Golda Meir and the Outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, October 1973

When historians or other writers discuss the reasons for the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, most of them place the blame on Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (1969-1974). Meir is accused of obstinately and stubbornly preventing any progress on the diplomatic front, thereby paving the way for an inevitable war that cost numerous lives.

Golda Meir’s biographer Goldstein notes that Meir did not believe that returning territory would lead to peace due to the underlying negative attitude of the Arab peoples toward Israel. She argued that the armistice lines could only be replaced by safe, recognized, and agreed borders to be determined in a peace treaty; in any case, however, there would be no return to the borders of June 4, 1967. She had absolutely no faith in the premise that returning the territories would indeed enable Israel to enjoy the desired peace and consistently preferred a diplomatic stalemate after her appointment as prime minister.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Avi Shlaim suggests that Meir’s policy sought to maintain the status quo and to refrain from any diplomatic risks. This was essentially a policy of marching on the spot while adhering to the armistice lines and refusing to budge until the Arabs agreed to make peace on her terms. International initiatives to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict by peaceful means were invariably perceived as undermining Israel’s security.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Bar-Joseph asserts that Sadat’s peace initiative in February 1973 “was probably the most important diplomatic proposal of the 1967-1973 period.” He suggests that the initiative was the first of its kind. Despite this initiative, however, which largely met Israel’s security needs, the Israeli leadership preferred military confrontation, confident in the IDF’s total superiority. The leadership was aware that a comprehensive agreement would require Israel to return to its international border with Egypt – a demand it was unwilling to accept.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Kipnis follows Bar-Joseph’s approach, accusing Meir’s government of running like wildfire from the peace initiative offered over the course of 1973 by Sadat’s envoy Hafez Ismail. He assumes that the decision-makers in Israel mistakenly believed that military superiority, deterrence, and the diplomatic support of the US would prevent a peace initiative they did not desire. In the event, it was only after more than 2,650 Israeli dead that the US came onboard with Sadat’s peace initiative. This initiative was implemented after the war in a similar format to that proposed by Sadat, but on the Israeli side it was signed not by Golda Meir but by Likud Prime Minister Menachem Begin.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Other writers do not place the blame exclusively on the government of Golda Meir but also on the superpowers, and particularly the US. Lebow and Stein argue that the responsibility for failing to prevent war is shared by Israel and by the superpowers. The Israelis’ confidence in their deterrent capability blinded them to the intense pressure on Sadat and his growing desperation. They failed to use their deterrent potential to promote a peace process, and deterrence effectively became a substitute for diplomacy.

Moreover, both the US and the Soviet Union failed to prevent the crisis due to the policy of détente. Neither set of leaders was willing to forego immediate political loss or sacrifice benefit in the Middle East to reduce the risk of war in the region and a serious crisis between the Soviet Union and the US.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Neff asserts that no-one doubted Meir’s intention to hold on to the territories taken in 1967 to the maximum possible extent. Israel flaunted its might and enjoyed US support, and if it were to return territory, this would be on its own terms. The US viewed the Arab-Israeli conflict as part of the global struggle, rather than as a local issue, and support for Israel was therefore perceived as analogous to support for the anti-Communist effort. While Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, regarded regional conflict as a reflection of superpower competition, the chief objective of the US was to expel the Soviets from the Middle East. This objective could be secured through a policy of sitting and waiting, letting the Arabs stew in their own frustration.[[6]](#footnote-6)

In his new and comprehensive study, Meir Boumfeld offers a different analysis, claiming that the proposals placed before Kissinger by Hafez Ismail at their meetings in February and May 1973 were not radical and did not deviate significantly from the Egyptian position of January 1971 as presented to UN Special Envoy Gunnar Jarring. According to the proposal, Egypt was willing to reach a state of peace, including no more than recognition of Israel’s existence and independence and the end of the state of war. Full peace and normalization could come only after the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, including the Palestinian problem and the question of the refugees.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Mordechai Gazit has examined Sadat’s policy in light of the partial agreement he proposed in February 1971. Gazit suggests that Sadat was unwilling to reach any type of compromise. He adhered to the collective Arab position that any partial agreement with Israel can only be a stage in the process of an Israeli withdrawal from al the territories occupied in the war, according to a set timetable. He does not believe that this position offered any chance of success for diplomatic initiatives by the Israeli government or the US Administration.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The goal of this article is first and foremost to examine Golda Meir’s policy during the years preceding the outbreak of the war, as well as the policy of Egypt under President Anwar Sadat. Accordingly, the obvious question: is it true to suggest that it was Golda Meir’s policy that led to situation where the outbreak of war was inevitable, or is it more accurate to conclude that both Meir and Sadat adhered stubbornly to a policy that could only be resolved through a bloody war?

**Policies**

Golda Meir came to power following the death of Levi Eshkol at the end of February 1969. Before assuming the post of prime minister, Meir had served as minister of labor from 1949-1956, while from 1956-1966 she served as foreign minister. This latter position enabled her to acquire extensive experience in the international arena. Her entry into the position of prime minister coincided with a period of diplomatic stalemate. Since the end of the Six Day War of June 1967, there had been no diplomatic progress between Israel and the Arab states, and particularly Egypt, the leader of the Arab world. On 22 November 1967, in an attempt to break the stalemate, the Security Council had adopted Resolution 242. The resolution called for a just and sustainable peace, including an Israeli withdrawal from territories captured in the war, agreed borders between Israel and its neighbors, the end of the state of war, an international effort to resolve the refugee problem, and freedom of shipping in international waters. In accordance with the resolution, the UN secretary-general appointed a special envoy to head to the region immediately in order to help the sides achieve a peace agreement.[[9]](#footnote-9) Special Envoy Gunnar Jarring was active throughout 1968 but failed in his mission of advancing a diplomatic agreement.

Presenting her government to the Knesset on 17 March 1969, Meir stated that “the establishment of a permanent peace in our region depends on the Arab states. Peace will arise only when the Arab states agree to negotiate with us directly in order to sign peace treaties… We and our neighbors vitally need peace that comes from dialogue in face-to-face meetings. Only in this manner is it possible to secure peace.”[[10]](#footnote-10) The policy Meir announced in the Knesset effectively constituted a continuation of the policy formulated by the Eshkol government following the Six Day War. According to this policy, the territories conquered by Israel constituted a security buffer and a bargaining chip. In the absence of peace, Israel would observe in full the situation created by the armistice agreements, and would strengthen its own standing in accordance with its vital security and development needs. Israel insisted on a signed peace treaty, rather than on mere declarations of the end of its state of war with the Arab countries. Only direct negotiations, possibly with international assistance, could provide a solution to all the components of the conflict.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Unlike Eshkol, however, who was an uninspiring and subdued figure, Meir showed uncompromising determination concerning the need for negotiations to secure a solution to the conflict. She had grave concerns about the Arabs and believed that the conflict between the Arab states and Israel was not about the amount of territory in which Israel should exist, but whether it would exist at all. This also explains her conviction that Israel must not in any circumstances withdraw from territory without an agreement with the Arabs, and the foreign players should not be involved in the negotiations as they had been surrounding the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai in 1957. The Israeli government should be free to negotiate the terms for peace directly with its neighbors, without predetermining the outcome of the negotiations. Meir was convinced that at this point in time there was no need to define the borders that would apply in the event of a peace agreement; however, the aspiration should be to ensure that these borders were far removed from those of 4 June 1967, and that Israel would not relinquish either Jerusalem or the Golan Heights.[[12]](#footnote-12)

Immediately on assuming the position of prime minister, Meir was forced to respond to two developments, one military and the other diplomatic, that powerfully illustrate her approach toward the conflict. On 8 March, the Egyptian president launched the War of Attrition along the Suez Canal front, with the goal of forcing Israel to withdraw from the territory it had captured. By raising the level of hostilities on the Israeli-Egyptian front, Sadat sought to convince the superpowers of the volatility of the situation. Meanwhile, on the diplomatic front, the US and the Soviet Union were about to begin bilateral talks alongside the discussions between the ambassadors of Great Britain, the US, France, and the Soviet Union to the United Nations, in an effort to find a solution to the conflict. The Israelis were capable of coping with a war on the canal front, but were more alarmed at the talks. Meir viewed the diplomatic developments as a trap and an attempt to impose an agreement on Israel.

As she had declared in the Knesset, Meir adhered to her policy that any solution must be the product of negotiations between the sides. She believed that the talks harmed Israeli policy by giving the Arabs a sense of confidence that an agreement could be imposed from the outside.[[13]](#footnote-13) She argued that any agreement must include recognized and secure borders that were not identical to the armistice lines, as well as the cessation of hostilities, the removal of the Arab boycott, and recognition of Israel’s right to exist. The solution would come through face-to-face negotiations, and not in any other manner.[[14]](#footnote-14) In a letter to Nixon, Meir emphasized that Israel must be free to negotiate the terms for peace directly with its neighbors, without the outcome of the talks being determined in advance. She attempted to convince the president that he must not fall into the trap of talks, and asked him to be both patient and determined. Such an approach, she argued, “could help to bring the Arab and Soviet Governments to the realization that the only way out of their dilemma lies in the conclusion…of peace treaties with the relationship normally associated with them.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Meanwhile, she explained to the British Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart that the Israeli government did not believe that any of the superpowers could determine Israel’s security interests. The Arabs “had been responsible for war and must be responsible for peace.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

The US Administration did not accept Israel’s policy in this regard. It agreed with Meir that the demand for direct negotiations was logical, but explained that it was unrealistic. In the prevailing circumstances, direct talks were completely impossible, and the insistence on this track therefore proved that the Israeli government was not interested in advancing the peace process. A protracted stalemate was a sure recipe for the erosion of the US position in the region: it heightened the Arabs’ resentment and helped to expand the Soviet sphere of influence. A stalemate could also lead to a further war between Israel and its neighbors, and the superpowers might find themselves dragged into the conflict. Accordingly, an agreement should be advanced that would be formulated by the superpowers, or by the US alone. Nixon clarified to Meir that it was vital to make a further effort to spark the peace process, and that any potential agreement would be secured through the joint action of the US and the Soviet Union.[[17]](#footnote-17)

The discussions between the superpowers, between the US and the Soviet Union, and between the four ambassadors to the United Nations did not produce an agreed formula for solving the conflict. The Americans thus decided to launch their own initiative – the Rogers Plan. The Secretary of State announced his plan on 9 December 1969, emphasizing that while the US believed that it was vital to determine agreed political borders, it did not support expansionist aspirations and the forces should withdraw from the territory they had occupied. The US Administration supported both Israel’s security and that of the Arab states. It favored a sustainable peace based on universal security. Jerusalem should be united, but the civil, religious, and economic management of the city should be undertaken jointly by Jordan and Israel. There was also a need to solve the refugee problem. As in the case of Israel’s total withdrawal from Egyptian territory, there was a similar need for Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, with the exception of insubstantial border changes.[[18]](#footnote-18)

This was precisely the policy that Meir had feared. The US had failed to reach an agreement with the Soviet Union, and was instead launching its own initiative, and in so doing defining Israel’s best interests. This was essentially a type of imposed solution. From Meir’s perspective, the proposals included in the plan would actually damage the prospects of securing peace. They totally ignored the vital need to determine secure and agreed borders through a peace treaty reached by direct negotiations. Israel would not be a victim to any policy imposed by one or more of the superpowers, and would reject any attempt to impose a coercive solution:[[19]](#footnote-19)

The prospect of bringing the Arabs to the path of negotiations have been seriously impaired and Israel's bargaining position has been undermined. The result must be interpreted by the Arabs as an effort to appease them at Israel's expense and will inevitably stiffen their position and aggressiveness and also strengthen the terrorist organization. The Government of Israel therefore feels that all this constitutes a serious blow to Israel's vital interests.[[20]](#footnote-20)

Meir was resolute in her opposition to the plan, even claiming that it was a disaster and a threat to Israel’s very existence. Accordingly, it is hardly surprising that the government reject the proposal.[[21]](#footnote-21) Meir’s government adhered to the policy of direct negotiations to resolve all the issues in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Meanwhile, Egypt – the leader of the Arab world- also opposed any negotiations with Israel as long as it held on to the territories it had occupied during the war. Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser remained faithful to the “three noes” determined by the conference of Arab leaders that met in late August and early September 1967 in Khartoum: no recognition of Israel, no negotiations, and no peace.[[22]](#footnote-22)

From Meir’s perspective, unlike that of the Americans, there was no rush. Like her predecessor, she was convinced that she would able to maintain the status quo, despite the fierce war raging along the canal. The Arabs must be prevented from believing in the illusion of an imposed solution, or more accurately – they must be denied any access to a solution other than through direct negotiations. In the absence of any prospects for a coercive solution, or for a military one such as that Nasser hoped to achieve when he launched the War of Attrition, the Arabs would be bound to come to the negotiating table in the end.[[23]](#footnote-23)

In the absence of a peace process, or if the process reached a stalemate, the Israelis were convinced that the use of military might would force the Egyptians to accept a ceasefire, and would even lead them to the negotiating table.[[24]](#footnote-24) The Israeli military bombed hard targets deep inside Egyptian territory, but this failed to deter the Egyptians from continuing their War of Attrition. Moreover, the Israeli bombardments motivated the Soviets to become involved in the conflict. In the circumstances that had been created, Meir was willing at best to agree to a ceasefire along the Suez Canal, as the Americans had proposed, in order to prevent a military conflagration and motivate the peace process. She agreed to the ceasefire after protracted consideration, and after President Nixon promised that not a single Israeli soldier would withdraw from the occupied territories until a stable and lasting peace meeting Israel’s desires had been secured.[[25]](#footnote-25) The ceasefire came into effect on 7 August for a period of three months, but it was violated by the Egyptians the very next day. Nixon notes in his diary that the Egyptian military began to violate the ceasefire agreement before the ink had dried on the page.[[26]](#footnote-26) The Egyptian violation reinforced Meir’s conviction that Israel’s neighbor was not interested in peace and was seeking to provoke a further conflict with Israel. As a result, she became extremely suspicious of Egypt’s future moves.[[27]](#footnote-27)

However, before any peace process could begin, a change occurred that would have a far-reaching impact on the entire Middle East. Nasser died toward the end of September 1970 and was replaced by Anwar Sadat, who adopted a different policy that changed the future of the region.

**Sadat Offers to Sign a Peace Treaty with Israel**

The traditional Egyptian position toward Israel did not change following Sadat’s rise to power. He viewed Israel as an imperialist bridgehead in the region and as an expansionist state. He rejected any possibility of direct negotiations with Israel as long as it occupied Arab lands. Like Nasser, Sadat argued that to sit around the table with Israelis would not be peace, but capitulation. Instead, he called for the implementation of Resolution 242 within a set timeframe.[[28]](#footnote-28) His assumption was that a peace process could only proceed under US mediation. Nasser had managed to secure American intervention during the discussions surround the ceasefire on the Suze Canal front, but Sadat sought to ensure that the US would play a central role in helping Egypt to regain its occupied territory. After all, the Americans had the strength to apply pressure on Israel, as without their aid the country would be unable to survive. Sadat informed the US that Egypt was interested in a genuine peace that would end the bloodshed in the region, but that it would not relinquish even an inch of its land.[[29]](#footnote-29)

In a surprising move that was diametrically opposed to the decisions adopted at the Khartoum Conference, Sadat informed UN Special Envoy Gunnar Jarring that if Israel undertook to withdraw completely not only from Sinai, but from all the occupied territories, promised to resolve the refugee problem in accordance with the UN resolutions, and agreed to demilitarize areas on both sides of the border with the same size and to accept the formation of a UN force with troops from the four superpowers to keep the peace in Sinai – then Egypt would be prepared to sign a peace treaty. Egypt added that “the United Arab Republic considers that the just and lasting peace cannot be realized without the full and scrupulous implementation of the Security Council resolution 242 and the withdrawal of the Israeli armed forces from all the territories occupied since June 1967.”[[30]](#footnote-30)

In an interview for Newsweek, Sadat explained that if Israel returned the Arab land in accordance with the Security Council resolution, all the nations of the region – including Israel – would enjoy security and independence.[[31]](#footnote-31) The peace he envisioned was a formalistic one that did not imply the introduction of open borders, a flow of tourists, and economic or cultural ties. In essence, Egypt had not changed its position regarding the occupied territories or regarding its refusal to negotiate directly with Israel toward a peace treaty Nevertheless, the willingness to sign an agreement constituted a dramatic change in Egyptian policy. For the first time, an Egyptian president had declared in writing that he was willing to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmud Rial emphasized to the Americans that his country had taken a bold step and was ready to sign a peace agreement with Israel. Egypt had done everything it could, and from its perspective it had broken the vicious cycle of conflict.[[32]](#footnote-32)

The Israelis were completely taken aback by the Egyptian move. No-one in the policy-making circles in Israel had imagined that Sadat might deviate from his predecessor’s policy. His announcement undermined the popular assumption that Egypt would not agree to sign a peace treaty with Israel under any circumstances. This undoubtedly constituted a change, since for the first time an Arab state had explicitly noted its willingness to reach an agreement, even if this was conditioned on an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 4 June 1967 and the resolution of the refugee problem.[[33]](#footnote-33)

Meir welcomed Egypt’s willingness to sign a treaty, but did not believe that there had been any dramatic change in Egypt’s position. From her perspective, a true peace agreement could only be reached through negotiations between the two sides, without any prior demands or conditions. The Egyptian president was effectively imposing conditions without any discussion.[[34]](#footnote-34) Meir clarified to the special envoy that Israel accepted the principle of withdrawal as formulated in Resolution 242, along with the other principles in the resolution. However, any withdrawal would be to secure and recognized borders.[[35]](#footnote-35) While she noted that Israel would not withdraw to the lines of 4 June 1967, she emphasized to US Ambassador Walworth Barbour that this position did not constitute a precondition.[[36]](#footnote-36) In the Israeli government’s reply to Gunnar Jarring, it announced that it welcomed Egypt’s willingness to sign a peace treaty with Israel, but reiterated that it was willing to enter into substantive negotiations between the two countries to discuss all the relevant issues for such a treaty. The Israeli government believed that “both parties should now pursue their negotiations in a detailed and concrete manner without prior conditions so as to cover all the points listed in their respective documents with a view to concluding a peace agreement.”[[37]](#footnote-37)

The Americans reacted furiously to the Israeli response, which prevented any possibility of progress. The Egyptian proposal was serious and met Israel’s concerns, insofar as Egypt categorically undertook to reach a peace agreement.[[38]](#footnote-38) The State Department held that since direct negotiations were impossible, the solution to the conflict lay in peace in return to the territories occupied by the IDF. There would be no Israeli withdrawal other than as part of a peace agreement. As Rabin wrote to Meir, “when Egypt agreed to reach a peace treaty with Israel in return for a comprehensive withdrawal, the US thereby achieved the main points of its declared policy for the solution of the Israeli-Arab conflict: a mutual peace agreement in return for a withdrawal to the international border… The essence of American policy was realized in the Egyptian agreement [to peace].”[[39]](#footnote-39)

US Secretary of State William Rogers saw the Egyptian willingness to reach peace with Israel as an opportunity to implement the plan named after him, and was convinced that the Israeli government’s policy was effectively thwarting the indirect negotiations the US was pursuing with Egypt.[[40]](#footnote-40) This led in turn to a souring of the rapprochement between Egypt and the US following the breaking of diplomatic relations in 1967. Since Sadat came to power, the US had become increasingly involved in the peace process, and despite the Soviet presence in Egypt, the general sense was that only the US could secure a deal. Sadat’s readiness to sign a peace treaty with Israel gave the Americans a tangible asset in this context. Predictably, Rogers informed the Israelis of his astonishment at their position. Around the world, the impression (created in large measure by Rogers) was that the Israeli government had responded with inflexibility, while Egypt had taken the unprecedented step of expressing a willingness to make peace.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The Americans were not alone in their furious response to the position adopted by the Israeli government. UN Secretary General U Thant held Israel responsible for the ongoing stalemate and asked the government to reconsider its position regarding a withdrawal from all the territories.[[42]](#footnote-42) The French government was even more forthright in its response, interpreting Israel’s response as brutal conduct that jeopardized any possibility of progress toward peace and could even lead to an abrupt shift in Sadat’s policy.[[43]](#footnote-43) The British, not without justification, noted that Sadat’s declared willingness to reach peace might not be genuine, but argued that the Israeli government should have tested this by means of a “similarly forthcoming response.” The course Israel had instead chosen was a certain recipe for a protracted stalemate.[[44]](#footnote-44)

Meir was not deterred by these reactions and remained unwilling to budge even slightly from the position she had declared. While appreciating Egypt’s willingness to sign a peace agreement, the Egyptians were insisting on signing a document before the negotiations had even begun that she could not accept. This constituted an effort to impose conditions. The Israeli government was interested in pursuing negotiations, but Sadat’s demands would render Israel’s position in such talks meaningless. A border must be the product of bilateral negotiations, and nobody could dictate from the outset where it would run.[[45]](#footnote-45) Meir pointed out to the Americans that this approach meant that Israel was not permitted to present its position. When the Egyptians worded their willingness for peace in the form of ultimatums no-one criticized it, but when Israel reiterated its longstanding policy it faced a storm of protest. Moreover, when Egypt

states its position, whole world says that is fine, but when Israel says it will withdraw to secure borders and not to the pre-June 5, 1967 lines, everybody becomes upset and accuses Israel of disrupting the peace in the Middle East, and there are threats of Security Council or Big Four action…Israel is apparently only government in the world that cannot state its position.[[46]](#footnote-46)

Meir again stressed that secure borders recognized by the United Nations were essential in order to prevent a further war. On 16 March, she commented in the Knesset that “the desired peace can be achieved only through negotiations between us and our neighbors. Free negotiations, pursued without prior conditions and without dictates. We will reject any attempt by anyone to impose borders […] International guarantees are not a substitute.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Both sides stuck stubbornly to their respective policies. Like his predecessors, Sadat rejected any possibility of negotiating directly with the Israelis, which was considered tantamount to a humiliating encounter with the victor. His policy sought to encourage the Americans to apply pressure on the Israeli government to agree to a full withdrawal from the occupied territories. Meir, meanwhile, sought to ensure that any withdrawal or solution would be the product of direct negotiations; any other solution was considered a form of coercion.

**The Attempt to Secure a Partial Agreement**

The Egyptian president saw the Israeli response as proof that the government in Jerusalem was unwilling to reach peace and was adamant in its expansionist policy. Israel was still drunk with victory, while the weapons supplied by the US facilitated the form of peace that Israel sought to impose. Similarly, the Israeli government saw Sadat’s willingness to reach peace as no more than an attempt to impose an agreement on his own terms. Despite the Israeli response to his proposals, Sadat preferred to continue to pursue the peace process. On 5 March he stated in a letter to the US president that the key to an agreement lay with the US Administration, which was providing political, economic, and military aid to Israel. This aid that had led to the Israeli aggression and was allowing the Israelis to continue to hold Arab land. If a comprehensive agreement was impossible, Sadat suggested that an interim arrangement could be reached allowing for the reopening of the Suez Canal in accordance with the position he had presented in his speech of 4 February 1971.[[48]](#footnote-48)

According to Sadat’s proposal, during this phase of the ceasefire Israel would undertake a partial withdrawal of its troops from the east bank of the canal. This withdrawal would serve as the first stage in a gradual timetable for the implementation of the remaining clauses in Security Council Resolution 242. If this withdrawal went ahead, Egypt would be willing to begin work immediately to clean the Suez Canal and reopen the waterway for international shipping.[[49]](#footnote-49) Sadat’s initiative was not made rashly, and the idea he presented was actually first conceived by Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. Dayan was interested in finding a way to resume the negotiations and to stabilize the ceasefire along the existing borders. A return the situation prior to the ceasefire held many dangers, particularly in light of the Soviet involvement in the conflict. Dayan believed that reopening the canal and rebuilding the cities along its course could ensure that Egypt would have no interest in a further war. His ideas became known in American circles as the “Dayan Plan.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

In his speech, the Egyptian president did not specify the borders to which the Israeli forces were supposed to withdraw. However, in an interview for Newsweek on 22 February he mentioned a line from El-Arish in the north to Ras Muhammad, approximately 100 kilometers east of the canal. Sadat again emphasized that the Egyptian initiative was not intended as a permanent agreement, but merely as the first step in a comprehensive withdrawal. Similarly, his initiative did not imply any willingness to engage in direct negotiations or any commitment to peace. Egypt was willing to extend the ceasefire by a limited period, since a permanent ceasefire would be tantamount to the perpetuation of the occupation and the status quo. Egypt would be willing to permit unrestricted Israeli maritime passage through Sharm a-Sheikh, subject to compliance with the United Nations resolutions ensuring the restitution of the rights of the Palestinian people.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The secretary of state felt that Sadat’s plan could maintain stability and advance the diplomatic process in the region, preventing a wider flareup. He concluded that action should be taken to promote the proposal.[[52]](#footnote-52) The day after receiving Sadat’s letter, Sisco drafted what he termed “preliminary ideas” that were forwarded to the Israelis, but not shared with the Egyptians. It was proposed that the governments of Egypt and Israel would announce their acceptance of Security Council Resolution 242, note their interest in implementing all the clauses of the resolution, and announce the following measures in order to facilitate Jarring’s work:

a. Israeli withdrawal to posts approximately 40 kilometers east of the Canal. No military or para-military forces of any kind to be brought into the area east of the canal by Egypt.

b. Egyptian civilians may assume administrative and civic positions in that area, including maintaining order and security in it.

c. Egypt to open canal to all countries, including Israel, within six months of the signing of the agreement.

d. Israel and Egypt to enforce ceasefire rigidly, and both countries to accelerate negotiations under Jarring's auspices, with an agreement between them to constitute the first phase of this process.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Based on the proposal they forwarded to Israel, the Americans do not appear to have studied Sadat’s offer carefully. Their suggestions were far removed from the conditions he had presented for a partial deal. In order to prevent any doubts about Egypt’s determination to adhere to its position, particularly concerning the reopening of the Suez Canal, Sadat wrote to the Americans at the beginning of April to clarify the Egyptian stance. The proposed interim arrangement was not a separate or partial solution, but a practical step connected organically to the full solution based on the Security Council resolution, including an Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab lands. According to Sadat’s approach, a partial withdrawal by Israel was merely a prelude to a full retreat. Alongside this withdrawal, Egypt would begin to clean the canal, and as the withdrawal actually went ahead it would be prepared to extend the ceasefire by a defined period in order to allow the special envoy to determine a timeframe for the implementation of Resolution 242. The Egyptian army would cross the Canal and assume responsibility for the east bank. The Egyptian president added that if there were no progress during the defined period, Egypt would be free to take alternative steps in order to secure its objectives.[[54]](#footnote-54)

After the harsh criticism of their response to Sadat’s proposal, the Israelis could not afford to ignore Sisco’s suggestions concerning the reopening of the Canal. Indeed, Meir herself had mentioned her willingness to take such a step in her speech in the Knesset on 9 February, following Sadat’s speech to the National Assembly.[[55]](#footnote-55) If they failed to respond to the State Department’s initiative, Israel would be regarded as thwarting the American efforts to secure a peace agreement and as seeking only to perpetuate the stalemate. The prime minister, supported by most of her government, was concerned that the reopening of the Canal was not the true purpose of the interim agreement. The Egyptian president was seeking to secure strategic advantages that his country could not gain by military means. Meir’s assumption was that after the withdrawal Egypt would be liable to resume the fighting from an enhanced position. She feared that even if an agreement was reached, Egypt would breach it, as they had the ceasefire.[[56]](#footnote-56)

Meir now also faced the task of responding to the Egyptian position on the reopening of the Canal as presented in the media. The Israelis saw the Egyptian proposal as a trap: Sadat was not interested in peace, as if he were there would be no need to station Egyptian forces east of the Canal. Moreover, Egypt should welcome the creation of a demilitarized buffer zone between itself and Israel, entry into which would serve as an alert of impending war. She was convinced that Sadat was interested only in exploiting the Americans in order to improve Egypt’s strategic position. Contrary to the State Department’s repeated assertions that Egyptian policy had changed since Sadat came to power, Meir assumed that the Egyptian strategy had remained unchanged and that Sadat would not abandon his country’s traditional positions. The change was purely on the tactical level, with the goal of allowing Egypt to acquire strength and ultimately launch a military campaign from a stronger starting point.[[57]](#footnote-57)

The Israeli government was willing to consider a substantive change to its own policy regarding an interim agreement and to accept the principle of a withdrawal from the Canal. On 19 April Israel announced its willingness to sign a special agreement with Egypt allowing the opening of the Canal to international shipping, including Israeli vessels. According to the Israeli proposal:

A. A partial agreement would be conditioned on Egyptian agreement to an unlimited ceasefire and the non-resumption of hostilities.

B. The Israeli government insisted that Egyptian or any other hostile forces would not be permitted to cross the Canal into the area vacated by the Israeli army.

C. A withdrawal of the IDF forces from the east bank would not be considered the first stage in an overall withdrawal.

D. A partial agreement would be considered to stand on its own and should not be regarded as the beginning of a comprehensive agreement, since the conditions for such an agreement could only be determined through exhaustive negotiations between the sides.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Meir’s chief condition was the cessation of the state of hostility, and this was an absolute requirement: “either the cessation of hostility or we don’t budge.”[[59]](#footnote-59) She did not detail how far Israel might “budge,” but her demand to end the state of hostility and refrain from its resumption was adamant. Yet the conditions presented by the president of Egypt were no less inflexible. Sadat did not regard a partial agreement as a goal in its won right, but merely as a step toward the removal of the Israelis from all the occupied territories. He did not propose direct negotiations to resolve all the disagreements, particularly on the Palestinian issue, and as noted his chief goal was to apply pressure on the US to impose his conditions on Israel.

Rogers visited the region at the beginning of May 1971. From his standpoint, the main problem was Israel’s intransigence in the face of Sadat’s interest in reaching an agreement. Roger arrived in Cairo on 4 May and met with Sadat. His visit was not intended to persuade Sadat’s conditions, which were more or less consistent with Roger’s own plan from December 1969. Instead, he simply sought to listen to Sadat’s positions. Sadat had taken the vital step by declaring his willingness to sign a peace agreement with Israel. Despite Israel’s response, he had not abandoned his plan and had added his suggestion to reach an agreement allowing the reopening of the Suez Canal. It was now the turn of the Israeli government to take the necessary steps and to show flexibility in its demands concerning a partial agreement, let alone a comprehensive one, in order to kickstart the diplomatic process.

The position Rogers heard in Egypt was that the Israeli withdrawal to a line from El-Arish to Ras Muhammad and the cleaning of the Canal would begin once Egyptian forces had crossed over to the east bank. This would be followed by an Israeli withdrawal to the lines of 4 June 1967. Egypt was willing to accept mutual demilitarization, but Sadat emphasized that his country would not countenance negotiations or bargaining concerning a single square inch of its territory.[[60]](#footnote-60) He promised that if an interim agreement were reached in accordance with his proposal, he would expel the Soviets from Egypt within six months, leading to the resumption of diplomatic relations with the US, which had been severed in June 1967. Sadat added that the US bore an obligation to apply pressure on Israel by curtailing its economic and military aid to the country.[[61]](#footnote-61) From Rogers’ perspective, the Egyptian promise was of the utmost importance to American interests. With this in mind, everything possible should be done to motivate the Israeli government to take appropriate action in this direction. Flexibility was the order of the day.

Meir, however, remained implacable. She informed Rogers that the Israeli government was willing in principle to accept the reopening of the Canal under Egyptian management and to agree to a withdrawal of the Israeli forces. However, she insisted on the non-resumption of hostilities on any level; no crossing of the Canal by Egyptian troops; and free passage for Israeli vessels. In addition, the agreement would stand on its own and would not bind Israel to any further withdrawals.[[62]](#footnote-62) Nevertheless, in order to prevent the collapse of the diplomatic initiative to reach a partial agreement, Moshe Dayan persuaded Meir to accept two options. According to the first option, if the ceasefire were limited, the Israeli withdrawal from the banks of the Canal would be confined to 10 kilometers, thereby maintaining the capability to retake the evacuated area. According to the second option, an unlimited ceasefire would lead to a more significant withdrawal followed by steps toward negotiations for a comprehensive agreement. Dayan assumed that no Egyptian government would open the Canal and begin to rebuild the cities along its west bank while Israeli troops remained within artillery range. He also accepted the possibility that Egyptian technicians and civilians could cross the Canal.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Sadat rejected Dayan’s suggestions, reiterating that Egyptian troops must be permitted to cross the Canal and that its reopening would not be a separate issue or a partial solution, but merely an Israeli withdrawal as part of an overall timetable. Egypt would not negotiate regarding the right of the Egyptian army to move to the east bank of the Canal and would not accept an indefinite extension of the ceasefire, since this would imply the acceptance of a new armistice line.[[64]](#footnote-64) At most, the Egyptian president was willing to show flexibility regarding the withdrawal line in the first phase and to restrict the number of troops and the types of weapons to be moved to the east bank of the Canal. Egypt would also accept a six-month ceasefire with an option for a further extension.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Meir argued that the Egyptian flexibility was insignificant. Egypt was still insisting that its forces must cross the Canal and that the arrangement must form part of a comprehensive agreement. The ostensible flexibility concerning the scale of forces and types of weapons was actually a trap. She found it difficult to free herself from the memory of the “trick” Egypt had played by moving its missiles toward the Canal in August 1970, violating the ceasefire agreement. Accepting Egypt’s proposal would mean nothing less than gambling with Israel’s security, and she was therefore unwilling to accept even a minor or symbolic crossing of the Canal by Egyptian forces. Similarly, the willingness to withdraw was confined to a very small distance: Israeli troops would remain close to the Canal. The Americans talked constantly of compromises, but they only asked Israel to show flexibility, while making no attempt to persuade the Egyptians to change their position.[[66]](#footnote-66)

As the Americans repeatedly emphasized in their contacts with Israel, the Egyptian flexibility was largely the product of the effort to restart the peace process and to implement the approach embodied in the Roger’s Plan, which formed the basis for the State Department’s activities in the region. An arrangement for the reopening of the Canal could constitute the turning over of a new page in the relations between the US and the Arab world. After all, Sadat had promised that following a partial arrangement the two countries would renew their diplomatic ties and he would expel the Soviets from the country. Unlike the Israelis, Sadat had taken positive steps in order to facilitate a diplomatic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. He had agreed to sign a peace treaty, and now he was willing to reopen the Canal. In order to reach a partial agreement he had shown a flexible approach to the scale of the Israeli withdrawal and to the size and composition of the Egyptian force that would cross to the east bank.

Despite their willingness to sign a peace treaty with Israel, however, the Egyptians did not see a partial arrangement as an end in itself, but as a step intended to implement Resolution 242 as they interpreted it. The most accurate definition of the Egyptian “flexibility” was, perhaps, offered by the Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmud Rial, who commented to the British that:

From the outset, the Egyptian Government, including President Sadat, had never contemplated an interim arrangement…President's Sadat initiative in early February had envisaged negotiations within certain timescale leading to a comprehensive settlement including total Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied territories; within this framework he had stated that he would be prepared as a first stage in a comprehensive settlement to consider reopening the canal in exchange for partial Israeli withdrawal.[[67]](#footnote-67)

The visit to the region by the US secretary of state was followed by unsuccessful attempts to secure a partial agreement between Israel and Egypt. Toward the end of July 1971, Sisco visited Israel. A week before his visit, Sadat declared that a choice between peace and war must be taken before the end of the year, adding that he was willing to sacrifice a million soldiers in order to free the occupied lands. This was a “year of decision” of the type familiar to historiographers. Sisco duly emphasized to his Israeli hosts that without an agreement to reopen the Canal and without any progress on the diplomatic front, fighting would inevitably resume along the Canal. In such a scenario, he could not rule out the possibility that the Soviets would intervene if they were unhappy with the outcomes of the battle. An agreement would create a new reality and was likely to endure for an extended period. It could strengthen those inside Egypt interested peace, and Sadat himself had noted that it would create a new atmosphere.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Sisco asked Meir to agree to the crossing of the Canal by a limited Egyptian force confined to 750 persons and to accept a vague wording referencing Resolution 242. Regarding the ceasefire, a distinction could be adopted between the term “permanently,” which Egypt categorically rejected, and “indefinitely,” which Sadat might be willing to accept. Moreover, Sadat had raised the possibility of forming an international force to supervise the implementation of the agreement and had not ruled out the possibility of cooperation with Israel, provided this were under a UN umbrella. Sisco asked Israel to withdraw to a point as close as possible to the Gidi and Mitla passes, 40 kilometers east of the Canal. As for Israeli shipping, Egypt was adhering to its position that this would be permitted only after a comprehensive agreement.[[69]](#footnote-69)

As already noted, Meir had a total mistrust for the Egyptians and did not believe that they would observe any agreement they might sign. Her skepticism was evident in her repeated question as to why Egypt was insisting on its forces crossing the Canal if it was interested in peace.[[70]](#footnote-70) She opposed even a symbolic crossing of Egyptian troops to the east bank and was certainly unwilling to link the agreement for the reopening of the Canal to Resolution 242 either directly or indirectly. She informed Sisco that at the most the Israeli government would be willing to make a minor withdrawal. In order to avoid a situation where Israel was seen to be thwarting the attempt to reach a partial agreement, Meir announced that she would be willing to consider ideas to bridge the gap between the two sides, without any commitment.[[71]](#footnote-71)

During her visit to Washington DC in December 1971, Meir indeed showed a willingness to modify the Israeli position regarding the partial agreement. After National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger complained that the Israel government had failed to make any constructive proposals, while the Administration was supporting Israel and had approved the supply of planes for the next three years, Meir raised a proposal embodying certain concessions that might advance the arrangement for the reopening of the Canal. According to her proposal, the ceasefire agreement would be restricted to 18-24 months; the Israeli withdrawal would be extended to a point close to the passes in Sinai; and Egyptian technicians and a modest unformed force would be permitted to cross the Canal. Meir reiterated her position that there would be no linkage between the opening of the Canal and a comprehensive agreement, and that the Roger’s Plan was not a foundation for such a comprehensive agreement. She presented the same proposal in March 1973 during her meeting with President Nixon.[[72]](#footnote-72)

This proposal was not brought to the attention of the Egyptian president, who would almost certainly have rejected it. Sadat was adamant that any partial arrangement must include an Israeli withdrawal beyond the passes and the entry of Egyptian forces to the east bank of the Canal. However, the main reason for the failure to inform Sadat of the proposal was almost certainly the fact that at the same time secret talks were underway between Kissinger and his Egyptian counterpart, Hafez Ismail, to find a comprehensive solution to the conflict.

**The Egyptian Attempt to Promote a Comprehensive Agreement**

The Egyptian president abandoned the idea of reopening the Canal or of reaching any type of partial agreement as the first step toward a comprehensive peace treaty. He broke of his contact with the State Department, which he considered uncapable of pressuring Israel to accept his outline for a deal.[[73]](#footnote-73) Conversely, he saw the White House, and particularly Kissinger, as the true power base capable of kickstarting the diplomatic process in a favorable direction for Egypt. For Sadat, Israel was at best a minor partner in the process. He continued his efforts to persuade the Americans to impose a solution on Israel that he believed was consistent with American interests. As we shall see, Kissinger as unenthusiastic about the idea of a coercive solution, and as a result several writers have him of deliberately creating a stalemate that led to war.[[74]](#footnote-74)

Before Ismail met with Kissinger he outlined Egypt’s policy regarding a comprehensive agreement – a policy that highlighted Egypt’s conviction that the Americans could impose a resolution to the conflict. He clarified to the Americans that Egypt was not interested in an agreement for the reopening of the Canal. The Suez Canal was Egyptian property and would be managed by Egypt and not through a barter deal with Israel in return for a withdrawal of a few dozen kilometers, nor for anything else. The Egyptian government saw the idea of reopening the Canal as a dead horse. It blamed the US Administration for neutralizing the attempt to find a solution to the conflict while at the same time recruiting its full strength to thwart Egyptian interests. The American policy of squeezing and exhausting Egypt was intended to allow it to impose a Pax Americana in the Middle East. Egypt was interested in encouraging the US to adopt as balanced a policy as possible,[[75]](#footnote-75) and argued that “the United States has particular responsibility to help achieve a settlement, especially because of its role in ‘creating the problem’ by assisting the establishment of the state of Israel.”[[76]](#footnote-76)

Ismail held two meetings with Kissinger, the first in February 1973 and the second in May. At both meetings he raised the Egyptian peace proposal, again emphasizing that his country was interested in advancing peace since this was its will. However, promoting peace implied causing Israel to commit itself in advance to a complete withdrawal from all the occupied Arab lands. Ismail spoke not only on behalf of his own country, although he emphasized that “this is the first time in almost a quarter a century that an Arab Head of State takes a decision to be prepared to enter into a peace agreement with Israel.”[[77]](#footnote-77) Egypt could not approach the issue in terms of a partial agreement for the opening of the Canal, but this action might form part of a comprehensive peace deal. Moreover, Egypt was unwilling to discuss a separate peace and insisted that the problem must be tackled as part of an overall framework for an agreement in the Middle East. Ismail’s demand was for a complete Israeli withdrawal from all the Arab territories and the solution of the Palestinian problem, though such a process could be implemented in stages. Peace would nullify the state of war, end the economic boycott, and allow free passage in Egypt and in the Suez Canal. The agreement would not include normalization, which could come after a protracted period of time. Full peace and normalization, including the exchange of ambassadors and arrangements for tourism and commerce, would be introduced only after the resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict as a whole, including the Palestinian problem and the refugee issue. Israel’s policy had proved that it was not interested in peace, since it was blocking any possible step in the desirable direction.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Ismail’s conditions for peace with Israel were no different to those presented to the special envoy by Sadat in January 1971. Accordingly, it is difficult to understand why some writers have chosen to describe this formula as a far-reaching offer that would have prevented war, had it been accepted. One writer claims that the proposal was indeed accepted after the war, at the price of 2,650 fatalities on the Israeli side.[[79]](#footnote-79) This is a serious allegation, but a groundless one. The process after the war included negotiations between the two sides and the laying of firm foundations for peace. An arrangement was established regarding the Palestinian problem, and above all – the agreement with Egypt was completely separated from the question of the other Arab countries. This separation was already apparent in the Second Sinai agreement signed between Israel and Egypt in September 1975.[[80]](#footnote-80)

As noted, it is interesting that Israel was a minor party in these developments. The focus was on the US, and in the meetings Ismail repeatedly accused the Americans of responsibility for the situation that had been created. He saw the US as an important player, albeit not the crucial one, in handling the crisis. The American military and technological aid to Israel and its commitment to maintaining Israel’s strength had perpetuated its presence in the territories. Israel was receiving sophisticated weapons that even the US’s other allies had not been given. This effectively constituted a commitment to defend Israel’s occupations, with the ultimate goal of persuading the Arabs to submit to the Israeli dictates.[[81]](#footnote-81) For Kissinger, these comments constituted nothing more than the recitation of Egyptian positions he could read about in the press. He informed the president that Ismail had not changed the Egyptian position on any fundamental issue and was offering Cairo’s familiar approach.[[82]](#footnote-82) Ismail’s real goal was to test the US’s intentions, rather than to engage in genuine discussions on the various components of a possible Egyptian-Israeli agreement.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Our assessment is that Kissinger did not adopt a deliberate policy of encouraging a stalemate, as some scholars have suggested. Rather, he assumed that the formula proposed by Ismail would not allow any progress in the peace process. He clarified to Ismail that the Americans did not agree “that Israel should stay in occupation of Arab territory, but we do believe that the final borders should emerged from negotiations, direct or indirect, between Arabs and Israelis rather than have us write out the whole details of the settlement.”[[84]](#footnote-84) Egypt’s insistence on an Israeli commitment to a full withdrawal was in effect perpetuating the status quo. Kissinger raised the idea of a gradual process whereby Israel would undertake a partial withdrawal in order to kickstart a series of actions that, at least from the US’s perspective, would lead to a withdrawal that might end at the international border. Recognizing the concern of the Egyptian leadership that an interim agreement could become a permanent one, Kissinger informed Ismail that the Administration was willing to declare publicly and unequivocally that it would not regard an agreement to reopen the Canal as a final settlement, but rather as a step toward such a settlement. The US would ask the Israeli government to make a similar declaration. Real progress toward an interim agreement could be secured at the beginning of 1974, while a comprehensive agreement could be reached a year later.[[85]](#footnote-85)

Meir rejected the conditions for peace presented by the Egyptian envoy. She was willing to embark on negotiations toward a partial agreement for the opening of the Canal, and was also willing to accept that such an agreement would not be the end of the road, and that any withdrawal in its framework would be temporary. She also expressed her willingness to negotiate regarding the line to which Israel would withdraw as part of this process. She informed Kissinger that he could tell the Egyptian envoy that the line to which Israel would withdraw in the interim agreement would not be intended to serve as a permanent border. This was essentially the step-by-step approach that Kissinger himself had proposed, and Sadat ultimately pursued this formula after the war.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Unsurprisingly, Sadat was unsuccessful in his attempts to persuade the Americans to apply pressure on Israel to accept his terms for peace. He flatly refused to come to the negotiating table until Israel returned the Arab territories. The result was a path to war, and this war had two purposes. The first was to persuade the Americans, and ultimately Israel, to engage in a diplomatic process leading to the return of the Arab lands. The second and more important goal was to eradicate the humiliation of June 1967, so that Egypt could negotiate not from a position of disgrace but as a victor. Sadat’s wife Jihan commented in an interview that “those who insisted that Sadat had sought a genuine peace, prior to 1973” had got it wrong. “Sadat’s goal,” she stated, was “to get a cease-fire and nothing else. Sadat not only needed another war, but he needed to win it in order to come to the negotiating table as Israel’s equal. My husband was a man of peace, but as an Arab leader he would not, could not, negotiate with Israelis from a position of weakness or inferiority.”[[87]](#footnote-87)

To sum up: can Prime Minister Meir be accused of adhering to a policy that led to war? The accusation is that she rejected any proposal raised by the Egyptian president. In February 1971 Sadat expressed his willingness to sign a peace treaty with Israel; he later proposed a partial agreement for the reopening of the Suez Canal; and he ultimately went even further in the suggestions presented to Henry Kissinger in the meetings with his national security advisor Hafez Ismail. As a result, the accusation continues, Sadat was left with no choice but to turn to war in order to persuade the Israelis to abandon their rigid policy. However, a detailed scrutiny of Egyptian policy shows that the peace that Sadat offered, both in February 1971 and during 1973, as well as his initiative to reach a partial agreement, constituted an effort to end the state of war rather than to reach peace. For the Egyptians, true peace must include the resolution of the Palestinian problem and agreements with the other Arab countries. This peace would be imposed by the Americans: Egypt rejected any possibility of direct negotiations with Israel, which it regarded as a form of humiliation.

Egypt remained trapped in diplomatic and psychological positions that could not be overcome in the circumstances following the 1967 War. The same was true of Israel. Meir’s policy was to insist on negotiations virtually without compromise. Unlike the Egyptian president, however, the Israeli government under Meir did not make any diplomatic initiatives of its own. Sadat’s proposal to sign a peace treaty surprised the Israeli government, but Meir remained faithful to her view that a diplomatic solution could be reached only through direct negotiations. Israel relied on its own military might, while emphasizing to the other side that a solution could not be imposed externally and must be secured around the negotiating table. Assistant Secretary of State Sisco commented during one of his meetings with the Israelis that Israel’s thinking was focusing on military strategy while lacking political consideration. He longed for “an Israeli policy in political field equal in brilliance in that in military strategy.”[[88]](#footnote-88)

The war in October 1973 provided the blow both sides needed in order to move closer to each other’s position; otherwise it is impossible to understand the Egyptian willingness to accept the step-by-strep approach Kissinger proposed and the view that each step stood by itself. Similarly, Egypt agreed after the war to pursue direct negotiations with Israel regarding the separation of forces, while Israel agreed to withdraw from the Canal and allow Egyptian forces and weapons to cross over to its east bank. Following the separation of forces, the Sinai 2 agreement was signed, and eventually a full peace treaty was signed in March 1979. This treaty was detached from Israel’s conflict with the other Arab countries and did not include a full and permanent solution to the Palestinian refugee problem.

1. G. Yossi, *Golda, Biography* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mossad Bialik, 2012), pp. 89, 544. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A. Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Aliyat Gag, 2005), pp. 282-284, and *Lion of Jordan; the Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* [in Hebrew] (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2009), p. 52. See also, Y. Weits, ‘Golda Meir, Israel’s Forth Prime Minister (1969-74)’, *Middle Eastern Studies, vol.*47: no.1 (2011), p. 54; D. Bably, *Dreams and Missed Opportunities* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2002), p. 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. U. Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and its Sources [in Hebrew] (Or Yeuda: Dvir, 2013)*, pp. 14-15, and ‘Last Chance to Avoid War: Sadat’s Peace Initiative of February 1973 and its Failure’, *Journal of Cotemporary History,* vol. 41, no. 3 (2006), pp. 545-546. See also, G. Ya'acobi, on *the Razor's Edge* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1989), pp. *174-175; Y.* Beilin, *The Price of Unity [in Hebrew] (Ramat Gan: Revivim, 1985)*, pp. 116-154. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Y. Kipnis, *1973; the way to War* [in Hebrew] (Or Yehuda: Dvir, 2012), pp. 9-10, 31; Yossi Sarid who was a Minister of Education and led the Meretz Party between 1996-2003 defined Meir as ‘the root of all evil’, *Ha’aretz* Israeli daily newspaper)24 December 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. R. N. Lebow, and J. G. Stein, *We All Lost the Cold War* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 150-151, 181.in this connection see also, C. Daigle, *The Limits of Détente; The United States, the Soviet Union and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 4; W. B. Quandt, *Peace Process; American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. D. Neff, *Warriors against Israel* (Brattleboro, Vermont: Amana Books, 1988), pp.19, 25-28, 30. See also, B. Venetik, and Z. Shalom ‘U.S. Middle Eastern Policy; a Catalyst for the Yom Kippur War’, *Iyunim Bitkumat Yisrae*l [in Hebrew], vol. 19 (2009), p. 208*; P.* Tyler, *Fortress Israel; The Inside Story of the Military Elite Who Run the Country-and Why They Can’t Make Peace* (London: Portobello Books, 2012), pp. 8-10, 199-200, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. M. Boumfeld, *To take the Plunge; Political Negotiations between Israel and Egypt for a Comprehensive Peace Treaty/or Partial Settlement on the Suez Canal* [in Hebrew] (Re’ut: Efi Meltzer, 2017), pp. 904-905. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. M. Gazit, ‘Egypt and Israel – Was There a Peace Opportunity Missed in 1971?’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 23, no. 1(1997), pp. 97-115, and *The Peace Process, 1967-1973: Efforts and Contacts* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), pp. 122-127. It should be noted that Gazit served as General Manager during Golda Meir’s term as Prime Minister. See also G. Meir, *My Life* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma’ariv, 1975), pp. 289-291; M. Meir, ’Sadat Rejected Golda’s Hand of Peace’, a letter to the editor, Ha’aretz [in Hebrew] (Israeli Daily Newspaper), 5 July 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For the full text of Resolution 242 see J. N. Moore, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 802–803. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Knesset Debates,* Israel Parliamentary Debates, vol. 54, 17 March 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Israel State Archives, Jerusalem (ISA), A-10/6304, Prime Minister’s Files, June 9 1967; Eban, *Memoirs* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma’ariv, 1978), p. 430; Y. Rabin, *Service Notebook* [in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Ma’ariv, 1979), vol. 1, p. 226–227*; Knesset Debates*, vol.50, 30 October 1967; *Foreign Relation of the United States* (FRUS), *Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1967-1968*, vol. pp. 20, 80-86, 311-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. H. Tsoref, *Golda Meir the Forth Prime Minister: Selected Documents* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: State Archive, 2016), pp. 273-281. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. United States National Archives (USNA), RG59/1834, SD to Tel Aviv, 2 April 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. USNA, RG59/1819, SD to Tel Aviv, 15 March 1969; USNA, RG59/1820, Rogers to Tel Aviv, 5 May 1969; The National Archives, Kew, London (TNA), FCO17/943, Washington to FCO, 15 March 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. USNA, Nixon Files/ 756, Prime Minister Meir to President, 15 May 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. TNA, FCO17/947, Record of Conversation, 13 June 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. USNA, Nixon Files/ 756, 13 June 1968. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. USNA, RG59/1840, SD to Tel Aviv, 19 December 1969; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. G. Rafael*, Destination Peace; Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy* [in Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Idanim, 1981), p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. USNA, Nixon Files/756, Memorandum for Kissinger, 26 December 1969. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. H. Kissinger, *The White House Years* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1980), vol.1, p. 401; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 1, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. M. H. Heikal, *Road to Ramadan* (London: Collins, 1975), pp. 53–54. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. USNA ,Nixon Files/ 756, Prime Minister Meir to President, 15 May 1969 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Eban, *Memoirs*, p. 459; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol.1, pp. 271-272; TNA, FCO17/769, Tel Aviv to FCO, 19 January 1970; USNA, RG/2050, Sisco to Rogers, 7 January 1970, and Middle East Situation, 19 January 1970; See also, *Le Monde*, 15 and 20 January 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Dayan, *Story of My Life [*in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1978), p. 521; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 1, p. 296; D. Korn, *Stalemate; The War of Attrition and Great Powers Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967-1970* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 254; Quandt, Peace Process, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. R. M. Nixon, *The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (London:, Arrow, 1979), p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. USNA, RG50/2068, Sisco to Rogers, 15 August 1970. R. Israeli, *Man of Defiance; A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1985), p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. I. A. Karawan, ‘Identity and foreign Policy: the Case of Egypt’, in S. Telhami and M. Barnett (eds.), *Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East* (New York and London*:* Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 182. K. Sorby, ‘The War of Attrition in the Middle East, 1969-1970’, *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2017), p. 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. W. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Foreign Policy toward Egypt* (Albany, NY: State University of NY, 1985), pp. 176–177; M. El Husseini, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945-1985* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1987), p. 184; Heikal, Road to Ramadan, p. 115; M. H. Heikal*, Secret Channels; the Inside Story of Arab-Israeli Peace Negotiations* (London: Harper and Collins, 1996), p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. K. Waldheim, ’The Search for Peace in the Middle East; The Waldheim Report’, *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 4 (Summer, 1973), pp. 203-204; M. Gazit, *The Peace Process, 1967-1973; Efforts and Contacts* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), p. 65; USNA, Nixon Files, H-31, Memorandum for the President, 25 February, 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Newsweek* 22 February 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. USNA, RG59/2073, Cairo to SD, 16 February 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 2, p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. F. Klagsbrun, *Lioness; Golda Meir and the Nation of Israel (New York: Schoken Books, 2017), p. 585;* Boumfeld, *Take the Plunge*, pp. 126-127. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. ISA, Hez2/4288, Eban to London, 12 January 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Boumfeld, *Take the Plunge*, p. 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Waldheim, "Search for Peace", pp. 204-205; Rafael, *Destination Peace*, p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. USNA, RG59/2073, SD to Tel Aviv, 18 February 1971, and 23 February 1971; USNA, RG50/2074, Scenario for Seeking to Break the Impasse on the Middle East, 9 March 1971, and Rogers to Tel Aviv, 19 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. ISA, Hez2/4289, Washington to Jerusalem, February 1971. (No exact date). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. USNA, RG50/2074, Scenario for Seeking to Break the Impasse on the Middle East, 9 March 1971, and Rogers to Tel Aviv, 19 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. USNA, RG50/2074, Scenario for Seeking to Break the Impasse on the Middle East, 9 March 1971, and Rogers to Tel Aviv, 19 March 1971; ; C. Daigle, ‘The Russians are Going; Sadat, Nixon and the Soviet Presence in Egypt’ *The Middle East Review of International Affairs*, vol. 8, no. 1 (2004), p. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. ISA, Hez8/4288, New York to Jerusalem, 6 March 1971; Gazit, *Peace Process*, pp.66-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ISA, Hez8/4288, Paris to Jerusalem, 4 March 1971, Telegram no. 37 and 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ISA, Hez8/4288, New York to Jerusalem, 6 March 1971; NA, FCO17/1499, Record of Conversation, 4 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ISA, Hez2/4829, Rabin to Eban, 6 March 1971; USNA, RG59/2074, Rogers to Tel Aviv, 19 March 1971; NA, FCO17/1499, Tel Aviv to FCO, 15 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. ISA, Hez8/4288, Jerusalem to Washington, 2 March 1971; USNA, RG59/2073, Tel Aviv to SD, 2 March 1791, nos. 819-820. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. *The Times*, 13 March 1971; *Ma'ariv* (Israeli daily newspaper), 14 March 1971; *Knesset Debates*, vol. 60, 16 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. USNA, RG59/2073, Sadat to Nixon, 5 March 1971; TNA, FCO17/1405, Washington to FCO, 9 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. ISA, Hez7/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 4 February 1971; M. Riad, *Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), pp. 177-178; G. Ya'acobi, *On the Razor's Edge*[in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1989), p. 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. USNA, Nixon Files/494, Memorandum for Kissinger, 26 January 1971; K. W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy; Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace (*New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 59; Kissinger, *White House Years*, vol. 3, p. 1316.

Several of Sadat's critics accused him repackaging and presenting Dayan's ideas as his own. See, Heikal, *Secret Channels*, p.164. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. *Newsweek*, 22 February 1971; See also, Heikal, *Road to Ramadan*, p. 116; Y. Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace Continuity and Change* (Gainsville: University of Florida, 1997), pp. 85-87; M. Gazit*, Israeli Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace (*London: Frank Cass, 2002), pp. 93-94; A. Z. Rubinstein, Red Star over the Nile (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 137; A. Sadat, ‘Where Egypt Stands’, *Foreign Affairs, vol.5, no. 1* (October, 1972), p.120; ISA, Hez4/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 10 February 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. USNA, RG59/2074, Memorandum for the President, 9 March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. ISA, Hez2/4289, Washington to Jerusalem, 6 March 1971; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 2, p. 339; Ya'acobi, *Razor's Edge*, pp. 106, 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. ISA, Hez2/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 2 April 1971; TNA, FCO17/1492, Cairo to FCO, 6 April 1971; Meital. *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 93; Y. Raviv, ‘Early Attempts to reach an interim Agreement between Egypt and Israel, 1972-1973’, *Ma’arakhot* [in Hebrew] , no. 243-244 (April-May, 1975), p. 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Knesset Debates, vol. 59, 9 February 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Public Relations Office, ‘The Special Arrangement to Reopen the Suez Canal’, in Altman David (ed,), *Excerpts from a Series of Lectures Given By Moshe Dayan; Arab-Israeli Relations* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1975), no numbers of pages. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. ISA, HEZ2/7024, Jerusalem to Ottawa, 2 May 1971; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 2, p. 348. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ISA, Hez4/5987, Jerusalem to Washington, 19 April 1971; Heikal, *Secret Channels*, pp. 167-168; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 90; Eban, *Memoirs*, p. 470; Kissinger, *White House Years*, vol. 3, p. 1318; *Rafael, Destination Peace*, p. 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 2, p. 348 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. ISA, Hez2/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 6 May 1971; Meital, *Egypt's Struggle*, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Daigle, "The Russians are Going", p. 6-7; Riad, *Struggle for Peace*, p. 201; USNA, RG59/2076, Origins of the Concept of an Interim Agreement, no date. See also, Newsweek, 13 December 1971. *Ma'ariv*, 7 May 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. ISA, Hez3/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 9 May 1971; TNA, FCO17/1490, Tel Aviv to FCO, 10 May 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. ISA, Hez3/7024, London to Jerusalem, 18 May 1971; Dayan, *Story of My Life*, p. 527; Eban, *Memoirs*, p. 470; G. Ya'acobi, *Grace of Time: an Autobiography* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Hemed, 2002), p. 99; USNA, RG59/2075, SD to London, 12 May 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. ISA, Hez3/7024, Jerusalem to Washington, 10, and 13 and 20 May 1971; USNA, RG59/2076, Cairo to SD, 1 June 1971; Gazit, *Israeli Diplomacy*, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. ISA, Hez9/7311, Conversation between Rabin and Sisco, 9, and 29 June 1971.

The Egyptian document had been drafted with the help of Donald Bergus, the US representative in Egypt. As news of this leaked to the press, Israel immediately pounced on this as evidence of a US-Egyptian conspiracy. Bergus, however, had acted on his own initiative and not at the behest of the State Department. Kissinger, however, claims though he had received no explicit instructions to help Egypt, Bergus had been inspired to do what he did by the prevailing mood in the upper echelons of the Administration. See Kissinger, *The White House* Years, vol.3, p.1320, USNA, RG59/2076, SD to Tel Aviv, 29 June 1971; Yaqub, ‘The Politics of Stalemate’, p.47; *Newsweek*, 13 December 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. ISA, Hez9/7311, Prime Minister's Remarks and Instructions, 10 May 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. TNA, FCO17/14194, Minute by Parsons, 30 September 1971. See also the conversation between Rogers and Riad in USNA, RG59/2076, SD to Cairo 29 September 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. ISA, A6/7029, Meir-Sisco Meeting, 30 July 1971; USNA, RG59/2076, Meir-Sisco- Meeting, 31 July 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. ISA, Hez2/7302, Sisco's Reports, 1 August 1971, and Meir-Sisco Meeting, 2 August 1971, and Hez2/7301, Gazit to Eban, 1 August 1971; Rafael, *Destination Peace*, p. 241;

 USNA, Nixon Files/756, Meir to Nixon, 17 September 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. USNA, RG59/2076, Sisco-Meir Meeting, 31 July 1971; ISA, Hez2/7301, Meir Sisco Meeting, 30 July 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. ISA, Hez2/7301, Rabin to Gazit, 13 August 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Rabin*, Service Notebook*, vol. 2, pp. 364, 367; Gazit, *Israeli Diplomacy*, p. 97; Boumfeld, *Take the Plunge,* pp. 651-654, *929-930.* [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. ISA, A12/7038, New York to Jerusalem, 6 February 1971; TNA, FCO93/235, Cairo to FCO, 20 March 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Venetik & Shalom, “U.S. Middle Eastern Policy", pp. 208-9, 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. USNA, RG59/2083, Tels, 2477-2478, Cairo to SD, 29 January 1973. In this connection see also, TNA, FCO93/234, Minute by Craig, 19 February 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. USNA, RG59/2083, Tel. 2477, Cairo to SD, 29 January 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. USNA, RG59/25 Records of Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, 20 May 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 99; Rabin, *Service Notebook*, vol. 2, pp. 383-385; Yaqub, "Politics of Stalemate", p. 51; Boumfeld, *Take the Plunge*, p. 904; USNSA, RG59/25 Records of Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, 20 May 1973. Tsoref, *Golda,* pp. 464-465. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. See notes 3- 4. In this connection see, Boumfeld, *Take the Plunge*, p. 905. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. M. Gat, *The Arab-Israel* Conflict*, 1956-1975: from Violent Conflict to a Peace Process (*London and New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. USNSA, RG59/25 Records of Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, 20 May 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. USNSA, NPMP, HAKO/132, Memorandum of Conversation, 13 August 1973; Tsoref, *Golda*, p. 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. USNA, NPMP, HAKO/132, Memorandum for the President, 2 June 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. USNSA, RG59/25 Records of Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, 20 May 1973 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. USNSA, RG59/25 Records of Henry Kissinger, Memorandum of Conversation, 20 May 1973; and Nixon Files, HAKO/132, Memorandum of Conversation, 13 August 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. ISA, A12/7038, Nixon-Meir Meting, 1 March 1973. ISA, A1/7051, Gazit to Dinitz, 13 May 1973, and Hez5/5975, The Egyptian Initiative, 9 May 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Yedi’ot Ahronot (*Israeli daily newspaper), 6 November 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. ISA, A25/7041, Jerusalem to Washington, 15 April 1970, and Hez1/7311, Meeting between Meir and Sisco, 16 April 1970; USNA, RG59/2052, Tel Aviv to SD, 15 April 1970. “Israeli military strategy”, Sisco would tell Shmuel Segev, writing for the Israeli daily Ma'ariv, “has been infinitely successful, but Israel's political policy was bankrupt.” See USNA, RG59/2050, Memorandum of Conversation, 6 March 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)