the stick rather than the carrot.

On many occasions the US connected a stability favouring US interests and a strong Israel (holding the territories occupied in the 1967 war). Thus Nixon himself stressed, as early as July 1970, that “once the balance of power shifts where Israel is weaker than its neighbours, there will be war.”⁵

But this, the US thought, was not happening. Even during one of the high points of diplomatic activity — Nixon’s “Middle East month” of February 1973 — this point of view still held sway. One *New York Times* story from Washington said that “Middle East experts have stressed that there seems to be no cause for urgency and that a strong case could be made for preserving the status quo.”⁶ The following day another *Times* article quoted “high-ranking American military analysts” as saying they believed the balance of power to be in Israel’s favour. The State and Defense Departments dismissed the importance of detente in the Arab world. “Military planners,” the article continued, “say that in the unlikely event that Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Libya might suddenly pool their air forces and mount a coordinated attack they would not be expected to be able to defeat Israel...” To ensure this, 22 of 80 promised A-4 Skyhawks and 22 of 42 additional Phantom planes, pledged to Israel in late 1971, had already been delivered.⁷

In this context, as we shall discuss later, all Arab concessions, particularly Egyptian ones, were seen as signs of weakness which only confirmed the views already held by US leaders.

Two other relatively minor points should be mentioned in passing. The ambiguity of American policy on negotiations over the past three years matches the ambiguity of US economic interests in the region. In some ways, US strategy naturally tended toward delay. Although at times, particularly 1971, the US went further than the Israeli government wanted, it generally drifted. This drift favoured the Israelis’ desire to maintain the status quo, as Egypt clearly realized.

In addition there is a tendency, which should not be overestimated, for the US to become the prisoner of its junior partners, as the case of South Vietnam shows. This kind of development results after years of propaganda

⁵ Malcolm Kerr, “Nixon’s Policy Prospects,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, II, 3 (Spring 1973), p. 24.

⁶ *New York Times*, February 7, 1973.

⁷ *New York Times*, February 8, 1973.

by the American government and within the US for the cause of its client state. Especially given Israel's powerful internal lobby, it is difficult for the US to simply turn its whole policy mechanism around overnight to meet policy contingencies, in this case pressuring Israel for concessions.

All these considerations have appeared in the kind and amount of aid that the US has dispensed in the Middle East since 1967. Israel received \$ 414 million in economic aid and \$ 985 million in military aid for a total of \$ 1.4 billion. All Arab states received a total of \$ 1.1 million in aid with only \$ 250 million for military purposes (half of this to Jordan) and \$ 890 in economic assistance (half to Morocco and Tunisia).⁸ But this policy may not have been beneficial for US economic interests. These include a \$ 3 billion volume of trade between the US and the Middle East in 1972,⁹ and US oil interests in the region estimated at over \$ 6 billion.¹⁰ Even given the tacit alliance between the US and conservative oil monarchies, some American petroleum companies began to rethink their policies. Mobil Oil (Standard Oil of New York) and Standard Oil of California, both Rockefeller-owned companies, began to call for a more "even-handed" policy to protect their investments. "It is time now," a Mobil advertisement said, "for the world to insist on a settlement in the Middle East."¹¹

Still, the US government took an instinctively global view. Asked why the US provided unlimited aid to Israel during a July 1972 visit, US Deputy Secretary of State Joseph Sisco replied, "Yes, our aid to Israel is immense, I admit that. But you must remember that America is looking after its interests. It does not see the Middle East crisis as a question of Israel and the Arab countries, it sees it from the angle of the general political situation and its requirements."¹²

Often it seemed as if, in Michael Hudson's words, a plausible explanation of US behaviour was that the US wanted "to give the Arabs the impression that it might yet intervene in their favour while in fact doing nothing but marking time, allowing the Israelis to further consolidate their position. Certainly, the Egyptians' unhappy experience with the Rogers Plan in the first Nixon administration lends credence to such an interpretation."¹³

⁸ *U.S. News and World Report*, October 22, 1973.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *U.S. News and World Report*, August 27, 1973.

¹¹ *Christian Science Monitor*, August 20, 1973.

¹² *Al-Ra'y al-'Am*, July 6, 1972; cited in *Journal of Palestine Studies*, II, 1 (Autumn 1972), p. 165.

¹³ Michael Hudson, "The U.S. and the Middle East in the Second Nixon Administration," American Committee for Justice in the Middle East (Boulder, Colorado, 1973), p. 2.

Such a policy could not have succeeded if the conservative regimes had not been involved in the performance. Thus, Iranian Shah Muhammad Pahlevi as late as October 4 was telling Egyptian newspapers that he had urged an "even-handed policy" on the US during his trip to Washington and thought he "got receptive ears."¹⁴ Similar statements were made by Saudi Arabian officials and by King Hussein of Jordan.

Dozens of examples can be given of how the US press reflected official US desires to constantly keep hopes for a settlement high among the Arabs. For instance, an editorial in the *Washington Post* of October 4, only two days before fighting broke out, described the granting of a contract to a US firm for construction of a major oil pipeline in Egypt in these terms: "Plainly, the political risk and economic cost are unacceptable unless American participation is linked to the widely heralded second-term Nixon initiative to try to bring about an Arab-Israeli settlement... . Only if the Nixon administration does in fact have such a Mideast initiative at one or another stage of readiness does it make sense to play the role now proposed in the Egyptian pipeline." But the major initiatives previously promised never seemed to materialize and two days later the Middle East was at war again.

THE INEVITABILITY OF WAR

When fighting broke out the US press was at a loss to explain why. The two leading news-magazines, *Time* and *Newsweek*, in their October 15 issues labelled the timing of the attack "inexplicable" and "a mystery." While no one had predicted the renewal of fighting, the renewed military conflict is not at all surprising in the light of diplomatic developments during the past year.

In 1970 the Egyptians had moved to accept the Rogers Plan and the following year they had cooperated with the Jarring Mission. In 1972 the Egyptians had even expelled Soviet advisers to increase US interest in a settlement. Nothing worked. It is worthwhile to recall the chronology leading up to the war to understand the complete refusal of the US to work for a peaceful settlement, even one that might well be in the US favour and aimed at eliminating Soviet influence and crushing the Palestinian resistance.¹⁵

1. The Visits of Ismail and Meir to Washington

On February 17, 1973, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat announced his decision to send his national security affairs adviser Hafez Ismail to "press

¹⁴ *New York Times*, October 4, 1973.

¹⁵ The following chronology is assembled from contemporary articles, from the Summer 1973 issue of *Middle East Journal* and from numbers 2-8 (vols. I and II) of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*.

on President Nixon the need for diplomatic action in the Middle East.” Thus began the US’s “Middle East month” which ran into mid-March. This was one in a series of “cycles” of negotiations of which there were several major periods between February and October. Each of these began with Arab offers or concessions, were fuelled by US public statements calling for negotiations or a settlement and concluded with an act by the US government which showed it had little interest in any such settlement.

Ismail met with Nixon and Secretary of State William Rogers on February 23. The *Christian Science Monitor* quoted “diplomatic informants” as saying Ismail told Nixon that Egypt was willing to give the US a “last chance” to lead the way to a settlement. Two days later the US responded favourably, with Sisco saying the governments of the Middle East were “still committed to a political solution” and “we think the doors of diplomacy are open.” The next day, February 26, Meir arrived in Washington. Rather than pressure Israel for a settlement at this point, however, the US apparently did just the opposite. On March 1 a US government spokesman said that Nixon assured Meir of “continuing US support for Israel.” On March 12 Meir arrived home and said “there is no basis” for changing Israel’s policy on a Middle East settlement and that she had not detected any US reluctance concerning arms deliveries to Israel. It is also appropriate to note the analysis of her visit discussed in the March 7 *Haaretz* article quoted above.

2. Saudi Oil Threat Ignored

In a second cycle, on March 29 a State Department spokesman said that talks with Middle East leaders indicated an “interim solution” remained the only way to bridge the chasm between Israel and the Arabs. A few days later, *Newsweek* quoted Sadat as saying that Egypt could agree to international control of Sharm al-Sheikh.

This was reinforced on April 18, when Saudi oil minister Ahmad Yamani told the *Washington Post* that Saudi Arabia would not expand oil production unless the US altered its pro-Israel stand. These two important statements — one a concession, the other a warning — had to be met with a US response. Therefore, on April 19, Secretary of State Rogers said the US would try to persuade the Arabs and Israel to begin “a genuine negotiating process.” In a major speech in May, Deputy Secretary of State Sisco blamed both sides for “lost opportunities”; during a trip to Israel he publicly called for new ideas. Again, nothing much happened. By June 18 the *Christian Science Monitor* was reporting a four-year agreement to sell Israel 48 Phantoms and 36 Skyhawks. According to Pentagon officials, the US had agreed to give Israel \$ 300 million in military supplies in 1973. This may not have been as much as the Israelis wanted but was the average for the last few years.

Finally, on July 25, the US vetoed a Security Council resolution, which only it opposed, that condemned Israel's continued occupation and expressed concern at Israel's lack of cooperation with the Jarring Mission.

3. *American Nonchalance, August-September*

A third cycle developed in August in connection with Arab economic concessions. David Rockefeller, board chairman of the powerful Chase Manhattan Bank, visited Cairo. New arrangements were worked out for a vast expansion of the activities of the US-controlled World Bank (headed by former US Defense Secretary Robert McNamara) in the Arab world, and Egypt continued to ease restrictions on foreign investments. Moreover, Bechtel, Inc. received the \$ 400 million contract for the Egyptian pipeline, and the Brown and Root Construction Company, which has important establishment connections in the US, got a \$ 117 million contract from Iraq for building port facilities on the Gulf. These opportunities, however, were apparently interpreted by the US as indicating Arab weaknesses; perhaps the ability of American capital to gain these concessions was even thought of as proof of the success of the policy the US had been following.

Meanwhile, the US was making a series of contradictory moves which led only in circles. Sisco had publicly called for Israel to "prime the pump" of negotiations with new ideas but Israelis claimed that Sisco had privately told their Washington ambassador, Simcha Dinitz, that this statement was only to keep the Arabs "off the US's back." John Scali, the US ambassador to the UN, voted to condemn Israel for seizure of a Lebanese airliner,¹⁶ the first US vote against Israel since 1969, but then said that this signalled no change in policy. From the viewpoint of the Arab conservatives these were lost opportunities but from the US's conception they were all part of its overall strategy.

This set the stage for Nixon's widely discussed press conference on September 5, 1973. "Both sides," Nixon said, are at fault. "Both sides need to start negotiating... We are pro-peace. And it's in the interest of the whole area for us to get those negotiations off dead centre." Although the press conference also included a direct threat against Libya over its nationalization of US oil companies, the whole machine of officially inspired optimism started up again. This time, however, the veneer was thinner than ever. Even the September 7 *Christian Science Monitor* admitted that "for several years the Israelis have had a close and generous relationship with Washington, receiving all the financial, political and military support they have wanted without having to make any concessions to the Arabs."

¹⁶ *Keesing's Archives*, September 10-16, 1973, p. 26086.

Administration officials stated later that there would be no move until the Israeli elections (at that time scheduled October 29 but later postponed because of the war). Further, the Israelis themselves hardly seemed upset about Nixon's statement. Israeli diplomats said on September 7 that Nixon had been "correct" in rejecting any Arab pressure to use oil to change the American position in the Middle East, although they were not pleased about being blamed equally for the failure of negotiations to get off the ground. They said that they did not believe the White House would apply the kind of pressure "on Israel that it did in 1969-71 to reach a compromise settlement." Israeli Foreign Ministry officials in Jerusalem noted that Nixon had not spoken of pressuring Israel but of moving toward negotiations. "That's fine," one said. "That's exactly what we want."¹⁷

Although we may never know the exact date that the Egyptians and Syrians decided on military action we might at least state that disappointment with this failure of Nixon's press conference to stimulate action must have been a factor.

What might have been the final straw was the failure of the new Secretary of State Henry Kissinger in his speech before the UN General Assembly on September 25 to offer any new proposal. Cairo radio described Kissinger's remarks as "general" and "noncommittal." In his UN speech, the new Secretary of State said the US recognized "our special obligation... in the search for just solutions in those parts of the world now torn by strife such as the Middle East." He counted the Middle East, Cyprus, south Asia and the Congo as areas where UN machinery had been effective in "fact-finding, mediation and peace-keeping missions." The Cairo daily *al-Akhbar* discounted the speech, finding it "does not indicate at all that the United States aims to give priority to efforts to solve the Mideast crisis, as President Nixon announced at his last news conference." Nixon, *al-Akhbar* continued, had said this "only to tranquillize Arabs who showed their determination to use oil as a political weapon against the United States because of its support for Israel." This was intended to allow Israel to "stabilize" its occupation of Arab territory, the newspaper concluded.¹⁸

On the other hand, Israeli ambassador Joseph Tekoah who "was obviously delighted with the speech" said, "This was one of the most impressive addresses I've ever heard. We welcome the statement of the desire to see practical progress made toward peace and the emphasis that the US cannot substitute itself for the parties."¹⁹ From the Arab point of view, the situation must have become intolerable.

¹⁷ *New York Times*, September 8, 1973.

¹⁸ *Christian Science Monitor*, September 26, 1973.

¹⁹ *New York Times*, September 25, 1973.

At Kissinger's luncheon the following day, representatives of thirteen Arab countries and two Arab League envoys came to hear the new US Secretary of State's views. It may well have been the United States' last chance to forestall the war. Kissinger said the US would be ready to assist in finding a settlement but that none of the parties should expect that it could bring forth "miracles." "What is necessary," Kissinger said, "is to find ways to turn what is presently unacceptable to you into a situation with which you can live." This — maintenance of the status quo — was the real US position, but Kissinger went on to say that "emphasis must be put on the most practical means of finding accommodations in the area" and pledged an "open attitude."²⁰

(Even this was later diluted when "US officials said that Kissinger clearly meant to convey to the Arabs that there is no American interest in an imposed solution, but that a settlement will have to be arrived at among the parties.")²¹

At the luncheon, Mahmoud Riad, Secretary-General of the Arab League, in reply to Kissinger, repeated the Arab demand that Israel must withdraw from the occupied territories if there was to be peace. Riad said that the Arabs still sought a peaceful solution but that he was concerned that unless this was achieved the area could once again be inflamed in fighting.

US MILITARY PREPARATIONS

A high-level Egyptian politician told the editor of *Newsweek* in mid-October that "Israel is anxious to suck everyone into this war, especially the United States. If this happens, it would put the US on the firing line against Egypt and another Vietnam would ensue."

While direct US military intervention in the Middle East remained doubtful, it was always possible. A few months preceding the fourth Arab-Israeli war the US was training troops in desert fighting.

In August, about 9000 US Marines and Marine reservists participated in manoeuvres in the 932-square-mile military base at Twenty-Nine Palms, California. The five-day war games, called Alkali Canyon '73, tested soldiers and equipment under desert conditions. Some of the participating troops from the Second Marine Division left for service in the Mediterranean immediately afterwards and were off Crete with the Sixth Fleet during the war.²²

The plan for Alkali Canyon '73 centered around two mythical desert states called Yermonia and Argos. Yermonia, with "Communist support and

²⁰ *Washington Post*, September 26, 1973.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *U.S. News and World Report*, August 27, 1973; *Time*, August 27, 1973; *Washington Post*, September 24, 1973.

weaponry,” decides to “invade” its neighbour with whom it has “ideological differences.” The US builds up its fleet in the sea touching both countries and then lands Marines and other units to “repel the invaders and preserve American lives and property.”

The political aims of these manoeuvres came out clearly. “Come on, men,” urged Sergeant Greg Anderson as he climbed aboard his tank, “We’re out here to get practice so we can grab the oil.” (Ironically, in the operation the military used up about 700,000 gallons of gasoline.)

Colonel Jerry O’Leary told reporters, “The Pentagon has a computer plan for the invasion of every civilized country in the world. The Middle East is the obvious powder keg, and we’d be fools if we didn’t prepare.”

An even larger operation in April, “Gallant Hand ’73” was even more explicit. This manoeuvre involved 30,000 soldiers and airmen in Texas. The scenario for the operation is almost an exact duplicate of the history of the Arab-Israeli struggle since 1948. Finally Tuscola (Egypt) with support from Richland (the Soviet Union) invades Belton (Israel). The latter requests US aid and a US task force is landed in Belton to attempt to dissuade intervention by Richland.

Only a month before the beginning of the October war, soldiers at Fort Hood, a major US armoured unit base in Texas, reported that most of the Second Armoured Division vehicles there were desert camouflaged and that during September further manoeuvres were held at Fort Bliss, including a week of desert training.

All of this was to make the presence of the US fleet in the eastern Mediterranean during the war a source of pressure on the Arab world, if not of direct intervention.

THE FOURTH ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

There is little break in continuity between US policy of the period before the fighting began on October 6 and that until the UN-supervised truce. Although it will be many months, perhaps years, before a full story of US diplomacy during the war is known, a few points can be made at this time.

When the fighting broke out Kissinger called Nixon, spoke to Israeli and Arab foreign ministers in New York, flew to Washington and called up members of the UN Security Council. The evening of October 6, Kissinger chaired a meeting of the Washington Special Action Group, a “crisis management team” including representatives from the State and Defense Departments, the CIA and the National Security Council.

The US’s aims seemed to be to prevent an Israeli defeat, to aid Israel in every way possible short of direct US involvement and to prevent the war

from spreading by trying to limit Soviet aid to the Arabs. Meanwhile, the US was mobilizing for support to Israel. On October 6 the 48 ships and 30,000 men of the Sixth Fleet were placed on alert, and the following day they left their home-port at Athens for the waters off Crete. Eventually this force included two attack carriers and two amphibious assault carriers, the latter each carrying about 2000 Marines trained in desert warfare.

In the first days of the war the Arab forces astonished the world with their crossing of the Suez Canal. Israel now was on the defensive. Publicly, at least, the US called for a return to the 1967 cease-fire lines — that is to the pre-October 6 positions — a move that would have cancelled out the Egyptian advances on the east bank of the Suez Canal. Since the Arabs and Soviet Union showed little interest in this kind of retreat, the US stepped up its aid to Israel, initiating an airlift of rockets, replacement jets, ammunition and other equipment.

By the end of the war's second week the tide began to turn militarily. After the Kosygin-Sadat meetings in Cairo, October 17-18, the Soviets called for a cease-fire to try to preserve the Egyptian position. But this situation was already being undermined by Israeli advances. The day Kissinger arrived in Moscow was the same day that the first firm reports came in of Israeli successes on the west bank of the Canal. The Soviets and Egyptians probably wished to rush the cease-fire to prevent further Israeli advances. The US, publicly agreeing to the cease-fire while privately not unhappy with developments, saw the military situation and front-line status quo altering in Israel's favour each day. By the time the cease-fire was being implemented, the Egyptians were in serious trouble as a result of the Israelis' crossing of the Canal and of their ability to move southward after the cease-fire and cut off forces of the Third Army Corps on the east side of the Canal.

Domestic Factors Influencing US Policy

There were two other important developments for the Nixon administration during this time. First, the oil production cutbacks, which had been threatened since the summer, began to be carried out. Eleven Arab countries decreased production from 5 to 10 per cent while the major producers completely cut off shipments to the US. Since yielding to such pressure was contrary to US strategy, the US government at first minimized the impact of this on the public, incorrectly quoting figures to suggest that only about 6 per cent of US petroleum requirements came from the boycotting countries, whereas the correct figure is estimated at closer to 20 per cent.

In addition there was the domestic political situation, according to many observers the most serious since the Civil War. The crisis involved the resignation of Nixon's vice-president, Spiro Agnew, over well-documented charges

of corruption, the forced resignation of Nixon's Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General and new disputes over concealed evidence in the Watergate case. Some observers considered that Nixon could use the Middle East war to strengthen his position. Pressure to lessen criticism was brought on those within the government protesting against Nixon's handling of the scandal. Nixon's press secretary, Ronald Ziegler, hinted at such a campaign when he said that Watergate investigator Archibald Cox, whom Nixon had fired, had defied "instructions from the President... at a time of serious world crisis." The *Washington Post* added that one week before Cox's ouster, Attorney General Elliot Richardson received special briefings "to impress upon him the serious magnitude of the Middle East crisis."²³ Pressure was also applied on Cox's deputy by Nixon's chief of White House staff, Alexander Haig, who urged him to give special concern to the gravity of the international situation.

In a press conference on October 23, Haig said that there was fear that some foreign governments might interpret the internal dispute in the US as a sign of American weakness.²⁴

Nixon was able to use his support of Israel to win a respite from liberal members of Congress who desired his impeachment but supported his Middle East policy, and who would support his call for a \$ 2.2 billion appropriation for the Israeli war effort. As Defense Secretary James Schlesinger noted, "There may be some irony that it has been typically those on the Hill who have voted regularly to reduce defence expenditures across the board who have most vigorously pressed the Department to supply fully all of Israel's needs." He continued, "The Middle Eastern experience exemplified the responsibilities which confront the United States as well as the dilemmas that flow from those responsibilities."²⁵ Nixon took the opportunity to veto — temporarily, as it turned out — a congressional resolution which would have limited his war-making powers. Using the Middle East war as an excuse, Nixon said the bill would have "seriously impaired" his efforts in the region.²⁶

Finally, the war was used to strengthen the Pentagon's budget demands in the face of congressional calls for cuts in military expenditures. Five days after the war broke out, a House-Senate committee restored most of the money that had been pared from the military budget in previous congressional action. There was little opposition in Congress to the supply airlift, which included *inter alia* kinds of anti-personnel bombs that had drawn lawmakers' protests when they had been used in Vietnam.

²³ *Washington Post*, October 23, 1973.

²⁴ *New York Times*, October 26, 1973.

²⁵ *Washington Post*, October 25, 1973.

²⁶ *Washington Post*, October 25, 1973.

By ignoring the oil cutbacks and by taking advantage domestically of the war, the Nixon administration was able substantially to continue its pre-war, pro-Israel policy.

Consequently, the US did not, as it might have, pressure Israel into an immediate cease-fire or into a position of supporting the full implications of UN Resolution 242 — withdrawal from all occupied territories. In fact, Meir said her interpretation of meetings with Kissinger was that “Mr. Kissinger assured us... that not only did the United States have no proposals concerning the future frontiers of Israel but that it considered that its good offices should be limited to bringing the two parties together to allow the two interested sides to discuss the proposals that each of them had brought to the negotiating table.”²⁷

The Military Alert

The post-cease-fire (October 22) Israeli offensive was of crucial importance for subsequent events. As the *Christian Science Monitor* observed, if the original cease-fire had been observed “the new military boundaries on the Suez Canal front would have been of net advantage to Egypt. Its troops were strung out along most of the east bank of the canal, while the Israelis had only a bridgehead on the west bank.”²⁸ But the Israelis by attacking after the cease-fire changed the complexion of the military situation. Now Israel was holding a large amount of territory on the west bank of the Canal and the Egyptian Third Army Corps, holding the southern part of the east bank of the Canal, was almost completely surrounded. The Soviets and Egypt quickly asserted that the US had tricked them and that the Israelis’ stated willingness to accept the agreed cease-fire “proved, in fact,” according to the official Soviet statement, “a gross lie under the cover of which the Israeli military perfidiously attacked the positions of Egyptian troops as well as peaceful populated localities in the Arab Republic of Egypt.”²⁹

These developments are necessary to an understanding of the reasons for the US military alert of October 25-27. Perhaps a key reason for ordering the alert was to strengthen Nixon’s domestic position by creating a feeling of international crisis requiring national unity; but it was also no doubt aimed against the developing Soviet and Egyptian counter-attack to the Israeli offensive. At an October 27 press conference, Nixon said that three days earlier he had received information that the “Soviet Union was planning to send a very substantial force to the Mideast.” Whether or not the USSR had

²⁷ *Washington Post*, October 24, 1973.

²⁸ *Christian Science Monitor*, October 27, 1973.

²⁹ *Washington Post*, October 24, 1973.

been planning to do this Nixon knew that the Soviet move was intended to pressure Israel to honour its commitments and to obtain an Israeli withdrawal to the cease-fire lines of October 22. He tried to face this challenge by threatening nuclear war.

The importance Nixon attributed to the stakes is indicated by the size of the forces put on alert: some two million US soldiers around the globe, including the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the Strategic Air Command and some National Guard and Reserve Units. Ironically, the last time the 82nd Airborne Division had been similarly mobilized was in September 1970, to prepare to support Jordan's King Hussein in his war against the Palestinians.

POST-WAR POSSIBILITIES

Given that the aims of the United States' policy in the Middle East remain the same the events of the October war will nevertheless require some drastic changes in strategy and tactics. The events of October have challenged three main assumptions of past US policy. The Arabs' strong military showing has thrown into question the possibility of Israel retaining military control over the region. Secondly, a pro-Israel policy now appears to entail heavy losses in the Arab world, particularly through Arab take-overs of oil investments and cutbacks in petroleum exports.³⁰ Finally, the Arabs have shown an unexpected capacity for concerted action and a determination to fight over and over again to regain what they consider their lawful rights. It was no longer so clear whether a strong Israel could, in the future, serve to guarantee stability in the Middle East, as was assumed to be within its capacity from 1967 to October 1973.

The US will have to take into account some changes on the world scene where the US and its Israeli ally have been extremely isolated. Third World countries firmly sided with the Arabs out of solidarity, while Western European countries were concerned about Arab oil power. In July 1972, Nixon had pointed out that "without aid to Greece and aid to Turkey we have no viable policy to save Israel."³¹ But during the October war, Turkey, Greece, Spain and Italy refused to allow US bases in their countries to be used

³⁰ It should be noted, though, that so far US oil companies have not been hurt by price increases of crude oil. Their profits have literally zoomed upward during the last year (*New York Times*, October 25, 1973). In addition, there might also be other losses. The government of Bahrain decided during the war to close the US naval base there and cancel all facilities.

³¹ *New York Times*, October 25, 1973. See also Rubin, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.

for supplying Israel, and Britain took the same position privately.³² West Germany made a special protest after learning of the covert loading with military goods of Israeli ships docked in German ports. Only Portugal, which had been using considerable US aid for its colonial wars in Africa, allowed the US to use its bases in the Azores.

African countries also sided with the Arabs. Only Malawi and African countries dependent upon South Africa did not cut off diplomatic relations with Israel.³³

Both Nixon and Kissinger publicly stated that their wish was to keep the diplomatic options open. In a post-war press conference, Kissinger declared: "Our position is that ... the conditions that produced this war were clearly intolerable to the Arab nations and that in a process of negotiations it will be necessary to make substantial concessions. ... We will make a major effort to bring about a solution that is considered just by all parties."³⁴ Nixon went even further, saying that the US was working for a permanent settlement. "I think I could safely say that the chance for not just a cease-fire, which we presently have and which, of course, we have had in the Mid-East for some time, but the outlook for permanent peace is the best that it has been in 20 years."³⁵

This kind of statement has been made before; it was used during the last six years without any attempt to put it into practice, to convince the Arab states that the US was serious about effecting peace in the area. A mere repetition of such statements will not satisfy the Arabs. Failure to find a solution along the lines of Resolution 242 at this point could only be an invitation to renewed warfare in the region. And even such a solution, although it would in many ways be a victory for the Arab world, would still leave unsolved fundamental aspects of the problem of the Palestinians and the demand for the return of their national rights. Certainly, after a half-century's rejection of Zionism, they are not likely to renounce their rights now.

³² *Washington Post*, October 25, 1973.

³³ *Africa News Service*, I, 36, (October 29 1973), pp. 8-9, 12; *New York Post*, October 25, 1973; *New York Times*, October 25, 1973; *Christian Science Monitor*, October 27, 1973.

³⁴ *New York Times*, October 26, 1973.

³⁵ *New York Times*, October 27, 1973.