

研究会記録

The Unexpected Expansions of Arab-Israeli Warfare in 1956, 1967, and 1973

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The Arab-Israeli regional conflict that erupted in an international war in 1948-49 festered for decades thereafter. Israel and its five Arab adversaries negotiated armistices that curtailed open warfare in 1949, but because they were unable to reach formal peace treaties, a state of war persisted. Perpetual tension, political and economic conflicts, and border skirmishes ensued, and were punctuated by short but intense outbursts of international warfare in 1956, 1967, and 1973. Those wars inflamed passions, altered borders, destabilized the region, and even threatened to embroil the great powers in armed conflict.

This article will examine the Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1956, 1967, and 1973, viewing them as unexpected expansions of the war that had persisted legally and practically since 1948. It will examine the origins of each round of warfare in its international and regional contexts, clarifying the security and other factors that triggered the resumption of hostilities and the war aims of each belligerent. Attention will be paid to the causes and consequences of each violent episode, the political and strategic interventions by external powers, and the complications that followed. Finally, the article will analyze the outcome of each outburst, including the extent to which the underlying controversies and conflicts were resolved or aggravated.

1956

The Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948-49 were suspended by a series of armistice agreements signed in early 1949 between Israel and Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria. (Iraq withdrew its troops from the battle front without an armistice.) In the absence of formal peace treaties, however, the belligerents engaged in political and economic contests that teetered between rivalry and war. There were bitter arguments about borders, control of Jerusalem, and the legal rights of some 1 million Palestinian refugees. There

were trade embargoes, maritime blockades, and contests for control of the precious fresh water of the Jordan River. There were episodes of low-intensity warfare along the borders of Israel, featuring an escalating cycle of armed incursions by irregular Palestinian fighters followed by devastating Israeli reprisals. Most famously, after an Israeli woman and her two children were killed by a grenade thrown into their house in October 1953, the Israeli Army retaliated by raiding the town of Qibya, Jordan, dynamiting dozens of homes and a mosque and killing scores of civilians, two thirds of them women and children.

International initiatives to curtail violence and promote peace proved futile. The United Nations sponsored a series of treaty negotiations that failed to make progress, and resorted repeatedly to passing resolutions condemning infractions of international norms and of the armistice agreements. In 1955, the United States and Britain jointly proposed a comprehensive peace plan, known as the Alpha Plan, and made a concerted effort to persuade the belligerents to sign it, offering border security assurances and \$1 billion in economic aid as incentives. Egyptian Premier Gamal Abdel Nasser first learned the terms of Alpha in February 1955, only days before Israel launched a devastating raid against an Egyptian army post at Gaza. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles publicized the plan in August 1955 in hope of pressuring Israel and Egypt to accept it, but a major Egyptian-Israeli border incident nearly triggered another regional war only days later, and Nasser signed a major arms deal with the Soviet Union. The Alpha Plan languished.

In early 1956, the United States tried mightily to deter hostilities and achieve a permanent peace, but instability escalated. Acting as a presidential emissary, Under Secretary of Defense Robert Anderson visited the region but proved unable to broker agreements on any of the major issues. Dulles then arranged a United Nations peace mission headed by Secretary General Dag Hammarskjold, but during his visit to the Middle East in April, Israel and Egypt fought a series of border skirmishes and nearly started a full-scale war. In a bid to deter hostilities, President Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched the U.S. Navy to the region and hinted that he would defend any victim of aggression in the theater.

Arab leaders showed little interest in any peace schemes that would require them to recognize the legitimacy of Israel. The State Department observed that "The Jewish state is regarded as a cancer on the body of the Arab Middle East. Quite frankly, the Arabs want it removed." Nor did the Israelis seem anxious to settle. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, Israel's two most eminent founders and

early statesmen, claimed to desire peace but refused to make any concessions or compromises on behalf of a settlement.¹

Nasser's unexpected move to nationalize the Suez Canal Company in July 1956 set the stage for the recrudescence of Arab-Israeli warfare. Nasser took over the British- and French-owned firm to demonstrate his independence from the European colonial powers, to avenge an Anglo-U.S. denial of economic aid, and to garner the profits the company earned in his country. The deed captured the imagination of the peoples of the Arab states and vaulted Nasser into prominence among Arab state leaders. Britain and France, however, strongly censured the action, demanded an immediate restoration of their property rights, and threatened sanctions and even military action if necessary to protect their interests.

To avert a Euro-Egyptian clash, the United States sprang into action. While he sympathized with Britain's and France's desire to recover the canal company, Eisenhower sought to settle the dispute with diplomacy before the Soviet Union exploited the instability for political gain. Dulles tried to defuse the crisis on terms acceptable to Britain and France through public statements, negotiations, two international conferences at London, establishment of an international consortium called the Suez Canal Users Association (SCUA) to govern the waterway, and deliberations at the United Nations. By late October, however, these efforts failed to change the fundamental fact of Egypt's nationalization. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden declared that he could not permit Nasser to "have his thumb on our windpipe."² Also upset by Egyptian interventions in Jordan and Algeria, the British and French continued their preparations for war.

As the crisis persisted, the United States concentrated on averting military action. Eisenhower conveyed to his European allies that he would not support military action by them because it would demolish the goodwill of Muslim states from Africa to southeast Asia and thereby redound to the advantage of the Soviet Union. The U.S. president also sought to isolate Israel from the canal controversy. Dulles warned that "Any action which would put the Israelis out in front in the Suez situation would solidify the Arab world." Accordingly, the United States denied Israel a seat in the diplomatic conferences called to address the crisis.

¹ Unsigned policy paper, n.d. (ca. Nov. 1953), Whitman File: Administrative Series, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

² Peter L. Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt: Strategy and Diplomacy in the Early Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 211-39; Steven Z. Freiburger, *Dawn Over Suez: The Rise of American Power in the Middle East, 1953-1957* (Chicago: Dee, 1992), 159-209; Keith Kyle, *Suez* (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 135-290.

Sensing a spike in Israeli bellicosity toward Egypt in August and September, Eisenhower arranged limited arms supplies from the United States, France, and Canada in the hope of easing Israeli insecurity and thereby averting Egyptian-Israeli war.³

In September, the threat of an Israeli-Jordanian war complicated the canal crisis. A series of hostile incidents along the Israel-Jordan border threatened to trigger a full-scale war. To defend his territory, King Hussein invited Iraq to station troops in his country, a step that Israel vowed to contest with arms. Meanwhile, political turmoil inside Jordan raised the prospect that King Hussein's regime might collapse. In October, U.S. military officers observed that Jordan was vulnerable to "serious internal disorder, military intervention by neighboring states, or both." As reports reached him that Israel was mobilizing its military forces, Dulles suspected that Jordan would be its target.⁴

As the Israel-Jordan border tension absorbed the attention of other powers, Britain, France, and Israel secretly devised an elaborate ruse to overthrow Nasser. The collusion scheme promised the European powers a favorable resolution of the canal conflict and offered the Israelis the removal of their most formidable Arab opponent. Under the ruse, Israel would invade the Sinai Peninsula, and Britain and France would issue ultimatums ordering Egyptian and Israeli troops to withdraw from the Suez Canal Zone. When Nasser, as expected, rejected the ultimatums, the European powers would bomb Egyptian airfields within 48 hours, occupy the canal zone, and depose Nasser. On the basis of that collusion scheme, Israel invaded the Sinai on October 29, Britain and France issued the prescribed ultimatums, Nasser defied those ultimatums, and British and French warplanes attacked Egyptian assets on October 31.⁵

Caught off-guard by the start of hostilities, the United States took steps to end the war quickly. Angered that his allies in London and Paris had deceived him in the collusion scheme, Eisenhower worried that the war would drive Arab states into Soviet dependence. To stop the fighting, he imposed sanctions on the colluding powers, achieved a United

³Minutes of NSC meeting, 9 Aug. 1956, Whitman File, NSC Series, box 8, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

⁴Circular cable from JCS, 17 Oct. 1956, RG 218, JCS Geographic File, 1954-1956, box 14, CCS 381 EMMEA (11-19-47), U.S. National Archives; minutes of NSC meeting, 26 Oct. 1956, Whitman File: NSC Series, box 8, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library.

⁵Avi Shlaim, "Protocol of Sevres, 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot," *International Affairs*, 73:3 (July 1997), 509-30.

Nations ceasefire resolution, and organized a United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) to disengage the combatants.

Before Eisenhower's diplomacy had effect, however, the crisis moved into its most dangerous phase. On November 5, Britain and France landed paratroopers along the Suez Canal, and the Soviet Union, in a ploy to distract attention from its brutal repression of a revolutionary movement in Hungary, threatened to intervene in the hostilities and perhaps even retaliate with "atom and hydrogen weapons" against London and Paris. Despite U.S. efforts to segregate the Arab-Israeli conflict from the canal crisis, the two problems intersected, with portentous consequences.⁶

The events of November 5 sent the 1956 warfare into its most dangerous phase. Eisenhower observed that "the Soviets are scared and furious" and ready "to take any wild adventure." As intelligence officers monitored reports of Soviet forces concentrating in Syria, the president ordered the Pentagon to prepare for a world war. Shaken by the sudden prospect of global conflict, he also moved quickly to avert it by pressuring the colluding powers to desist and by facilitating the deployment of UNEF to occupy positions as monitors between the warring parties. Tensions gradually eased. British and French forces departed Egypt in December and, following complex negotiations, Israeli forces withdrew from the Sinai by March 1957.⁷

1967

By the early 1960s, the Arab-Israeli conflict increasingly aligned with the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. Having emerged in the preceding decade as the dominant Western power in the region, the United States sought to prevent the spread of communist influence in the region in order to protect the oilfields, airbases, lines of communication, and human resources, mainly in the Arab states and especially in Saudi Arabia, deemed vital for success in the Cold War. For a combination of diplomatic, domestic political, and cultural reasons, Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson remained committed to the preservation of the State of Israel. U.S. leaders fashioned a policy objective they called *stability*, meaning a region at peace, governed by non-communist

⁶ Bulganin to Eisenhower, 5 Nov. 1956, RG 59, 684A.86, U.S. National Archives.

⁷ Memorandum of conversation by Goodpaster, 5 Nov. 1956, Whitman File: Diary Series, box 19, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library. See also Hahn, *Caught in the Middle East*, 200-7.

regimes, economically oriented to the capitalist world, and aligned with the Western security system. Thus, the United States aimed to maintain good relations with all powers in the region. In 1965 and 1966, for instance, it sold tanks and then military aircraft to both Israel and Jordan, as a means of providing what it called “a deterrent balance” between those states and of stabilizing the pro-Western orientation of both. Given the local Arab-Israeli conflict as well as inter-Arab rivalries, stability would prove to be elusive.

The Soviets, by contrast, assertively pursued their own interests in the region, provoking U.S. resistance. Motivated by a combination of security and economic interests, they sought to gain footholds of influence among local powers. Having provided modern weapons to Egypt as early as 1955, the Soviets continued to nurture relations with additional material and military aid. They encouraged Nasser when he advocated for Arab nationalism and independence by criticizing vehemently the legacy of Anglo-French colonialism. The civil war that started in 1962 in Yemen became a clash by proxy between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which further strained U.S.-Egyptian relations and encouraged an Egyptian alignment with Moscow. Soviet political overtures to Egypt, Syria, and Iraq limited the ability of the United States to remain friendly to those countries, indirectly threatened the integrity of Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and portended a resurgence of Arab-Israeli conflict. U.S. arming of Israel and Soviet arming of Arab states raised tensions and increased destructive capabilities across the region.

The bipolarization of the Middle East along the Cold War axis contributed to an escalation of Arab-Israeli hostility in the mid-1960s. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established in 1964 with the expressed purpose of destroying the Jewish state. Violence flared along the Israeli-Syrian border, first as Israel used force to stop Syrian efforts to divert the headwaters of rivers flowing into Israel in 1964, and then, in 1965 and after, as PLO guerrillas based in Syria launched attacks into Israel and Israel retaliated with reprisal raids. By late 1966, low intensity warfare also erupted along Israel's border with Jordan. Israeli fighters engaged and downed Syrian jets in early April 1967, and in May a wave of violence in northern Israel prompted an Israeli threat to occupy Damascus. Egyptian and Syrian military officers met for consultations, and Israel mobilized its reserve forces.

A crisis erupted on May 16, when Nasser expelled the U.N. troops that had policed and pacified the Sinai since the end of the Suez-Sinai War a decade before. Intent on achieving political grandeur and stung by criticism from other Arab leaders of his

recent passivity toward Israel, Nasser ordered his forces to occupy the evacuated U.N. bases on Israel's border. As rumors of war swirled, U.N. Secretary General U Thant rushed to the region to urge restraint on all powers. But the crisis escalated sharply on May 22, when Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping and Israeli leaders threatened to fight to reopen the waterway, which was vital to their economic livelihood. Israeli insecurity mounted amidst reports that Egyptian troops in the Sinai were armed with chemical weapons, especially after Jordan and Egypt signed a mutual defense treaty on May 30.

For two weeks following the closure of the Straits, the United States and United Nations engaged in intense international diplomacy to avert full-scale war. Secretary General Thant tried futilely to negotiate a de-escalation agreement. Johnson decried the Egyptian blockade and urged Israeli leaders to refrain from initiating general hostilities. To break Nasser's blockade and reassure the Israelis, the United States conceived of a plan in which naval forces of various Western maritime powers would position ships in the Red Sea to protect merchant ships that plied the straits bound for Israel. Other Western naval vessels would concentrate in the eastern Mediterranean to deter Nasser from resisting the operation in the straits and to provide reinforcement if shooting erupted. It soon became clear, however, that logistical impediments and limited enthusiasm both in the U.S. Congress and among allied powers would prevent the launch of an effective operation in timely manner. Even discussion of the plan provoked resistance among Arab leaders, who considered it a capitulation to Israel and a vestige of Western imperialism.

Full-scale hostilities erupted on June 5, when Israeli forces suddenly launched a military offensive, demolished the Egyptian air force in aerial attacks, and then rapidly occupied the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. When Jordan and Syria entered the fray on Egypt's side, Israel delivered similar blows to their forces and occupied the West Bank and the Golan Heights. By the time a ceasefire took effect on June 10, Israel had soundly defeated three adversaries and occupied enormous portions of their territory.

On June 6, U.S. officials pushed a ceasefire resolution through the U.N. Security Council, resisting a Soviet amendment ordering Israel to evacuate the territory it had occupied. U.S. diplomats brokered mutual Israeli-Jordanian acceptance of the ceasefire on June 7, and Israeli-Egyptian acceptance the next day. They elicited Syrian acceptance of the ceasefire on June 9, although the fighting continued at Israeli initiative for one more day.

The Six Day War, as it became known in the West, exacerbated superpower tensions. In the first use of the “hotline” communication link between the U.S. and Soviet governments, Johnson appealed to Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin to collaborate on U.N. ceasefire resolutions. Kosygin supported such resolutions in principle, although he proposed a proviso demanding Israeli withdrawal from the territory it had occupied, a proviso that Johnson refused. Superpower tensions peaked on June 9-10, when Israel continued military operations against Syria even after Syria indicated acceptance of the ceasefire. Kosygin severed diplomatic relations with Israel and warned Johnson that unless Israel promptly desisted, “necessary actions will be taken, including military.” Prudently, Johnson ordered the Sixth Fleet to move toward the Eastern Mediterranean and pressed Israel to stand down. Israel complied with the ceasefire after the U.S. State Department warned that the Soviets were “busy saber rattling.”

The 1967 hostilities dramatically recast the political dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The speed and scale of Israel’s battlefield victories against three adversaries signaled its military superiority among the combatants. Israelis became euphoric that they had survived the mortal threats arrayed against them, scored a huge victory, and captured land that they could use as bargaining chips to shape Arab behavior. The war accentuated the alignment of Israel with the United States, despite lingering U.S. resentment that Israel had defied U.S. diplomatic overtures prior to the fighting, and despite a flare-up of anger after Israeli air power, apparently inadvertently, attacked the *USS Liberty*, an American espionage ship sailing near the war zone on June 8.

The war drove the Arab states into greater reliance on the Soviet Union. They welcomed the Soviet pressure on Israel to withdraw from occupied territories and to accept the final ceasefire. Devastated by their defeat, Arab leaders made false charges that U.S. military forces assisted or even participated in the initial Israeli assault on Egypt. Although officials in Washington rejected these charges as specious, anti-U.S. passions soared in Arab countries, mobs threatened the safety of U.S. nationals, and Arab governments severed diplomatic relations with the United States. While regretting the loss of accord with Arab states, Johnson expressed a small measure of satisfaction that those states that had relied on the Soviet Union had fared miserably. “The Russians had lost their shirts in the Middle East war,” the U.S. president noted on June 14.

Strategic tensions deepened in the months following the war. The war had left Arab leaders angry and bitter, and at a summit meeting in Khartoum in August-

September 1967 they adopted the so-called “three noes” resolutions: no recognition of Israel, no peace with Israel, no negotiations with Israel. Emboldened by their dramatic victory over three Arab states, Israeli leaders resolved to use the occupied territories as bargaining chips to secure their own terms in any peace settlement. In November 1967, the U.N. Security Council passed Resolution 242 as a basis for a peace settlement, affirming the principles of Israeli withdrawal from territories occupied in June and Arab recognition of Israel’s right to exist as a state. Ambiguities in the wording of the resolution, however, essentially demolished its capacity to become a meaningful basis for a peace settlement.

1973

Arab-Israeli hostilities continued to roil after 1967. Eager to recover from the humiliation of 1967, Egypt accepted massive Soviet arms supplies and surpassed its prewar military capability by late 1968. U.S. leaders provided Israel with advanced military jets to assure military balance, gain a potential lever on Israeli diplomacy, and enhance their domestic political interests. Nasser offered to make peace through a U.N.-brokered settlement if Israel withdrew from all occupied territory, but Israel, determined to base its security on land rather than agreements, refused to go along.

In this context, sporadic violence along the Egyptian-Israeli border escalated into the so-called War of Attrition. Calculating that he could challenge the Israeli occupation of the Sinai and provoke great power political intervention, Nasser ordered artillery and air strikes on Israeli units east of the Suez Canal in March 1969. Responding with similar measures, Israel quickly achieved air superiority and the ability to strike Egyptian targets virtually at will. By January 1970, Israeli war jets bombed targets deep in Egyptian territory, including Cairo, with the purposes of signaling Israel’s prowess, securing the frontier, and triggering Nasser’s downfall. Nasser, however, became even more dependent on Soviet support. He visited Moscow, received modern anti-aircraft guns, surface-to-air missiles, radar systems, and MiG fighters, and welcomed 15,000 Soviet soldiers (including 200 pilots) as advisers.

U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers formulated a peace plan in consultation with the Soviets and other powers, but he made little headway, in part because National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger, who disliked Rogers and mistrusted the Soviets,

quietly encouraged the Israelis to reject it. When Rogers proposed a settlement in December 1969, Israeli leaders not only refused the scheme as damaging to their interests but also escalated their strategic bombing of Egypt. By June 1970, Soviet pilots fought Israeli airmen in dogfights near the Suez Canal, and casualties mounted on both sides of the waterway. In August 1970, the War of Attrition abated after Israel, Egypt, and Jordan agreed to meet with U.N. Mediator Gunnar Jarring. Despite suffering heavy casualties, Nasser had reached his goals of burnishing his image, gaining Soviet weapons, exposing the limits of Israeli power, and triggering U.S. and U.N. involvement in peacemaking.

The suspension of the War of Attrition failed to produce a lasting peace. In 1971, Jarring promoted a deal based on U.N. Resolution 242. Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat, who consolidated power in Cairo after the death of Nasser in 1970, conditionally accepted the plan, but Israel rejected it, as well as a more modest Egyptian proposal that Israeli forces withdraw from the Suez Canal area as a gesture to start a peace process. Prime Minister Golda Meir decided that continued deadlock in peace negotiations would enable Israel to exploit its military superiority in order to achieve maximalist territorial ambitions. In so doing, Avi Shlaim argues, she missed a chance to avoid the resumption of warfare in October 1973.⁸

The 1973 outbreak of fighting originated in a series of calculations by Sadat. With U.N. diplomacy foiled, the Egyptian leader explored other options to restore Egyptian territorial integrity. He declared his intention to recover the Sinai, asked for U.S. diplomatic support, and expelled Soviet advisers from his country in July 1972 as a means of achieving independence of action. By 1973, Sadat concluded that launching a major offensive against Israel was his best prospect for restoring Egyptian territory and prestige. Egypt and Syria planned a coordinated attack on Israel. By escalating violence as a means of forcing foreign intervention that would redound to his advantage, Sadat would repeat on a larger scale the reasoning that impelled Nasser to start the War of Attrition in 1969.

Despite their deep involvement in the region, U.S. officials also overlooked the harbingers of war. Kissinger, for example, interpreted Sadat's expulsion of Soviet

⁸ Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2000), 301-9.

advisers in 1972 as a sign of weakness rather than preparedness for action.⁹ In the autumn of 1973, Kissinger negotiated with Israeli, Jordanian, and Egyptian officials, but the talks failed to break his complacency, to change Israel's determination to stay the course of deadlock, or to provide Sadat hope of reaching his goals via diplomacy. Distracted by the war in Vietnam, the pursuit of détente in Beijing and Moscow, and the unfolding Watergate crisis at home, U.S. leaders failed to anticipate that Egypt and Syria were veering toward a major escalation of warfare.¹⁰

Hostilities erupted on October 6, 1973, when Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a coordinated offensive against Israeli forces in the occupied Sinai and Golan. Launched at the height of the Jewish Yom Kippur holiday, the attack surprised the Israelis. The Arab armies, benefiting from a Soviet airlift of supplies that began on October 10, made impressive advances for several days.

Surprised by the outbreak of hostilities, the Nixon Administration soon became politically involved in it. Initially hoping for an indecisive outcome so they could negotiate a lasting territorial settlement, U.S. officials refused to arm either side and they encouraged both sides to accept a ceasefire on October 12. Headstrong with success, Egypt refused. President Richard M. Nixon then authorized a massive airlift of military supplies to Israel. Such a step offered to secure the United States a diplomatic role in the conflict, to ensure an indecisive outcome to the fighting, to match the Soviet arms supply to Arab armies, and to please the U.S. electorate. There also was concern that Israel might use its nuclear arsenal to stave off defeat. Kissinger aide William Quandt later wrote that "Without being told in so many words, we knew that a desperate Israel might activate its nuclear option." The U.S. airlift delivered thousands of tons of war material that enabled Israel to launch its successful counterattacks.¹¹

The United States also took steps to end the fighting on terms favorable to U.S. interests. Kissinger flew to Moscow to negotiate with the Soviets the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 338, passed on October 22, which called on the belligerents

⁹ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 309-18; William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington: Brookings, 1993), 136-47.

¹⁰ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 309-18; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 136-47.

¹¹ Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 512-24 (quotation p. 518); Quandt, *Peace Process*, 148-69.

to honor a ceasefire and to negotiate a “just and durable peace” based on U.N. Resolution 242. Then he flew to Israel and convinced Meir to honor the ceasefire.¹²

As the superpowers negotiated ceasefire resolutions, Israel gradually gained the upper hand on the battlefields. Provisioned with massive quantities of U.S. weapons, Israel stopped the Arab offensives, reoccupied the Golan and reached within 20 miles of Damascus, and crossed to the west side of the Suez Canal, thereby isolating the entire Egyptian Third Army in the Sinai. Israel thus expanded its territorial reach before the ceasefire took effect on October 22.

Ironically, the war moved through its most dangerous phase after the ceasefire resolution took effect. To gain tactical advantages in the event of future hostilities, the IDF moved to encircle the Egyptian Third Army and sever Egyptian supply lines, in violation of the ceasefire resolution. Sadat complained bitterly, and Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev warned starkly on October 24 that he would send Soviet troops to defend Egypt if necessary. Brezhnev warned Nixon: “I will say it straight that if you find it impossible to act jointly with us in this matter, we should be faced with the necessity urgently to consider the question of taking appropriate steps unilaterally.” To avert such Soviet action, Kissinger used diplomacy to reign in the Israelis and to mollify the Soviets. With Nixon’s backing, however, he also placed U.S. worldwide forces on alert and leaked reports of this move to the news media, in part to demonstrate U.S. firmness to the Soviets, in part to establish U.S. prestige in the eyes of Middle East leaders, and in part to deflect attention from the Watergate scandal. The Israeli troop movements ground to a halt on October 25.¹³

The 1973 warfare affected the fortunes and interests of multiple states. It inflamed Arab-Israeli tensions and mistrust. Although Israel gained territorial interests during the fighting, the early Arab advances and the relatively high Israeli casualty rates convinced the Arab world that the war was a draw, that Israel was not invincible, and that Arab states had recovered their prestige and honor so badly mauled in 1967.¹⁴ Between the superpowers, the 1973 hostilities eroded the appeal of détente by revealing that U.S.-Soviet rivalry remained intense on such peripheral issues as the Arab-Israeli

¹² Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 80-90; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 169-71.

¹³ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 90-96; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 171-82 (quotation p. 173).

¹⁴ Shlaim, *Iron Wall*, 318-24.

conflict, despite the apparent relaxation of tensions on strategic questions. Angry at U.S. rearmament of Israel, Arab oil-producing states imposed an artificial price hike and production limits on the sale of oil to the United States and other Western powers, seriously damaging their economies.¹⁵

Conclusion

The Arab-Israeli hostilities of 1948-49 opened a lengthy era of perpetual conflict in the Middle East. Tensions, controversies, and border violence roiled continuously, punctuated by the eruption of international warfare in 1956, 1967, and 1973. In the regional context, those three unexpected expansions into general hostilities were triggered by the legacy of Israeli statehood. Arab states considered Israel an infringement on their national interests and they vowed never to accept it, while Israeli leaders naturally remained steadfast in their determination to protect their security and sovereignty. Unresolved squabbles over such specific issues as territorial borders, the political administration of Jerusalem, control of the fresh water of the Jordan Valley, and the disposition of Palestinian refugees fanned the embers that occasionally flared into armed clashes between national armies.

The local states all played roles in triggering the hostilities of 1956, 1967, and 1973. In the first instance, Israel calculated that it could depose its chief Arab antagonist, Nasser, through the elaborate collusion scheme concocted with two European powers. In 1967, Israeli leaders calculated that escalating signs of Arab hostile intent justified a preemptive strike to demolish the war-making capacity of three neighboring Arab states. In 1973, Egypt and Syria concluded that by initiating hostilities against Israel, they could gain political and strategic interests vis-à-vis both Israel and the superpowers.

The great powers also played key roles in the origins and the outcome of all three rounds of hostilities. In 1956, Britain and France abetted the Israeli attack in order to advance their own objectives in Egypt and in neighboring states where Nasser's meddling had complicated their interests. In 1967, Israel launched its attacks using military hardware supplied by the United States, and in confidence that the United States would support its fundamental interests. In 1973, a feeling of isolation from the United States

¹⁵ Isaacson, *Kissinger*, 537-38.

and the Soviet Union contributed to Sadat's calculation that he could most effectively advance his interests via offensive military action. The United States also took a lead role in all three episodes of war to negotiate ceasefire terms that ended the current hostilities even though they did little to address the underlying causes of conflict.

The unexpected expansions of Arab-Israeli hostilities in 1956, 1967, and 1973 originated in the persistence of unresolved political and territorial conflicts, the calculations of local powers that an escalation of hostilities would serve their vital interests, and the tendency among the superpowers to take sides in the regional conflict on behalf of their own global interests in the Cold War.