

for a generation. But the United States also faced its worst economic crisis since the Great Depression and the most severe loss of faith in its leadership ever. This mix of strengths and weaknesses would become central to Kissinger's conduct of U.S.-Mideast diplomacy.

### *The Aftermath of October 1973*

The war had a startling effect on the activities, arguments, and positions of all involved parties. The pro-Israeli camp was suddenly thrown on the defensive. Its cherished assumptions had been compromised and its close connections with the administration severed. Pro-Arab forces were stronger but had yet to be tested.

Arab political strength also increased because of the alliance between Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This coalition created a united front between the Arab country with which Washington had established the closest relations after the Second World War—Saudi Arabia—and the Arab state it had been most anxious to win over during the same period—Egypt. This combination helped Kissinger's diplomacy and increased Arab influence on the United States because both the richest and the most powerful Arab countries were now developing close relations with Washington. Nixon and Kissinger were presented with an opportunity no American administration could refuse: Sadat's offer to restore American primacy in the Middle East. His willingness to trust the United States made Kissinger's policy possible.

The main Mideast diplomatic effort during Nixon's remaining days in the presidency was to unravel the tangled military situation that Kissinger himself had helped create. The very first step epitomized this process. The Egyptians made a political concession—face-to-face talks between opposing generals—and the Israelis made a tangible concession—the passage of one convoy of non-military supplies to the Third Army.<sup>223</sup> The talks began on 27 October in a tent in the Egyptian desert on the canal's west bank at Kilometer 101. In addition to an Egyptian and Israeli general, the Finnish commander of the U.N. force was also present. That the talks were held at all proves Egyptian desperation and American pressure on the Israelis. For days the Kilometer 101 meeting dealt with the details of resupply and possible disengagement, but what mattered were talks with Henry Kissinger in Washington.

Both Nixon and Kissinger knew the importance of Egypt in Middle East politics. Nixon called Egypt "the key to the Arab world." Now Kissinger tried to manipulate the military stalemate toward a political disengagement in which both sides would gain. He later told Mohamed Heikal after the war, "If we want to solve a critical conflict, the point we start from must be the point at which each party feels it has obtained something and that to stop there is not a defeat for it."<sup>224</sup>

Kissinger's objectives in the talks were highly complex: (1) to win the

Egyptians away from the Russians and to nudge them toward a settlement with Israel; (2) to demonstrate to the Arab oil producers that his mediation would help resolve a twenty-five year old conflict; (3) to convince the Israelis that they could gain more by relying on his diplomatic skill than by resuming the war; and (4) to maintain the backing of Israel's supporters at home. Kissinger's first step was accepting Sadat's offer to fly to Cairo. His second step was to meet separately at the end of October with Ismail Fahmy (soon to be named Egyptian foreign minister) and Golda Meir in Washington. Both Egypt and Israel were eager to talk and the United States held the pivotal position. Fahmy had arrived in Washington without waiting for an invitation and Meir also initiated her approach.<sup>225</sup> These meetings were the first practical application of Kissinger's postwar approach, an early form of what later became shuttle diplomacy.

The meetings with Fahmy were characterized by surprising public and private amity for two countries so recently opposed. The Egyptian emissary proposed a return to the 22 October cease-fire lines and ultimate total Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai in return for a state of nonbelligerency. Kissinger tried to convince him that the Egyptians should seek a more immediately attainable objective. Since he felt the original cease-fire lines were impossible to reproduce and a broader agreement was presently beyond reach, Kissinger argued for a "long range strategy" in which disengaging the forces of both sides would serve as a first step. The most important result of Fahmy's visit was to convince Nixon and Kissinger that Sadat was committed to a settlement.<sup>226</sup>

They presented this conclusion to the skeptical Golda Meir on 1 November. In the talks with the Israeli prime minister, however, Nixon and Kissinger found a leader heartbroken by her country's ordeals, simultaneously grateful for the airlift and resentful of U.S. diplomacy. The gratitude was expressed in her meeting with Nixon: "There were days and hours when we needed a friend, and you came right in. You don't know what your airlift means to us."<sup>227</sup> She listened impassively as the president outlined his goal of improved relations with Egypt and Syria, offered the opinion that Sadat wanted peace, and indicated that Israel would have to concede territory. Nixon stated flatly that the United States would not permit the destruction of the Third Army. The prime minister's resentment and anger were saved for Kissinger. At the usual dinner, the atmosphere was "chilly, if not hostile" and the secretary of state was censured. Mrs. Meir argued with Kissinger about his actions in Moscow during the war. Kissinger unsuccessfully urged her to allow an Egyptian-controlled corridor to the Third Army, while she adamantly insisted on the return of Israeli prisoners of war, which, she reminded Kissinger, he had led the Israelis to believe would occur soon after the cease-fire.<sup>228</sup>

A new pattern now emerged. The secretary of state wanted a new relationship with the Egyptians and Syrians as an entrée for U.S. influence and interests in the area. He could offer economic aid and the prestige of American

attention, but his major bargaining point was the prospect of Israeli concessions. The Israelis, however, insisted that Kissinger's achievements should not be made at their expense, despite his arguments that Jerusalem would benefit from increased U.S. influence in the area and the resulting restraint on the Arabs. Kissinger soon found himself complaining about the Israelis' intransigence and the "diplomatic Ghetto" in which they lived.<sup>229</sup> In the Arab world, Kissinger's efforts were equally complicated by distrust of the United States. Kissinger overcame these obstacles masterfully.

His trip to the Middle East in early November 1973 was the first of eleven he would take over the next two years, and his first visit to any Arab country. He was always accompanied by a substantial State Department team, which usually included Sisco, Saunders, and Atherton. Kissinger frequently met with major leaders alone, however, and only he had full knowledge of all the negotiations.

In these trips he achieved a position in Arab-Israeli negotiations unknown since the days of Ralph Bunche, who had gained the confidence of both sides. To the Egyptians he offered the fruits of the victory they had frittered away. To the Israelis he offered relief from the traumas of war, the possibility of a more secure position, and the return of their prisoners of war. The last was almost an obsession in a tiny country whose size and culture meant that few families were untouched by war casualties.

What was the secret of his success? It was not the one he confided months earlier to Italian journalist, Oriana Fallaci: "The main point stems from the fact that I've always acted alone. Americans admire that enormously. Americans admire the cowboy leading the caravan alone astride on his horse . . . a wild West tale if you like."<sup>230</sup> This self-characterization was more than a little specious. Kissinger's diplomatic triumphs were possible because he commanded the power and prestige of the U.S. government. In the Mideast, he never went anywhere alone; he fashioned many of the key compromises from other people's ideas. Nevertheless, by 1974 Arabs and Israelis alike admired the self-styled Lone Ranger. In November 1973 Kissinger and the "senior official" who seemed always nearby began a dizzying round of talks. For months the State Department seemed a traveling air show, whose electronic gadgetry and journalistic glitter served one man. Formulation of American Mideast policy seemed to rest on the experiences and beliefs of Kissinger on his gallant Air Force charger.

When they first landed in Cairo, the U.S. team was uneasy about the politically unknown world they were about to enter. Nonetheless, the meetings between Kissinger and Sadat were a huge success. The secretary of state met the Egyptian leader for the first time alone and achieved what Kissinger later called one of the "dramatic breakthroughs" of his diplomacy.<sup>231</sup> Sadat accepted the recommendation that Kissinger attempt a broader disengagement and not expend his political capital on recreating the original 22 October cease-fire lines.

The Egyptian leader also accepted a basic "six point" agreement devised by Kissinger and his team.<sup>232</sup> A corridor to allow the resupply of the Third Army in Suez City would be exchanged for Israeli prisoners of war. The decision to restore full diplomatic relations between the United States and Egypt was made on the same principle." According to Sadat, "The first hour made me feel I was dealing with an entirely new mentality, a new political method." For his part Kissinger was impressed that Sadat seemed a person with whom he could do business.<sup>233</sup>

As Kissinger proceeded with his trip, Sisco and Saunders went to Israel for the approval of the "six points." Prime Minister Meir complained about several demands and finally got concessions to assure that military supplies would not be cut off to the Third Army. Through Kissinger she also obtained Sadat's oral agreement for lifting the Arab blockade of the Bab El Mandeb straits, which lead to the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba.<sup>234</sup> Meir accepted the agreement on 10 November, and it was signed by Israeli and Egyptian generals at Kilometer 101 the next day.

Kissinger also visited Saudi Arabia on this first trip, just as he would on each of the following ten as secretary of state. Riyadh, of course, was not directly involved in Arab-Israeli negotiations, but the United States had courted the Saudis since the 1930s. Now the oil crisis had greatly increased their importance and made King Faisal the symbol of the new era. Kissinger tried to persuade Faisal to lift the embargo as soon as diplomatic progress could be demonstrated.

The secretary of state felt the irony of his role acutely when he dealt with Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia was notoriously antagonistic towards Jews, and Faisal had particularly strong feelings on the subject. Even Kissinger once labeled Faisal "a religious fanatic," and suggested to a reporter privately that the king hated Jews as well as Zionists.<sup>235</sup> Faisal regularly informed visitors—including Nixon and Kissinger—that Communists, Jews, and Zionists conspired to take over the world. "Israel is advancing communist objectives," Faisal told Kissinger at their first meeting, and he made much of the facts that Karl Marx had been Jewish and that Golda Meir was born in Russia.<sup>236</sup> Yet Faisal did not object to negotiating with this powerful American Jew and, like Sadat, he accepted Kissinger's strategy of step-by-step diplomacy. On this first trip, however, Faisal adamantly refused to lift the oil embargo until Israel returned to her 1967 borders.

After this journey to the area, Kissinger focused on convening an Arab-Israeli peace conference under Soviet-American sponsorship to arrange for disengagement with Egypt and Syria. Meanwhile, the military talks at Kilometer 101 had made substantial progress, which disturbed Kissinger. He believed that if an Egyptian-Israeli agreement occurred in isolation, it would be more difficult to extend the talks beyond disengagement with Egypt, and the United States would lose its central role. As Kissinger later explained, "Our strategy depended on being the only country capable of eliciting Israeli concessions, but also on our presenting it within a context where this was perceived to be a difficult task." There-

fore, he subtly moved both sides toward the Geneva forum and away from more direct military talks.<sup>237</sup> Geneva had two other advantages: it would keep the United States in a position to gain credit with Arab oil producers for successful negotiations, and it would not force all Arabs to accept direct bilateral talks with Israel before the process began.

Having decided on the Geneva forum, Kissinger set the stage for his next Mideast trip. He knew that Sadat was willing to attend, and he had ascertained from a meeting with Dayan in Washington that the Israelis wanted to withdraw their exposed troops from the west bank of the canal. This advance information was typical of Kissinger's approach: because of his unique contact with all parties, he could manipulate both sides and postpone agreements until he was ready to take credit for them. Before his December trip, for example, he urged Dayan to slow the pace of Israeli concessions in order not to raise Arab expectations; he wanted the Arab leaders to appreciate the difficulty of achieving a disengagement.<sup>238</sup>

The goal of Kissinger's second trip was to arrange a peace conference in Geneva, sponsored by the United States and the U.S.S.R., chaired by U.N. Secretary-General Waldheim, and attended by Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The first item on the agenda would be an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement. Kissinger's second objective was to persuade the Arabs to lift the embargo. On this December trip he asked Sadat to help convince Faisal that the embargo had accomplished its purpose. He wrote Nixon: "I told Sadat that without your personal willingness to confront the domestic issue nothing would have been possible. Sadat promised me he would get the oil embargo lifted during the first half of January and said that he would call for its lifting in a statement which praised your personal role in bringing the parties to the negotiating table and making progress thereafter."<sup>239</sup> Thus, whatever he might say in public, Kissinger's actions demonstrated to the Arabs that oil and Arab-Israeli diplomacy were indeed linked.

Nixon was less subtle. He wrote Sadat in December that he hoped to promote the peace process but the oil embargo could ruin the effort: "Therefore, Mr. President, I must tell you in complete candor that it is essential that the oil embargo and oil production restrictions against the United States be ended at once. It cannot await the outcome of the current talks on disengagement."<sup>240</sup> While Kissinger was in the Middle East, reports appeared that Nixon had made a shockingly blunt public comment linking oil with his Mideast diplomacy. He had told a group of governors: "The only way we're going to solve the crisis is to end the oil embargo, and the only way we're going to end the embargo is to get the Israelis to act reasonable. I hate to use the word blackmail, but we've got to do some things to get them to behave."<sup>241</sup>

This statement was exactly what the Arabs wanted, and it reinforced the logic of their oil embargo. The war would have increased U.S. diplomatic in-

involvement in the Middle East even without the embargo. However, the Arab oil producers wrongly interpreted Washington's urgency as a selfish reaction. The two American leaders' statements in public and private confirmed this impression. After all, had not Sadat and Faisal received visits from Kissinger and messages from Washington seeking an end to the embargo, implying that refusal might weaken Nixon still further and contribute to his removal from office? Rather than giving the impression that the United States was strong and could not be blackmailed, Nixon and Kissinger confirmed the Arabs' hope that the oil embargo would lead directly to Israeli concessions.<sup>242</sup>

On his December trip, Kissinger became the first secretary of state since Dulles to visit Damascus, but he was unable to persuade Assad to attend the Geneva Conference. The Syrian leader wanted a disengagement agreement, including the entire Golan Heights, to precede the conference and Kissinger knew he could not possibly induce the Israelis to accept.<sup>243</sup> In Israel he found the Israelis worried about Sadat's insistence on Palestinian involvement, concerned about the degree of U.N. engagement, and anxious to obtain a list of prisoners of war held by the Syrians. Kissinger's method of resolving these issues typified the approach he would use over the next two years.

First, two messages arrived from the president urging the Israelis to go to Geneva and threatening a loss of U.S. support if they did not.<sup>244</sup> Second, Kissinger spent hours with Meir or with her "kitchen cabinet" or with the entire cabinet trying to satisfy them on particular details. Finally, the Israelis were persuaded to accept U.N. chairmanship of the conference.<sup>245</sup> Third, Sadat was persuaded to withdraw his proposal for inviting the Palestinians. Fourth, since the Israelis still worried over the PLO, Kissinger secretly agreed to a memorandum of understanding by which the United States would veto any future participation of the PLO in a Geneva conference without Israeli consent.<sup>246</sup> This was to prove the most lasting of the arrangements he made in preparing for the conference. Fifth, Kissinger coaxed the Israelis into accepting the return of Syrian villagers to Israeli-controlled areas if Assad would release a list of prisoners of war before the conference. This was Israel's condition for attending the Geneva conference with Syria. In the end, the issue evaporated when Assad refused to attend the opening session.<sup>247</sup>

In negotiations Kissinger relied on charm, threats, the prestige of his office, his ability to focus world attention on the negotiations, and the advantage of having the most information. Moreover, the shuttle style was tailor-made for a man willing to endure gruelling days, sleepless nights, wretched food, and marathon discussions of six or eight hours at a time. His December trip set the pattern for future shuttles. After a six-hour meeting with Assad (originally scheduled for two-and-a-half hours), Kissinger arrived in Amman at midnight for dinner with King Hussein.

Compared with the preparations, the actual convening of the Geneva

Conference on 21 December 1973 was anticlimactic. All the diplomats present had agreed that the initial two-day meeting would be largely ceremonial. When the conference convened, the Israeli and Arab delegates met in the same room, but the Arabs still refused direct contact with the Israelis. They would not shake hands with them or exchange pleasantries. They would not even allow their tables to touch, and Fahmy vetoed Waldheim's suggestion for a joint cocktail party.<sup>248</sup> All that was left was a series of formalities and speeches. The war-delayed Israeli elections were to be held ten days later and the Israeli government could make no decisions in the interim, so the negotiations quickly adjourned until January. Few imagined that the conference would never reconvene.

Kissinger was still concerned with an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement, even at this comprehensive Geneva forum. When Dayan came to Washington in early January to discuss the subject, he brought with him the concept of Egyptian and Israeli zones separated by a U.N. area in the Sinai; these ideas soon formed the basis of the accord.<sup>249</sup> By the time of Dayan's visit, both sides had powerful incentives to reach a rapid agreement. Israel was suffering from the severe economic pressure of continued mobilization, the disheartening possibility of renewed warfare with Syria, and the diplomatic pressure of Arab oil strength. Sadat needed to save the Third Army and demonstrate that the war had gained territory for Egypt in order to continue to claim victory before his people.

Thus, when Dayan asked Kissinger to the Middle East to help achieve disengagement, Sadat readily agreed. When Kissinger arrived in Cairo in mid-January, Sadat asked him to complete the disengagement agreement during that trip without returning to Geneva.<sup>250</sup> When he learned the Israelis also wanted quick results, Kissinger began shuttling between Aswan and Jerusalem, carrying proposals and counterproposals back and forth. This method worked so well that it replaced the Geneva Conference. The negotiations began to falter over Israel's demand for nonbelligerency or some practical commitment to peace, such as Egypt's reopening the canal and rebuilding the canal cities, which would make war less likely. Kissinger therefore devised a two-tier system. Publicly, both sides would conclude an agreement for troop disengagement along the Suez front; the United States would produce a draft based on the Egyptian and Israeli drafts. Privately, each side would receive a "memorandum of understanding" listing its private assurances to Kissinger.<sup>251</sup>

As a result the negotiations appeared less direct, a face-saving concession to Sadat, in return for private commitments which locked Egypt into de facto nonbelligerence. The new approach was consistent with Kissinger's cautious and practical tactics. He avoided defining the end of negotiations, an approach that differed markedly from Rogers's attempts to outline a comprehensive solution. Like that of all previous American diplomatic efforts, Kissinger's concept of

peace was limited. As he put it at Geneva, "A peace agreement must include these elements, among others: withdrawals, recognized frontiers, security arrangements, guarantees, a settlement of the legitimate interests of the Palestinians, and a recognition that Jerusalem contains places considered holy by three great religions."<sup>252</sup> This description foresaw no future in which diplomatic, commercial, and social barriers between the Arabs and Israelis would be broken. Kissinger aimed merely at the absence of armed conflict, the only approach he thought would lead to quick results. It did. The two-tier system produced the first disengagement accord just six days after he left Washington.

Ironically, the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement accord resembled the Suez "interim" arrangement considered in 1971. But after the war, both sides made significant concessions. In order to avoid past recriminations, both sides accepted American reconnaissance (through satellites and aircraft) to monitor compliance. In 1971 Israel had not been willing to allow any Egyptian troops across the canal. Egypt had insisted on a substantial Israeli withdrawal from most of the Sinai and a commitment to abandon the other territorial gains of 1967. Now, however, Israel relinquished its holdings on the canal's west bank and only withdrew from a tiny area of the Sinai (approximately twenty miles along the length of the canal). Israel also settled for seven thousand Egyptian troops on its side (the east bank). This meant Egypt would have to withdraw troops, since fifty thousand Egyptian soldiers had remained east of the canal at the end of the war.<sup>253</sup>

The agreement created three militarily limited zones on the east bank—an Egyptian area closest to the canal, an area occupied by a U.N. peacekeeping force, and an Israeli zone on the other side. Israel retained the strategic Gidi and Mitla passes. In the two forward zones, the Egyptian and Israeli forces would be thinned out. In order to protect Sadat against the charge of having agreed to a permanent Israeli occupation of the Sinai, a time limit of six months was established on the U.N. peacekeeping force. In secret, the Egyptians committed themselves to clearing and reopening the canal and to rebuilding its adjacent cities. Moreover, Kissinger assured the Israelis that Sadat would allow ships containing nonmilitary cargoes bound for Israel to pass through the reopened canal. But Sadat would not commit himself to a date.<sup>254</sup>

This confusion over reopening the canal illustrates Kissinger's tendency to adjust his arguments to a particular moment and his preoccupation with closing a deal. These traits explain why Kissinger achieved an initial success that proved difficult to sustain. His energies were devoted to specific, highly circumscribed agreements accompanied by secret oral and written understandings often interpreted differently by opposing sides. During the October War, Kissinger had very specific aims and achieved them, but his postwar negotiations were conducted with little consideration for where they might ultimately lead.

Kissinger was adept at using previous failures to advantage in present

negotiations. He admitted to the Arabs that he had erred in not being more active in diplomacy before the war, but then he cautioned them that they could translate their limited military gains into tangible results only by cooperating. In Jerusalem he chastened the Israelis for relying on military deterrence. It had not worked, and he declared his acquiescence in it to have been a mistake. For both Arabs and Israelis, he drew the same conclusion: the time had arrived to depend on his diplomacy for solving the twenty-five year dispute.<sup>255</sup>

Nixon and Kissinger had always been prepared to use military and economic aid as tools of diplomacy, and they resurrected the old "hardware—software" formula during the disengagement discussions. Those states that they considered cooperative would be rewarded; those considered uncooperative would suffer. In a written memorandum that was part of the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement accord, Kissinger promised Israel that he would "make every effort to be fully responsive" to Israel's long-term equipment needs, but during the Syrian-Israeli negotiations that followed the Egyptian-Israeli accord, Nixon and Kissinger hinted that the amount of aid to Israel would depend on her concessions. Soon Kissinger discussed increased economic aid and even military assistance to Egypt. Meanwhile, in the spring the administration requested from Congress increased aid to Egypt and Jordan and a special fund to use if Syria were forthcoming in the disengagement accords.<sup>256</sup> This aid created strings Kissinger could pull if Egypt, Syria, Jordan, or Israel adopted a hard line in negotiations. Clearly, however, the strings were more likely to be pulled on Israel because of its greater dependence on the United States.

After the Egyptian-Israeli disengagement accord, Kissinger returned home, and despite gas lines and Nixon's deteriorating authority, he received almost universal praise. The *New York Times* called the accord a "notable achievement" and complimented his "extraordinary diplomatic skill." The *Los Angeles Times* extolled the accord, saying that it "could well be the prelude to the most significant political development in the last quarter century." And the *Chicago Tribune* lauded Kissinger for his "diplomatic coup," even while expressing doubt that the agreement would hold.<sup>257</sup> At this juncture neither the State Department, Congress, the Jewish community, nor the oil companies criticized Kissinger's policy. All the major countries of the area also endorsed the accord. Iraq and Libya, always hostile to American initiatives, advocated continuing the oil embargo and stepped up their attacks against Sadat's policies.

Kissinger's signals to the Arabs seemed to imply that oil and diplomacy were separate unless diplomacy succeeded, in which case the oil embargo should be lifted. Thus, on 3 January, before his third trip to the Middle East, the secretary of state said: "We cannot engage in negotiations with the Arab governments about the specific terms that we will support in negotiations in order to get the embargo lifted, because it would make our foreign policy then entirely subject to the producing nations' decisions and would set up an endless cycle."

When he returned to Washington after the accord had been reached, however, Kissinger admitted, "We have had every reason to believe that success in the negotiations would mark a major step forward ending the oil embargo. . . ."258

When Kissinger claimed that the United States would not be coerced by Arab oil blackmail, he was not convincing. The Arab oil ministers could read about the sharp public outcry in the United States in the *New York Times*. As the American people blamed their own government and the oil companies, oil blackmail seemed to be working. After all, within weeks of the oil embargo, the U.S. secretary of state was calling on Arab leaders every month and promising progress toward peace and stability in the Middle East. Moreover, the embargo and the resulting shortages had made possible the quadrupling of world oil prices and the largest, most sudden transfer of wealth in the history of the world. All this had been accomplished without the slightest hostile action by the United States. Arab radicals could plausibly argue that the embargo should continue.

The Arab producers decided in early February that they would not lift the embargo until there was evidence of diplomatic progress between Syria and Israel. This unexpected step angered Nixon and Kissinger, but they could not carry through on previous threats to terminate the diplomatic process for three reasons: (1) they feared another war without a Syrian-Israeli disengagement; (2) the search for agreements was now the centerpiece of U.S. diplomacy and stopping the effort would destroy Nixon's rationale for remaining in office; and (3) Nixon and especially Kissinger wished to continue the fiction that oil and diplomacy were not linked.<sup>259</sup>

Therefore, on his fourth Mideast trip in late February, Kissinger dangled the prospect of sophisticated U.S. technology before the eager Saudi princes. As he had done in December, he offered the Saudis advanced military equipment and aid in developing an industrialized plant if they would end the embargo.<sup>260</sup> This offer was the precursor of the joint Saudi-American economic commission arranged later in the year and led to massive arms sales later in the decade.

The trip also allowed the secretary of state to strengthen his growing ties with Sadat, on whom he was increasingly dependent for advice and support with other Arab leaders. A policy of coordination with the Egyptian leadership, long the dream of U.S. statesmen, was now becoming reality. As a symbol of the new amity, the U.S. and Egypt announced the resumption of full-scale diplomatic relations while Kissinger was in Cairo.

On this trip Kissinger also made progress in the difficult negotiations between Jerusalem and Damascus. Assad had already accepted a complex U.S. plan in early February in which he would trade a list of Israeli prisoners of war held in Syria in return for a "serious" Israeli disengagement proposal. When Kissinger handed over the list to Golda Meir, however, he found that the Israelis proposed a three-stage zonal disengagement similar to the one on the Israeli-Egyptian front, except that Israel wanted all three zones to be located on Syrian

territory captured in 1973. Israel was, in effect, proposing to keep some new territory. Kissinger feared that if he actually presented these ideas to Assad the talks would collapse, so he told Assad that the Israeli ideas were not worth presenting. Instead, in effect he made a side deal with Assad: Syria could hope to regain "a bit" of the territory Israel had captured in 1967, but Israel could not be induced to dismantle any of her Golan Heights settlements.<sup>261</sup> This move at least allowed the negotiations to continue. Meanwhile, Syrian artillery continued to shell Israel across the cease-fire lines, inflicting casualties daily and maintaining pressure on both the United States and Israel. Israel, of course, returned the fire, and a war of attrition continued throughout the spring.

The existence of an Israeli withdrawal proposal gave the oil producers a justification for suspending the oil embargo in mid-March. Faisal seemed to imply, however, that the embargo might be reimposed if an Israeli-Syrian disengagement accord was not reached within two months.<sup>262</sup> Nixon responded by publicly linking peace and oil when he told the National Association of Broadcasters in Houston on 19 March:

Now, as far as our policy in the Mideast is concerned, we seek a permanent peace as an end in itself. Whatever happens to the oil embargo, peace in the Mideast would be in our interest and in the interests of the whole world.

As far as the oil embargo is concerned, it is in the interest of those countries that imposed it, as well as the United States, that it be lifted. The two should go parallel. Inevitably, what happens in one area affects the other, and I am confident that the progress we are going to continue to make on the peace front in the Mideast will be very helpful in seeing to it that an oil embargo is not reimposed.<sup>263</sup>

Both Syria and Israel had powerful incentives to reach agreement on the disengagement of their forces. Israel needed her prisoners of war back and relief from the war of attrition; Syria needed to show territorial gains, however miniscule, from the war and to remove the Israeli guns from so near Damascus.<sup>264</sup>

The hatred and bitterness between Israel and Syria, however, ran deeper than the hostility between Israel and her other Arab neighbors. Syria was also closer to Moscow, and as Kissinger's experiences had already demonstrated, Assad was more difficult to handle than Sadat, Hussein, or even Faisal.<sup>265</sup> To make matters even more difficult, President Assad's tough negotiating stance did not augur well: he had opposed lifting the oil embargo and had intensified the war of attrition along the cease-fire lines. His army was not threatened by envelopment as the Egyptian Third Army had been.

Therefore, in preparing for the talks, Kissinger devised three steps. First, he wanted to isolate Syria from the other Arab states so that, if the talks failed and Syria was seen as unreasonable, Assad would not have broad Arab back-

ing.<sup>266</sup> Second, he sought to keep the Soviet Union out of the talks. The Soviets could logically argue that they should participate because they were Syria's patron. Kissinger, however, persuaded Assad that shuttle diplomacy had proved more effective than the Geneva forum and that the Soviets could contribute nothing to the process. Kissinger also took pains to mollify the Soviets by meeting regularly with their foreign minister, Gromyko, to keep him abreast of developments. Third, he arranged for Dayan and the chief of Syrian military intelligence (Hikmat al-Shihabi) to come separately to Washington to share their latest ideas on the disengagement.

Thus, the concept of the accord was completed on 13 April in Washington.<sup>267</sup> All that seemed to remain was for Kissinger to go through the ritual shuttle, the act of political theater that would focus world attention on the antagonists and provide the crucial psychological pressure. And the two sides had to agree on where to draw the line.

Drawing the line between Syria and Israel proved to be the most difficult task of Kissinger's Mideast diplomacy thus far. The antagonism between the two peoples proved so deep-rooted that the governments of the two nations could make concessions only after agonizing, physically painful harangues at the secretary of state. Each concession had to be torn from the flesh of a nation and delivered to its mortal enemy. Israel could be under no illusions that Syria would make peace (as it could hope in the case of Egypt) or even implicitly accept the permanent existence of the Jewish state. The most Assad would grant was a formalized, stable cease-fire. For all these emotional reasons, the chief foreign policy officer of the United States spent thirty-four tense, grueling days persuading the leaders of two small nations to endorse an agreement both desperately needed.

Meanwhile, the leadership in both the United States and Israel fell into disarray. In Washington the Watergate crisis marched toward its conclusion, and the word *impeachment* appeared daily in the press. Nixon's focus on foreign policy and his practice of it made him think that somehow a diplomatic achievement might rescue him. He pressed Kissinger hard and used extremely tough language with Golda Meir.<sup>268</sup> He was, of course, unable to deal similarly with Syria as Washington had little influence there. The secretary of state remained in the Mideast because Nixon desperately wanted a triumph; Watergate actually increased the chances for a Syrian-Israeli disengagement accord.

In Jerusalem the Yom Kippur War crisis had led to the political downfall of Meir and Dayan and the designation of a new Labor party cabinet, including Yitzhak Rabin as prime minister; Rabin's rival, Shimon Peres, as defense minister; and Yigal Allon as foreign minister. Meir stayed on as a caretaker, but the new team would take office as soon as the Syrian disengagement was complete. Rabin, Peres, and Allon participated in several of the meetings with Kissinger, and their presence made agreement among the Israelis, who usually differed with

each other in any case, even more difficult. Fortunately, however, Meir, Dayan, and Eban—all leaving Cabinet positions after years of service—were determined to achieve an agreement.

The Syrians were not easy to handle; one of their regular practices was to raise new demands after agreements had seemingly been reached. Not surprisingly, negotiating sessions frequently lasted several hours. "Every issue was contested with a tenacity that I find unequalled in my experience," Kissinger later complained. Often frustrated and suffering from sleepless nights, Kissinger would resort to his keen sense of humor to lighten the tension. Using hard-line Foreign Minister Kahddam as his foil, he quipped at one point, "I'll take Kahddam back with me. He can convince Golda."<sup>269</sup> Kissinger believed that Assad had to come away from the negotiations with more land than he had before the war; he could not accept a deal that legitimized the new cease-fire lines.

Kissinger's frustration with the Israelis was also considerable. Their meetings declined into acrimonious lectures from the U.S. secretary of state. After discussing the hills above Quneitra for what seemed like an eternity, Kissinger angrily told the Israeli negotiating team, "Such bargaining is not dignified for an American Secretary of State. I am wandering around here like a rug merchant in order to bargain over 100 to 200 meters! Like a peddler in the market! I'm trying to save you, and you think you are doing me a favor when you are kind enough to give me a few more meters. As if I were a citizen of El Quneitra. As if I planned to build my house there!"<sup>270</sup> He had to deal delicately with Assad, but with the Israelis he could vent his emotions in furious shouting matches, berating them for their press leaks and battering them with speeches about diplomatic isolation. Kissinger tried to convince the Israelis that their concerns about Golan Heights security were less important than the benefits to Israel from maintaining the negotiations. At one point he reportedly told them, "Remember what this is all about . . . to keep the negotiating process alive, to prevent another round of hostilities which would benefit the Soviet Union and increase pressure on you, on us, and [on] Sadat to rejoin the battle . . ." Later in the negotiations, he is said to have exclaimed, "You're always looking at the trees, and you don't see the woods! If we didn't have this negotiation, there'd be an international forum for the 1967 frontiers."<sup>271</sup>

The atmosphere deteriorated further when twenty-four Israelis (most of them children) were killed by Palestinian terrorists on 15 May at a school in the village of Ma'alot, an incident that followed the killing of eighteen Israelis in the town of Qiryat Shemona on 2 April. These raids were intended by radical Palestinian groups to prevent serious Arab negotiations with Israel. Nonetheless, Kissinger and the Israelis pressed on. The raids only emphasized the consequences of failure.

Three times the talks nearly collapsed, but Nixon kept pressing his secretary of state to continue. On one occasion a final communiqué was prepared in

Damascus, but Assad suggested that Kissinger try one last time. Meanwhile, the secretary had Nixon put pressure on the Israelis and sought to employ the Egyptians, Algerians, and Saudis to persuade the Syrians.<sup>272</sup> The talks proceeded, with details being reconsidered even after tentative agreement. A deal was finally struck on 29 May, after Kissinger's thirteenth round trip between Jerusalem and Damascus.

The Israelis gained an exchange of prisoners of war and relief from the war of attrition on the Golan Heights in exchange for the territory they had conquered in 1973 plus the town of Quneitra, capital of the Golan, which the Syrians agreed to repopulate with civilians (a promise that they did not keep). This arrangement was a double compromise. Syria had initially demanded the whole Golan Heights, and Israel had initially insisted that the whole buffer zone should be in territory taken from Syria in 1973. Five zones were established, with two zones of thinned out forces on either side of a neutral zone occupied by U.N. force. This force was similar to the force in the Sinai but had less authority. Israel wanted Assad to promise to control Palestinian guerrilla raids from Syria, but it settled for U.S. political support for Israeli reprisals and preventive strikes.<sup>273</sup>

Almost everyone saw the agreement as a remarkable success, but the difficulty of reaching it raised serious doubts about future Syrian-Israeli negotiations. The incentives for both sides might not be so great in the future. Moreover, it was doubtful that the Syrians and Israelis would again have a mediator who was as clever, powerful, and energetic as Kissinger. If under favorable conditions, Jerusalem and Damascus could barely agree to stop shelling each other, separate their troops, and exchange prisoners, the prospects for future Syrian-Israeli agreements were not bright. At the time so much general relief greeted the agreement (several times the press had reported that the talks were failing) that few were willing to criticize Kissinger's Middle East diplomacy.

Immediately upon Kissinger's return to Washington, a presidential trip was hastily sandwiched between the Syrian-Israeli disengagement accord and the next scheduled Moscow summit. Nixon was determined to use Kissinger's success to strengthen his tenuous hold on the presidency. He wrote in his diary afterward, "We must have gotten some lift from the trip, although it seems almost impossible to break through in the polls."<sup>274</sup>

The circumstances were not auspicious for a delicate presidential foray into Middle East politics. Nixon suffered from phlebitis in his leg. His doctor advised him to stay off his feet and, if possible, not to take the trip at all. In Washington, the president's lawyer, Fred Buzhardt, suffered a heart attack as the House Judiciary Committee moved closer to recommending impeachment. Kissinger had just returned from a month in the Mideast, so there had been no time for new planning and little accomplishment could be hoped for. Instead, Nixon might create misunderstandings and commit diplomatic gaffes. Perhaps the president thought he could shift credit for the disengagement accords from Kissinger

to himself by taking the trip. Perhaps he believed that a trip could accomplish in 1974 what his trip to China had achieved in 1972: greater stature and domestic respect. (As he had been the first to visit China, Nixon became the first American president to visit each of the countries except Egypt; Roosevelt had attended the Cairo Conference in 1943.) He later claimed that his hurried excursion was necessary to the momentum of the peace process.<sup>275</sup>

For Kissinger the trip was particularly frustrating. He had returned to Washington expecting praise for his diplomatic achievement but had instead been accused of ordering illegal wiretaps on his subordinates. His response was emotional. He threatened to resign. It was not surprising that Kissinger appeared sullen and exhausted after his recent travails.

In Egypt Nixon received a tumultuous welcome—twice as many people greeted him along the Egyptian parade routes as live in Israel. While he signed agreements with Sadat for increased economic aid and cultural exchange, the most surprising agreement was the offer to sell Egypt a nuclear reactor.<sup>276</sup> Sadat still had a friendship treaty in force with the Soviet Union. Even though the Israelis were quickly offered a nuclear reactor of their own, their concern about the possible military use of any reactor increased their nervousness about American policy.

As friendly as he found the Egyptians, Nixon was particularly impressed with Assad. He later wrote in his diary, "The man really has elements of genius, without any question." He knew that the Syrians wanted to play off the United States against the U.S.S.R., but he believed that they could be weaned away from the Soviets if America could help with the return of their land and provide them with economic aid. During his visit, the United States and Syria announced that they would resume full diplomatic relations. One reason Nixon may have found Assad so cooperative was that he told the Syrian leader much that he wanted to hear. During their conversations, Nixon declared that the purpose of U.S. policy was to push the Israelis back, step by step, until they "fell off" the Golan Heights.<sup>277</sup>

Similarly, Nixon made promises in Jordan about a future Israeli disengagement on the West Bank. He had also told Sadat that his goal was to restore the 1967 Egyptian-Israeli border and involve the Palestinians in negotiations. Kissinger had been much more cautious in his promises throughout the previous months of negotiations. He had told the Arabs that he could not predict what withdrawals might emerge from the negotiations, although he implied that Israeli withdrawals would be substantial if not complete. The secretary of state had explained, however, that he would not repeat Rogers's error of announcing a plan. Nixon made sweeping commitments privately, but they fell short of an official public commitment to the 1967 borders and there was no way for his listeners to know whether the shaky U.S. government would be able to fulfill secret promises.<sup>278</sup>

Although the Israelis could not have known precisely what Nixon said in



private to the Arabs, they were suspicious. Nixon observed, "Our reception in Israel, although warm by ordinary standards, was the most restrained of the trip." With the Israelis, Nixon explored their requests for economic and military aid but made it clear that he expected further concessions from them, beginning with the Jordanian frontier. He was typically unpredictable. In an informal meeting in Golda Meir's living room, Nixon told his astonished listeners that there was only one way to deal with terrorists. Then he stood up and acted out the use of a machine gun.<sup>279</sup>

Nixon's fascination with what he later called the "tremendous potential of the new role of the United States as a force for peace in the Arab world" led him to moderate his past support for Israel. Even before the trip, he told Jewish leaders that "hardware alone to Israel was a policy that made sense maybe five years ago but did not make sense today . . ." Therefore, "I made it clear there is going to be no blank check in our conversations with the Israelis although, of course, I expressed sympathy for their military needs and, of course, enormous respect for their bravery, etc."<sup>280</sup> By the time the trip was over, he was talking to congressional leaders about his goal of balanced aid to the Israelis. As he put it in his diary, "With the congressional leaders I stepped out a little bit ahead of Henry in indicating that we would make Israel strong enough that they would not fear to negotiate, but not so strong that they felt they had no need to negotiate. I would add to that, Israel should also be strong enough so that their neighbors would not be tempted to attack them, and would have an incentive to negotiate."<sup>281</sup> Nixon was obviously preparing to press Israel for concessions on the West Bank.

The trip was not without comic moments. When Syrian jets rose to greet Air Force One, the president's pilots initially feared that they might attack and took appropriate evasive maneuvers, shaking up everyone on board. After a surprise toast from Nixon at the state dinner in Israel, Golda Meir responded, "As President Nixon says, Presidents can do almost anything, and President Nixon has done many things that nobody would have thought of doing." This drew howls of laughter from the press corps listening to the speech in an adjoining room.<sup>282</sup> Finally, in his memoirs, Nixon provided a somewhat incongruous commentary on his visit to Saudi Arabia:

Faisal saw Zionist and Communist conspiracies everywhere around him. He even put forward what must be the ultimate conspiratorialist notion: that the Zionists were behind the Palestinian terrorists. Despite this obsession, however, and thanks to his intelligence and the experience of many years in power, Faisal was one of the wisest leaders in the entire region.<sup>283</sup>

The trip was a bizarre episode in a period of intense U.S. domestic turmoil and involvement in Middle Eastern politics. It was followed by a similarly

fabricated exercise when, six days after returning to Washington, Nixon journeyed to Moscow. He returned to the United States in late June. On the eve of his Mideast trip, he had recorded in his diary a theme that would soon be widely accepted in official Washington: "Whether Israel can survive over a long period of time with a hundred million Arabs around them I think is really questionable. The only long-term hope lies in reaching some kind of settlement now while they can operate from a position of strength, and while we are having such apparent success in weaning the Arabs away from the Soviets into more reasonable paths."<sup>284</sup>

Here Nixon echoed the theme from the days of the Rogers Plan: U.S. diplomacy could awaken a new era in U.S.-Arab relations, block Soviet inroads in the area, and thereby guarantee Israeli security in the long run. Nixon had never deviated from this broad strategy. Throughout his years in office, he maintained an impressive consistency in approaching the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Yom Kippur War allowed him to implement his strategy and the oil embargo made the Mideast America's most immediate foreign policy concern, but neither of these epochal events changed the administration's basic direction. After Nixon's resignation on 9 August 1974, Kissinger pursued the same strategy under a very different president and in the midst of a rapidly changing Arab world.

#### *The Ford Era: The Second Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement*

All sides involved in the peace process had been fortunate that no other international crisis had distracted Kissinger's attention between the October War and June 1974. Watergate had actually pushed America into greater involvement in the area. One of the key problems with the Kissinger shuttle was that it depended on this delicate balance of international and domestic factors. The man who was both NSC adviser and secretary of state had to devote an enormous amount of his time to Arab-Israeli matters and spend lengthy periods outside Washington. He could not do so forever.

It was now necessary to move beyond the separation of forces to a new kind of agreement. The two disengagement accords were only a formalized re-deployment of troops at the end of a war. By summer 1974, however, domestic and international constraints limited the time Kissinger could devote to Arab-Israeli matters. The hastily arranged presidential trip, although justified as a means of moving toward genuine peace negotiations, was actually motivated by Nixon's shaky hold on his office. The third U.S.-Soviet summit and the Cyprus crisis in July diverted attention from the Middle East. As the president moved toward possible impeachment or resignation, it took all of Kissinger's time just to keep U.S. foreign policy afloat. A new diplomatic initiative was unthinkable.

Nonetheless, both Nixon and Kissinger had proposed to confront the thorny issue of the West Bank after the Syrian-Israeli disengagement. Certainly,