

# MERIA

## **THE RUSSIANS ARE GOING: SADAT, NIXON AND THE SOVIET PRESENCE IN EGYPT, 1970-1971**

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*New evidence reveals that the United States was well aware of Sadat's intention to remove the Soviet military presence from Egypt and took steps over the summer of 1971 to ensure this end. We now know that President Nixon's decision to suspend the supply of aircrafts to Israel at the end of June and his decision to press for reopening the Suez Canal as part of an interim agreement between Egypt and Israel had as much to do with getting Soviets out of Egypt as it did with finding a peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.*

The decision by Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat to remove the Soviet military presence from his country during the summer of 1972 has often been viewed as the first step on the road to the October War the following year. By removing the Soviet presence, it has been argued, Sadat was also removing the major obstacle preventing him from engaging in another war with Israel.(1) Though Sadat insisted at the time that the expulsion of the Soviets was simply a result of the growing differences between Moscow and Cairo,(2) and while others have argued that their removal was a direct result of the Soviet-American détente,(3) it seemed clear that since Moscow was opposed to risking its new relationship with the United States by supporting Egypt in another war with Israel, Sadat had no choice but to ask for their departure.

In Washington, American officials were reportedly "shocked" to learn of Sadat's announcement. Henry Kissinger later recalled that Sadat's decision came as a "complete surprise to Washington," and he quickly met with the Soviet ambassador to dispel any notion that the United States had colluded with the Egyptians in reaching this end.(4) President Nixon, similarly,

hurried a letter to Leonid Brezhnev, claiming the United States had "no advanced knowledge of the recent events in Egypt," and assured the Soviet Premier that the United States would "take no unilateral actions in the Middle East" as a result of the recent developments.(5)

Early scholarly treatment of Sadat's decision to remove the Soviet military presence has generally fallen in line with this official account. William B. Quandt, for example, argued that the expulsion of the Soviet advisors came at "curious" time in Washington since Nixon was preoccupied with an election campaign and would not risk his lead in the polls "by embarking on a controversial policy in the Middle East."(6) In his study of the Soviet-Egyptian relationship, Alvin Z. Rubinstein also concluded that "as far as can be determined Sadat consulted no one; his decision was his own."(7)

More recently, scholars have placed the expulsion in the context of Soviet-American relations rather than in the deteriorating relationship between Egypt and Russia. In Raymond L. Garthoff's view, it was the agreements reached between the United States and the Soviet Union during the 1972 Moscow Summit,

which effectively put the Arab-Israeli conflict on the backburner, that became the "last straw" for Sadat.(8) Henry Kissinger reached similar conclusions in his 1994 study *Diplomacy*, in which he argued that "the first sign that [detente] was having an impact came in 1972 [when] Egyptian President Anwar Sadat dismissed all his Soviet military advisors and asked Soviet technicians to leave the country."(9)

Without archival evidence, however, several questions surrounding Sadat's decision to expel the Soviet military presence from Egypt still remain: To what extent did the United States have prior knowledge of Sadat's intentions? Did the United States work with Sadat in seeking the removal of the Soviets? And was the expulsion of the Soviet military presence from Egypt really the first step to the October War, as some have argued, or was it simply the easiest way for Sadat to tell the United States that he was prepared to take Egypt in a new direction?

New material emerging from American archives and summarized in this article suggests that Sadat's decision to remove the Soviet advisors was hardly the surprise that American officials later claimed it to be. Documents now declassified from State Department and National Security Council files, as well as numerous hours of recorded conversations between President Nixon and his senior foreign policy advisors, show that as early as May 1971, over a year before the expulsion of the Soviet advisors, American officials were well aware of Sadat's intentions and worked aggressively to ensure the removal of the Soviet presence from Egypt.

Throughout the summer of 1971, these sources show, the Nixon administration took numerous steps to help Sadat remove the Soviet military presence from his country. We now know, in fact, that Nixon's decision to suspend the supply of aircrafts to Israel at the end of June, and his

decision to aggressively press for the reopening of the Suez Canal as part of an interim agreement between Egypt and Israel had just as much to do with getting the Soviets out of Egypt as it did with finding a long-term peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

Just as important, though, these new sources demonstrate that the expulsion of the Soviet military presence had very little to do with preparing Egypt for another war with Israel. For Sadat, the decision to remove the Soviets was clearly a decision he had made from the earliest days of his presidency to not only become much closer to the West, but to avoid another war with Israel, which he knew Egypt would undoubtedly lose.

### **SOVIETS IN THE SINAI**

From the earliest days of the Nixon administration, removing the Soviet military presence from Egypt was central to American interests in the Middle East. Since the mid-1960s, the United States had watched Moscow increase its military and financial support to Cairo, as the Soviet military worked closely with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in training Egyptian pilots and acquiring and constructing naval bases along the Suez Canal.(10) In the 1967 Six-Day War, Egypt became virtually dependent upon Soviet financial and military assistance in its struggle against Israel, and looked to the Soviets for diplomatic support in bringing the war to an end. Recent evidence has also shown that during the war the Soviet Union had even prepared for a naval landing on Israel's shores to support the Arab states in the event of an outbreak of hostilities.(11)

Following the Six-Day War, the Soviet Union became the primary source of financial and military support for rebuilding Egypt's shattered army. In the first six months following the war, almost 80 percent of the aircraft, tanks and

artillery Egypt had lost in June had been replaced by the Soviet Union, and more than five thousand Soviet "advisors" were sent to Cairo in all phases of training, planning, and air defense. These weapons allowed Egypt to continue fighting with Israel over the next three years in an attempt to reverse the territorial gains made by Israel in 1967.(12) According to Alvin Rubinstein, "the magnitude of the Soviet commitment [to Egypt] was unprecedented, surpassing in both quantity and quality the aid given to North Vietnam and exceeding the rate at which aid had hitherto been given to allied or friendly countries." (13)

Early reports out of the Nixon administration seemed to confirm these fears. In a paper prepared for a meeting of the National Security Council on February 4, 1969, it was determined that "the high-water mark of Soviet potential influence [in the Middle East] has not yet been reached." The Soviet Union, the report concluded, was determined to "reduce Western, and particularly American, positions and influence in the Middle East, and to expand its own."(14) For Nixon, too, the continued Soviet presence in the Middle East was the surest way the Soviets could "gain access to what [they] had always wanted--land, oil, power, and the warm waters of the Mediterranean."(15) As he later commented to Secretary of State William Rogers, "The difference between our goal and the Soviet goal in the Middle East is very simple but fundamental. We want Peace. They want the Middle East."(16)

With this in mind, President Nixon authorized the State Department to begin talks with the Soviet Union on the Middle East, in the hope that the two could find a solution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Though in part, the President wanted to use these negotiations to determine Soviet flexibility on what he considered more pressing issues--Vietnam, SALT, and Berlin--he truly believed that since any future

explosion in the region would almost certainly lead to a superpower confrontation, he had to make a strong effort to find a solution to the ongoing conflict.

But despite efforts over the next year to reach an agreement with Moscow, the Soviets continued to increase their military support to Egypt. New sources emerging out of the former Soviet Union, for example, indicate that in November 1969, while Moscow was deliberating on a proposed peace plan by Secretary of State William Rogers, Soviet naval advisors were leading an operation against Israeli forces in the Sinai.(17) And throughout 1970, moreover, Soviet pilots disguised in Egyptian uniforms took part in air combat operations in response to increased Israeli air assaults inside Egypt.(18)

In August 1970, after three months of negotiations with the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Israel, Secretary of State Rogers was able to get Egypt and Israel to agree to a temporary ceasefire, putting an end to the ongoing war of attrition.(19) But within minutes of the ceasefire taking affect, Nasser had violated its provisions by constructing surface-to-air missile sites and moving Soviet missiles into the canal zone.(20)

Indeed, not until the ascension of Anwar al-Sadat to the Egyptian presidency following Nasser's death in the fall of 1970 did the United States see a realistic chance of removing the Soviet presence from Egypt. Unlike his predecessor, Sadat hoped to reduce the Soviet military presence in his country, and he genuinely wanted to negotiate a way out of his country's dispute with Israel. More importantly, he understood that the best way to recover the land lost to Israel in the 1967 war was not to strengthen itself military through the Soviet Union, but to reach out to the United States in the hope that the Americans could squeeze the Israelis into returning the occupied territories. During Nasser's

funeral Sadat privately summoned Elliot Richardson, the highest-ranking American official in attendance, and expressed to him that under his direction Egypt was prepared to become much closer to the West.(21)

Two months later, Sadat sent a letter to Washington with the intent of affirming Egypt's independence from Soviet power. "You would be mistaken to think that [Egypt] was in the sphere of Soviet influence," the Egyptian president said unambiguously. Instead, Sadat promised that Egypt "takes its decisions freely and independently," and assured President Nixon that if the United States "proves friendly to us, we shall be ten times as friendly."(22)

In February 1971, in perhaps his most overt statement about the Soviet presence since becoming president, Sadat told Gunnar Jarring, the United Nation's special representative assigned to the Arab-Israeli conflict, that Egypt would terminate all states of claims of belligerency with Israel, as well as respect Israel's "right to live within secure and recognized boundaries."(23) Though there was nothing in his statement to Jarring that directly mentioned the removal of the Soviet presence from Egypt, there was little doubt that by coming to terms with Israel Sadat would quickly eliminate the need for maintaining the vast Soviet military presence in his country.

American officials clearly interpreted his statements as an opening. In a recently declassified recording of a meeting of the National Security Council on February 26, 1971, Secretary of State Rogers and Assistant Secretary Joseph Sisco can be heard explaining to President Nixon the significance of Sadat's recent gestures. In Sisco's view, the Egyptians had now given concrete assurances that Israel should find acceptable. "They have said categorically, 'We will join in a peace agreement with the Israelis.' They have spelled out these peace

commitments in a way in which we're sure [is] satisfactory."(24) Rogers, too, expressed his satisfaction with Sadat's proposals, but knew that his statements would mean nothing if the Israelis refused to meet him half way. "If, in 1967, we could have gotten from Egypt what they are now willing to give, Israel would have been delighted with it," the Secretary of State said before the National Security Council. "Now, Israel is... unwilling to make a decision of any kind."(25)

For Rogers, Israel's intransigence represented a clear evasion of the commitments they had made to the United States since the conclusion of the Six-Day War. Since 1967, in fact, the Israeli government had continually maintained that if Egypt was willing to accept Israel's right to exist, and to make provisions for its security, that they would then negotiate a return of the occupied territories. But now, as Rogers explained, the Israelis were simply refusing to come to the negotiating table. "And if that is their response," he said very clearly, "then the United States is in one hell of a position."(26)

President Nixon appeared to be equally frustrated by Israel's reluctance to respond favorably to Sadat's new overtures, and began to question America's continued commitment to Israel when they would not live up to their obligations. "Why do we provide the arms," he asked, if Israel refuses to negotiate? The President had grown tired of Israel's games and believed it was time to increase the pressure on Israeli leaders. "We cannot be in a position where we [continue to provide aid] and Israel says we won't talk," he said in response to Rogers's comments. "That's what it gets down to."(27)

Nixon's frustration with Israel, however, did not mean he was completely behind Sadat. In fact, he made it quite clear during the meeting of the NSC that he "had no confidence at all about the Egyptians,"(28)

and was highly skeptical about whether the Egyptians could be trusted after breaking similar promises to the United States just six months earlier. In addition, the President affirmed that for the time being the United States would "maintain the [military] balance in [Israel's] favor," as well as support Israel's claim of "secure and defensible borders."

Still, both Nixon and Rogers believed that with Nasser out of the picture and with Sadat's recent statements there was a reasonable possibility of getting Egypt and Israel to agree to some form of an interim settlement. At the very least, Nixon knew that with the chances of a summit with the Soviet Union still about a year away, and with little progress being made in Vietnam, he had some time to maneuver on the Middle East. Yet any agreement, the President maintained, must address the Soviet military presence in Egypt. "They've got to quit messing around over there," he said firmly to Rogers and Sisco. "That has to be part of the deal." (29)

The following month, and just days before Rogers was set to depart on a ten-day tour to the Middle East, which included direct talks with Sadat in Cairo, the President and Secretary of State again discussed the importance of removing the Soviets from Egypt. "Egypt is not as concerned about a war as she was before because she's got pretty good defenses now," Secretary Rogers explained to President Nixon. The Soviet Union has strengthened Egypt considerably." In fact, he said, Egypt possessed "the strongest defensive position outside the Soviet Union in terms of SAM [Surface-to-Air Missiles] sites... so that they feel much more comfortable defensively than they did before." (30) At the same time, though, Rogers insisted that neither the Egyptians nor the Soviets had any interest in another Arab-Israeli war. "It's quite clear that they are saying to Egypt 'we're going to give you all kinds of defensive equipment so

you can feel secure... [and] if necessary we'll fly the goddamn planes.'" But, Rogers maintained, "what [the Russians] want is to keep it right where it is because then they get the whole Arab world sore at us." (31)

### **THE SADAT-ROGERS CONVERSATIONS: NEW EVIDENCE**

Until recently the details of Sadat's conversations with the Secretary of State has remained somewhat ambiguous. In his memoirs, Sadat said only that he and Rogers discussed the importance of his (Sadat's) previous overtures, but made no reference to any future guarantees about removing the Soviet military presence from his country. (32) Mahmoud Riad, Sadat's foreign minister who was also present during the conversations, later wrote that Rogers was continually "harping" on the Soviet theme, but did not mention the extent to which the Soviets were also on Egyptian minds. (33)

Rogers's cables to Washington following his talks in Cairo were equally evasive on the Soviet theme. In his May 7 telegram to President Nixon, Rogers seemed genuinely impressed that Sadat had made a true commitment to peace, but regarding the Soviets Rogers mentioned only that Sadat "said some things about [their] presence which I will report to you personally." (34) Alexander Haig's memo to President Nixon the following day also made no reference to Sadat's views on the Soviet presence inside Egypt, saying only that "Secretary Rogers concludes his visits to the Near East with the general observation that the trip added a measure of confidence in our relations with the UAR." (35)

With the opening of the Nixon presidential tapes, however, we now know that much more was discussed between Rogers and Sadat than previous accounts have led on. Indeed through two separate recordings of conversations held between Secretary Rogers and President Nixon

immediately following Rogers's return from Egypt, the Secretary of State can be heard thoroughly detailing his discussion with Sadat, making it clear to President Nixon that removing the Soviet military presence had become central to Sadat's strategy.

"I know what's uppermost in your mind and I want to talk about it at once... and that's the Soviet Union," Rogers quoted Sadat as telling him. "I don't like the fact that we have to depend on the Soviet Union as much as we do. I am a nationalist. I want to remain a nationalist... I don't want to have to depend on anyone else. The only reason I have is because we were humiliated and I had no place to turn."(36)

According to Rogers's account of the conversation, the financial burden of maintaining the Soviet presence in Egypt was weighing heavily on Sadat. In the three years following the Six-Day War, Egypt's military expenditures, including the costs of the Soviet advisors, almost doubled, rising from \$718 million in 1967 to \$1.26 billion in 1970.(37) "I'll tell you," Sadat told Rogers, "you may not believe this but it is the truth: I have to pay for everything... I can't afford it. It's a drain on me. We should be spending money for other [things]. I pay for it all in hard currency... I pay for the salaries and expenses of the Russians who are here... I need the money for other things."(38)

Though these statements in some ways echoed what Sadat had been telling American officials during the preceding months, the Secretary of State seemed genuinely surprised by Sadat's discontent with the Soviet Union. Like Rogers, Sadat believed that the Soviets had no interest in seeing the immediate return of the occupied territories to the Arab states. So long as Israel controlled these areas, he reasoned, the Soviets would continue to justify the expansion of their military presence in the region. He pleaded for the

United States government to be more evenhanded, and he left Secretary Rogers with a clear message to take back to Washington that he believed would not only end the continued impasse but would change the direction of American policy in the region for years to come: "I want to give you this promise," Sadat said unambiguously to Rogers. "If we can work out an interim settlement... I promise you, I give you my personal assurance, that all the Russian ground troops will be out of my country at the end of six months. I will keep Russian pilots to train my pilots because that's the only way my pilots can learn how to fly. But in so far as the bulk of the Russians--the ten or twelve thousand--they will all be out of Egypt within six months if we can make a deal."(39)

The significance of Sadat's proposal was not lost on Rogers. Since the earliest days of the Nixon administration, he had been trying to negotiate an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict only to see his efforts come up short time and again. The idea that Sadat was now willing to include the removal of the Soviet military presence from his country in addition to agreeing to sign a peace agreement with Israel was simply something the United States could not ignore. "For as much as we would like to be friendly as hell with you, we can't as long as you have this number of Russians here," he told Sadat in response to the Egyptian's new promises.(40)

Rogers acknowledged that he too was frustrated with Israel's refusal to respond favorably to the proposals put forth during the preceding months, and he understood that Sadat desperately needed a deal to maintain his power. But the Secretary of State made it clear that Israel would continue with their pattern of behavior, and the United States would continue to support Israel so long as the large number of Russian troops remained in Egypt. "On the other hand," Rogers told Sadat, "once

that is not the case, once they've left, or most of them, it's a different ballgame."(41)

What seems even more evident from the presidential recordings, however, is that Sadat's decision to expel the Soviet presence from Egypt had very little to do with preparing Egypt for another war with Israel. For Sadat the Soviet removal was the most overt way he could tell the United States that he was serious in wanting to change their existing relationship. He assured Rogers that the position he took with regards to Jarring's memorandum in February--his decision to live in peace with Israel, to sign a peace agreement with Israel, and to stay out of Israeli internal affairs--was because he thought that was what the West wanted. "There's no reason why the Arabs should be closer aligned to the Soviet Union," he said to Rogers. "My people like the West better."(42)

To be sure, Sadat was even willing to accept an American military presence in the region as part of a peacekeeping force so long as Israel would agree to return Egypt's land. "I have no interest in violating the security interests in anything you want to do, in anything the United Nations wants to do, or anyone else wants to do," he pleaded with Rogers. "I don't want to bother Israel... I'll sign an agreement... I just want my land back."(43)

Before the meeting concluded, Sadat expressed to Rogers that he hoped the time had come where the United States would change its relationship with Egypt, believing that with the Soviet presence removed from his country, there could be a much more evenhanded approach to the conflict. "I realize too that you can't change overnight," he said. "You've sort of built a monument in your relationship with Israel that can't be affected quickly, but can be changed over a period of time. And if you can do that, I'm prepared to change our relationship with you." He said, "if we can

work out some interim settlements on the Suez, we'll renew diplomatic relations with you... and I think others will too."(44)

As soon as he returned to Washington, Secretary Rogers told the President that he believed Egypt had made a commitment to peace that the United States could not afford to ignore. He explained to Nixon that Sadat wanted to be sure that any future deal is phrased in such a way that it did not appear as if Sadat had made any concessions, but he had no doubt that was something that could be easily accomplished. "The thing I want to emphasize," the Secretary of State can be heard telling President Nixon in the Oval Office on May 10, "[is] I think that it is possible that if he stays in power, that we can make a breakthrough here that will have tremendous importance... If we can pull this off, it will be a step toward peace no one thought was possible."(45)

President Nixon was clearly intrigued by what he was learning during his two conversations with Rogers. While it was still not clear whether Sadat would remain in power long enough to see these promises through, he also understood that Egypt had been much more forthcoming than the Israeli leaders had been during the preceding months, and well understood that this was by far the best offer he had received from any Arab leader about furthering American objectives in the region.

True, Nixon was concerned about how colluding with the Egyptians would affect the relationship he had built with Moscow during the preceding years. Would the Soviet Union, for example, increase their military aid to North Vietnam if they learned that the United States was secretly seeking their expulsion from Egypt? Or would Moscow withdraw its most recent offer of an anti-ballistic missile agreement if the President's efforts to remove the Soviet military presence came to light? (46) Still, the President obviously

recognized that this was his chance to finally get the Soviets out of Egypt and he seemed prepared to accept the risks that moving them out might entail.

Accordingly, on May 26, 1971, Nixon sent Secretary Rogers a TOP SECRET/EYES ONLY memorandum in which he clearly authorized the Secretary of State to press the Israelis into an agreement so as to ensure the expulsion of the Soviet forces from Egypt. "Under these circumstances," Nixon said referring to Sadat's recent revelations, "it is essential that no more aid programs for Israel be approved until they agree to some kind of interim action on the Suez or some other issue." (47). The President strongly believed that Golda Meir had "diddled us along" during the previous two years and that it was now time for the Israeli government to make the hard decisions. "In the month of June or July," he told Rogers, "[they] must bite the bullet as to whether they want more U.S. aid at the price of being reasonable on an interim agreement or whether they want to go at it alone." (48)

The President acknowledged that there were certainly times when the national security interests of the United States is better served by siding with Israel. "Where the Soviet Union is obviously siding with Israel's neighbors," he wrote, "it serves our interests to see that Israel is able to not only defend itself but to deter further Soviet encroachments in the area." (49) This, he said, is what had influenced him in coming down hard on the side of Israel in maintaining the balance of power in the area at a time when Soviet influence in Egypt and other countries surrounding Israel has been particularly strong. (50) But in this instance, Nixon believed, with the possibility of moving the Soviet military presence out of Egypt, and with the likelihood of getting Egypt to enter a peace agreement with Israel, he strongly felt that "the interests of the United States will be

served... by tilting the policy... on the side of 100 million Arabs rather than on the side of two million Israelis." (51)

President Nixon, though, fully understood that his window of opportunity to "tilt" American policy toward the Arabs was extremely narrow. In fact, he made it quite clear to Secretary Rogers that "unless [he] was able to get some kind of a settlement now with the Israelis on the Suez or some other issue, there was not going to be any kind of settlement until after the 1972 elections." By that time, he knew, "the Soviet will have had no other choice but to build up the armed strength of Israel's neighbors to the point that another Mideast war will be inevitable." (52) As far as Sadat was concerned, the President acknowledged that "he obviously does not want to have a Soviet presence in Egypt." On the other hand, he told Rogers, "if his policy of conciliation fails, he will either have to go along with a new program of accepting Soviet aid or lose his head, either politically or physically." (53)

#### **THE EGYPTIAN-SOVIET TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP**

It was with great surprise, therefore, that just three weeks after Sadat had assured Rogers that he wanted the Soviets out of Egypt, and just one day after President Nixon issued his instructions to Rogers to ensure that end, that the United States learned of the new Egyptian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. Signed between Sadat and Nikolai Podgorny on May 27, 1971, the treaty reaffirmed the Egyptian-Soviet relationship, and provided for continued Soviet military, economic, and cultural aid, as well as an Egyptian commitment to pursue a socialist course regardless of who was in power. (54)

In the West, the treaty was generally interpreted as solidifying the Soviet influence in Egypt. Shortly after the new agreement, the New York Times

editorialized that "except for religion, it is difficult to think of a major area of Egyptian life which Mr. Sadat has not now promised to bring closely under Moscow's guidance."(55) The Washington Post similarly argued that the treaty by Russia and Egypt "destroys the widespread notion that Sadat... had managed to diminish the Soviet influence [in Egypt]."(56) And Henry Kissinger was so convinced the treaty was a new foundation in the Soviet-Egyptian relationship that he quickly sent a letter to President Nixon asserting "the treaty would give the Soviet Union a veto over [any] future negotiations."(57)

Secretary Rogers, on the other hand, disagreed with those assessments. As the Nixon tapes show, upon learning of the Egyptian-Soviet treaty Rogers informed President Nixon that the treaty in no way reversed the assurances Sadat had made to him back in early May. In Rogers's view, the treaty was simply a diversion from the Egyptian side, and a move from the Russians to solidify the relationship that they knew they were losing.(58) "I think what [the Soviets] are trying to do is make it appear that they have not lost their position with Egypt," the Secretary of State told President Nixon over the telephone on May 28. "They don't want to threaten anything because that would really make Sadat mad as hell. So what they are doing is trying to figure out other ways to make it appear that there has been no change in their relationship."(59)

From the Egyptian perspective, moreover, Rogers almost blatantly dismissed the treaty as a smokescreen. Not only did he believe that Sadat was using this treaty to continue the flow of arms in the event that an agreement was not reached, but after carefully studying the provisions of the treaty Rogers knew that the document changed nothing in the existing Egyptian-Soviet relationship. "I think he's trying to play both ends against the middle," he told Nixon. "It didn't say a

hell of a lot that they didn't already have in informal treaties. So this is just window dressing, I'm quite convinced of that."(60)

Sadat, too, tried to downplay the significance of the new Egyptian-Soviet treaty. He explained to American officials in Cairo that the treaty did not mean that he did not want an interim agreement or the reopening of the Suez Canal, nor did it mean that the United States should discontinue its diplomatic role in helping the two sides achieve an agreement. "Tell Secretary Rogers, tell President Nixon, that everything I said when Secretary Rogers was here in May and when I saw Sisco later still stands."(61)

Indeed, so convinced was Rogers that the new treaty was nothing but a smokescreen, that instead of reassuring the Israelis of the American commitment to the Jewish state, the Secretary of State informed the Israeli government that the shipment of aircraft (Phantoms) would be suspended at the end of June unless they agreed to some concessions on an interim agreement with Egypt.(62) On May 31, Nixon told Rogers over the telephone that if asked by the press about the change in U.S. policy he would say only that "we're still trying to persuade the parties involved to continue the cease-fire and also to make progress toward a settlement either on an interim or other basis."(63) But Nixon was clearly behind the new direction Rogers was moving down, believing that it was critical "to keep that bargaining position because you have to be in a position... to hold it [financial and military assistance] over their heads."(64)

Henry Kissinger, on the other hand, appeared quite disillusioned about new path that Nixon and Rogers were going down in the Middle East. Throughout the spring of 1971, he had been secretly working with the Israeli Ambassador to the United States, Yitzhak Rabin, in hope of negotiating an agreement with Israel on his own.(65) More importantly, he feared that

if the United States negotiated an agreement between Israel and Egypt without the assistance of the Soviet Union it would severely hamper his efforts and negotiating a summit in Moscow the following year.

The Soviet Union, meanwhile, seemed equally concerned about the direction of American policy in the Middle East. In a meeting with Henry Kissinger at Camp David on June 8, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, professed to be completely baffled by what Nixon and Rogers were trying to accomplish in Egypt. "Did you really think you can push the Soviet Union out of the Middle East?" he asked Kissinger. According to Dobrynin, Rogers's trip to Cairo was taken very badly in the Soviet Union and, as he told Kissinger, "it didn't make any sense from any other point [of view] either."(66)

Whether Dobrynin truly believed that Egypt would not remove the Soviet presence from their country or whether he was just trying to make it appear that the Soviets had not lost ground with Sadat is difficult to say. At the same time, though, the Soviet ambassador made it known that regardless of what progress the United States had made with Egypt there would be no interim agreement without Soviet approval. "We can always prevent a settlement if you push us to it," he promised Kissinger. "We got a 15-year treaty out of the Rogers visit and we have taken adequate precautions, you can be sure."(67)

Less than a week after his discussion with Dobrynin, Kissinger brought these concerns to the President. In fact, on the morning of June 12, as President Nixon was getting ready for his daughter's wedding later that afternoon, Kissinger can be heard in Oval Office questioning President Nixon about the State Department's handling of Middle East

policy. "I know you don't want to discuss it now, [but] the Middle East camp is really getting screwed up," he said to Nixon. "I think they [the State Department] have done too many things that, in my view, have produced an explosion. And they've cut off now--the airplanes have been cut off to Israel at the end of this month, which is going to produce an explosion amongst the Jewish leaders here. And all of this for no discernable objective."(68)

To be sure, Kissinger believed that the negotiations he had been conducting with the Israeli Ambassador were severely undercut by the recent steps taken by Nixon and Rogers. He had assured Rabin that the United States would continue supplying the Israelis with weapons, and he felt that the best way of getting a peace agreement in the region was not to go over to the Egyptians, but to so increase the strength of the Israelis that the Arabs would have no other choice but to make concessions on their own. Moreover, he simply could not understand why Nixon was allowing Rogers to be so aggressive in the Middle East when there were more important things--the rapprochement with China, détente with the Soviet Union, and the ending of the Vietnam War--to worry about. "The thing we need for the next two months is quiet," he explained to Nixon. "We don't want to get the Russians lining up with the Egyptians and get everybody steaming up with a big Mid-East crisis. I think we should just slow that process down a little bit for the next two or three months."(69)

Despite Kissinger's warnings, Nixon seemed convinced that he had to get the Israelis to accept the provisions of the interim agreement. Recently declassified records of a meeting of the National Security Council held at the Western White House in San Clemente on July 16, 1971, show that Nixon gave clear instructions to Rogers to continue pressing for the interim

agreement, and instructed Sisco to go back to Israel to "narrow the gap" between the Egyptian and Israeli positions on an interim settlement.(70)

The President wanted to be careful that Sisco's trip to Israel would in no way overshadow his recent announcement that he (Nixon) was planning to visit the People's Republic of China in early 1972, and he made it clear to Sisco that he did not want the United States to "get into a position where we would trigger a confrontation for which we do not have an answer." Still, there was no doubt that Nixon wanted Sisco to play it very tough with the Israeli government. "Don't promise a damned thing," he told Sisco. "This is not going to be a free ride this time. From now on it is *quid pro quo*."(71)

Kissinger once more objected to the fact that the United States was continuing to withhold military supplies to Israel. He told the President that the military balance in the region was now shifting towards the Arabs, as Israel was no longer in a position to win a war quickly, and could now be engaged in another prolonged war of attrition.(72) But Rogers assured President Nixon that both the State and Defense Departments had just gone through another extensive review of the military balance in the Middle East and concluded that the balance still remained in Israel's favor. Sisco, too, reiterated that with the addition of Soviet weapons into the region over the preceding four years, it was next to impossible to recreate the conditions of 1967 in which the Israelis were able to win an overwhelming victory.(73)

As the meeting concluded Nixon gave the Assistant Secretary a clear mandate to take with him to Israel. "Joe, I want you to press Golda on this because I think there is an opportunity," Sisco later recalled of the instructions President Nixon gave him while in San Clemente.(74) "Don't cause a major donnybrook [crisis] between Israel

and the United States," he said. But "press Golda. Press her hard."(75)

The records of Sisco's conversations with Prime Minister Meir indicate that the Israeli government had no intentions of making any agreement with the Egyptians. Throughout his five days in Tel Aviv, in fact, not once did Prime Minister Meir give any indication that she was willing to sit down with Sadat, nor did she seem eager to accept the very limited disengagement agreement that Sisco had brought with him.(76) "The cabinet showed no inclination to alter its [position].... nor was there any give on the other fundamental issues bound up with the partial agreement," Yitzhak Rabin admitted years later of their meeting with Sisco.(77)

What still is not clear even with documentary evidence, however, is the extent to which the Israelis were aware of Sadat's intention to remove the Soviets in exchange for an interim agreement. At one point in his conversation with the Prime Minister, Sisco hinted that Sadat "would like to use an interim settlement as a way to alter the Soviet presence," but acknowledged he had no way to "tell [her] whether he means it... and whether he can produce it."(78). At the same time, Sisco made it clear to the cabinet what the cost of not reaching an agreement with Cairo would entail. "In the Vietnam climate of our country," he explained, "the situation is such that if we ever get to that point... [where] hostilities have broken out, Egyptians have called in help from the Russians and the Russians are helping them, the U.S. may be confronted with an awful decision: does it intervene or not intervene in order to protect the situation? Nobody can predict what that decision would be."(79)

This is not to say that the Israelis would have altered their position had they had confirmation of Sadat's plan to expel the Soviets from his country. In fact, it is quite evident from the documentary record that

the Israelis were far more concerned with the fact that the United States had shut down the supply of Phantoms than they were with the continue Soviet military presence in Egypt. "If I were Sadat," Prime Minister Meir reasoned with Sisco, "I would say to myself, I am now in a position where Israel is not getting planes. What am I waiting for? Until the U.S. will begin to deliver planes? This is the time."(80)

Moreover, the Prime Minister could simply not believe the fact that Sadat was trying to cut ties with the Soviet Union. She referred Sisco to Mahmoud Riad's recent trip to Moscow in which the Egyptian Foreign Minister affirmed the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship as well as received further guarantees of Soviet arms.(81) "At any rate," she said, "there is talk about August being a month of many activities... of [Soviet Defense Minister Marshall Andrei] Grechko coming to Egypt, of Egyptians going to Moscow. What is Grechko going to talk about? A cultural agreement? Pushkin translated to Arabic?"(82)

Still, there can be no doubt that Prime Minister Meir's refusal to work with Egypt during the summer of 1971 effectively put an end to the idea of the interim agreement. That Sadat decided to expel the Soviets less than a year later without any formal settlement from Israel, or any indication that the Israeli government was willing to return Egypt's land only lends credence to Sadat's assertions that the Soviets had become an increasing burden to his country and that he wanted to become much closer to the West.

Those who insist, therefore, that the expulsion of the Soviets was simply a result of the improving relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, or somehow believe that this was his first step on the road to another confrontation with Israel have failed to see the broader

implications of Sadat's strategy from the earliest days of his presidency: removing the Soviet military presence was not only the most direct way he could avoid another Arab-Israeli war, but it was the surest way to align Egypt with the United States and change the balance of power in the Middle East for years to come.

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#### NOTES

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15. Richard Nixon, RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (New York: Touchstone, 1978), pp. 477.

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18. *Ibid.* See also, Richard B. Parker, The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 141-145.

19. For a text of the ceasefire agreement, see Jerusalem Post, August 14, 1970. 20. Korn, Stalemate, pp. 259-272;

21. Interview with Elliot Richardson as seen in The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs (New York: Public Broadcasting Corporation, 1998), Disc II. See also, Sadat, In Search of Identity, pp. 276-277.

22. Sadat, In Search of Identity, pp. 277-278.

23. Department of State Telegram 328 from Cairo, February 16, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 1160.

24. Recording of a Conversation of the National Security Council, February 26, 1971, Cabinet Room, NA, NPMS, White House Tapes (hereafter cited as WHT). For a written record of the meeting, see Memcon, National Security Council Meeting: The Middle East, February 26, 1971, 11:45 am, the Cabinet Room, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box H-112.

25. Conversation 48-4, NA, NPMS, WHT.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. The written memcon of the conversation attributes this line to Rogers. However, a close examination of the recording clearly indicates that that statement was made by President Nixon, not Secretary Rogers.

29. NA, NPMS, WHT, Conversation No. 48-4.

30. Recording of a conversation between Richard Nixon and William P. Rogers, April 22, 1971, 3:41 pm – 4:35 pm, Oval Office, Conversation No. 486-7, NA, NPMS, WHT. See also, H.R. Haldeman,

The Haldeman Diaries: Inside The Nixon White House (Santa Monica: Sony Electronic Publishing Inc., 1994), April 22, 1971.

31. Conversation No. 486-7, NA, NPMS, WHT.

32. Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, pp. 281-282.

33. Mahmoud Riad, The Struggle For Peace in the Middle East (London: Quartet Books, 1981), pp. 197-202.

34. Department of State Telegram 2660 from Cairo, May 7, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 1162.

35. Memo from Brigadier General Alexander Haig, Jr. to President Nixon, May 8, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 1162.

36. Recording of a Conversation between Richard Nixon and William P. Rogers, May 10, 1971, Oval Office, Conversation No. 496-13, NA, NPMS, WHT.

37. Korn, Stalemate, p. 210. In Korn's book, the figures are mistakenly given in the billions instead of millions.

38. Conversation 496-13, NA, NPMS, WHT.

39. Recording of a Conversation between Richard Nixon and William P. Rogers, May 19, 1971, Oval Office, Conversation 501-4, NA, NPMS, WHT.

40. Conversation 501-4, NA, NPMS, WHT.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Conversation No. 496-13, NA, NPMS, WHT.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*

45. *Ibid.*

46. On May 20, 1971, President Nixon announced that the United States and the Soviet Union had agreed to work out an ABM agreement and "certain measures with respect to the limitation of offensive strategic weapons." For provisions of the agreement see, Garthoff, Detente and Confrontation, pp. 167-170.

47. Letter from Richard Nixon to William P. Rogers, May 26, 1971, National Archives, Record Group 59, Lot Files, Office Files of William P. Rogers, Box 25.

48. *Ibid.*

49. *Ibid.*

50. *Ibid.*

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

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54. For provisions of the treaty, see Rubinstein, Red Star on the Nile, pp. 143-153, Golan, Soviet Policies in the Middle East, pp. 77-79, and Riad, The Struggle For Peace in the Middle East, pp. 204-206.

55. New York Times, May 30, 1971.

56. Washington Post, May 29, 1971.

57. Kissinger, White House Years, p. 1284.

58. Recording of a Conversation between Richard Nixon and William P. Rogers, May 28, 1971, White House Telephone, Conversation No. 3-166, NA, NPMS, WHT.

59. Conversation 3-166, NA, NPMS, WHT.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Department of State Telegram 1639 from Cairo, July 6, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 134.

62. Memorandum from Henry A. Kissinger to President Nixon, "Current State of Play in the Middle East," June 26, 1971, NA, NPMS, Box H-20.

63. Recording of a Conversation between Richard Nixon and William P. Rogers, May 31, 1971, White House Telephone, Conversation No. 3-203, NA, NPMS, WHT.

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65. For a description of Kissinger's "back channel" negotiations with Yitzhak Rabin, see Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 190-218; and Kissinger, White House Years, pp. 1280-1283.

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67. Memcon, Dobrynin-Kissinger, June 8, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 491.
68. Recording of a Conversation between Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, June 12, 1971, Oval Office, Conversation No. 518-3, NA, NPMS, WHT.
69. Conversation No. 518-3, NA, NPMS, WHT.
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71. *Ibid.*
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73. *Ibid.*
74. Telephone interview with Sisco, March 5, 2001.
75. Interview with Sisco as seen in the Fifty Years War, Disc II. See also, Oral History Interview, Undersecretary of State Joseph J. Sisco, March 19, 1990, The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project, Georgetown University.
76. Memorandum for the Record, Meeting between Golda Meir and Joseph Sisco, July 30, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 134; Telephone interview with the Sisco, March 5, 2001.
77. Rabin, The Rabin Memoirs, p. 201.
78. Memorandum for the Record, Meeting between Golda Meir and Joseph Sisco, July 30, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 134.
79. *Ibid.*
80. *Ibid.*
81. On June 29, 1971, Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad traveled to Moscow for the exchange of ratification of the Egyptian-Soviet Treaty of Friendship. While in Moscow, Riad discussed with Brezhnev continued arm shipments to Cairo and received Brezhnev's approval for another Arab-Israeli war if "Egypt so decided." See Riad, The Struggle For Peace in the Middle East, pp. 206-208.
82. Memorandum for the Record, Meeting between Golda Meir and Joseph Sisco, July 30, 1971, NA, NPMS, NSC Files, Box 134.