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THE MAN WITH A PLAN

The recent bout of Israeli breast-beating and recycled recrimination, occasioned by the 30th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, left comparatively untouched the leading, indeed crucial, role of former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger.

Kissinger had not played a direct part in the Israeli dispute with the Arabs, but during his period as president Nixon's national security adviser he had established a secret line of contact with Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's senior adviser, Hafiz Ismael. Evidently that line became active only when he was appointed secretary of state in September 1973.

Now, two days after his appointment, he addressed the annual session of the UN General Assembly and already there declared that the US had a 'special obligation in the search for a Middle East settlement.'

The very next day he publicly gave a hint of what that might mean - and on whose side he was. He spoke to a gathering of Arab delegates to the UN and then, as reported in the New York Times, he assured them that 'the US understood the Arab concern over the current Middle East stalemate,' and that it was necessary to 'find ways of creating a situation with which you can live.'

Eleven days later, on Yom Kippur, Egypt launched the war against Israel; and Kissinger became the self-confessed mastermind who prevented the consummation of Israel's historic military victory. He had the essentials all planned. When war broke out, he wrote in his memoirs: 'I was convinced from the first that we were in a good position to dominate events... At its end - if we played our hand well - the Arab countries might abandon reliance on Soviet pressure and seek goals through cooperation with the United States.'

He did not, heaven forbid, want Israel to be defeated. That would be quite undesirable. He wanted Israel to beat Egypt, not to crush her, and then turn over to Egypt the fruits of Israel's victory.

On the evening of Saturday, October 20, 1973, the 15th day of the war, a crowd of newspapermen greeted Abba Eban, the Israeli foreign minister, arriving at Lod Airport from the United States. They all wanted to know whether the sudden visit of Kissinger to Moscow meant that a cease-fire was being discussed.

Eban had taken leave of Kissinger in Washington the previous day, and Kissinger had not mentioned that he was about to travel to the Soviet Union to discuss a cease-fire. Hiding his discomfiture, Eban - who claimed a close personal friendship with 'Henry' - told the newsmen that the meeting in Moscow was no doubt simply part of the regular diplomatic exchanges between the two powers, and had nothing to do with the war.

'The subject of a cease-fire' he said, 'is simply not on the agenda. It is our victory that will hold the key to any subsequent political move. At the moment I see no prospect of a cease-fire. The Americans believe we will gain a victory, because this is important to them.'

The next morning the truth came out. The moment it had become clear beyond any doubt that Israel was about to gain a resounding victory over Egypt - which signified, not less important, a victory for American arms over Russian arms - Moscow appealed to Washington to negotiate a resolution at the UN for an immediate cease-fire.

Both the Americans, and no less the Russians, did not want the Egyptians to suffer a humiliating defeat. The Israelis were not to be informed until after agreement was reached. (Not so the Egyptians who, with Russian prime minister Kosygin in Cairo and with Israeli forces at the gates of Cairo, had initiated the appeal).

THE EGYPTIAN attack had come as a complete surprise to both Israel and the US. The humiliation of the Egyptian defeat was consequently all the more harrowing to them after the brilliant successes they had achieved at the opening of the war. That beginning had been literally disastrous to Israel. The weakness of Israeli intelligence was plain for all to see. It was no excuse that American intelligence had been equally blind.

The year after the war an Egyptian writer had written a description of how the Egyptian deception had been carried out. It had begun in 1972 with the heavily publicized expulsion of a host of Russian advisers. In fact the expulsion was a blind, in which the Russians gleefully cooperated. Sadat himself described the deception as a 'magnificent achievement.'

Slovenly intelligence, however, was not the only Israeli failure. The physical maintenance of arms had been neglected. The consequence was not only, for example, the loss of 49 planes in the first four days due to the hand-held Russian SA missiles, but the loss of 500 tanks - 400 on the Egyptian front.

Almost immediately after the outbreak of war, a dangerous shortage of materiel loomed. The Egyptians had crossed the Suez Canal and gained some ground to the east. Defense minister Moshe Dayan was in a panic, and actually advised prime minister Golda Meir that Israel should withdraw to the heart of Sinai. Meir urged ambassador Simcha Dinitz in Washington to push harder for immediate resupply. She began to fear, and told Dinitz, that Israel was losing the war.

Dinitz had presented Israel's requests day after day to Kissinger, and was daily being given evasive answers. Kissinger claimed that it was the secretary of defense James Schlesinger who was holding things up. As the week went by he even charged Schlesinger's aide William Clements with responsibility.

Then an argument developed in the Administration over the means for transporting the arms. Kissinger opposed using army planes and pressed for approaching private charter

companies. But this was hopelessly inadequate, and private companies were unwilling to go into war zones.

In the end, a week passed before (on October 13) the resupply of arms began to be carried to Tel Aviv by military planes.

Kissinger would tell a delegation of US Jewish leaders that he would expedite emergency arms for Israel if the Jewish leaders undertook to try to block the Jackson-Vanick amendment which blocked most-favored-nation trade status for the Soviet Union - a key goal of the Soviet Jewry movement.

The Jewish group was stunned, but believing that Israel's very existence might be endangered, they agreed to Kissinger's demand. A month after the war they reported on their decision to the Executive of the World Zionist Organization in Jerusalem. Their reasoning was put succinctly by one of their spokesmen, Professor Allan Pollack:

'Because of the crisis, and we are foremost concerned with Israel, when the secretary of state directly and indirectly came and said this is what he wants, we agreed, whether rightly or wrongly, that if the survival of Israel is at stake, we are not going to sit there maintaining our own position. So we would go and do what he asked.'

That indeed is how the Jewish delegation had come to Senator Jackson. They had been given a thunderous reception. He gave them a merciless tongue-lashing. 'If you are prepared to abandon your brothers in the Soviet Union, I am not. In any case' he added, 'I am fighting for free immigration for everybody, not only for Jews.' And so that Kissinger ploy failed.

Jackson at once went to see the president and told him bluntly that his original order for urgent resupply of Israel was not being carried out. Nixon acted swiftly, evidently gave Schlesinger a direct order, and the arms began to flow.

Israel's advance was swift. IDF units crossed the canal, outflanking the Egyptian Third Army, and within days reached the gates of Cairo (as well as Damascus).

At this point came the cease-fire which seemed the culminating success of Kissinger's diplomacy. The Egyptians then and for evermore claimed that it was Israel that had asked for a cease-fire, and that Egypt had won the war. The subsequent negotiations led to Israel's almost complete withdrawal.

There was one snag, however, which provided one more example of Kissinger's proclivities. The Israeli forces had surrounded the Egyptian Third Army and almost completely cut off their communications. After the cease-fire the Israelis reported that the Egyptians had tried forcibly to break out. They had been stopped and the IDF had intensified the siege.

Kissinger demanded that Israel should not force the Egyptian Third Army to surrender, but to allow food and medicines to reach them.

Dayan's angry riposte was, so he reported, that in all history no such thing had ever been known to happen. Whereupon Kissinger angrily retorted: 'The Russians say that unless you consent, they will send in their aircraft to deliver the supplies.'

Dayan: 'That is what the Russians said. And what about you? What was our answer to that?'

Kissinger: 'We are not going to risk an atomic war on account of three million people in the Middle East!'

In the face of such a threat, Dayan felt he had no choice but to acquiesce, and Israel's hand in the forthcoming negotiations was drastically weakened.

Dayan later realized that he had been hoodwinked, and indeed, on examination of Kissinger's blow-by-blow negotiations with the Russians, there is not a smidgen of a hint of an atomic threat by the Russians. In a public lecture in May 1974, Dayan declared:

'The Americans denied us the fruits of victory. It was an ultimatum. Had the US not pressed us, the Third Army and Suez City would have had to surrender. We would have captured 30,000 to 40,000 soldiers and Sadat would have had to admit it to his people. We might have held them only for a day and let them walk out without their arms, but it would have changed the whole Egyptian attitude about whether they won the war or not.'

In the negotiations that followed Kissinger, backing Sadat solidly, ensured the resumption more or less of the status quo, and Egypt celebrates the October victory every year.