dent, he said, was determined to serve out his term, continuing his activities vigorously, particularly in foreign policy. That would be the best answer to his critics. In the meantime, he was looking forward to next year's summit in Moscow.

Kissinger concluded that because of the special relations that had been developed with the Soviet leadership, Brezhnev was the only foreign leader to whom the president deemed it necessary to give such frank and confidential clarification of a purely domestic American affair. I must admit it was a curious goodwill gesture; rather than demonstrating the security of Nixon's position, it disclosed his growing awareness of domestic pressure and, simultaneously, his eagerness to reassure Brezhnev (and himself) of his determination to continue his course in Soviet-American relations. The Soviet government began to understand his serious difficulties but still believed that he would overcome them, and that the process of consolidating our relations would develop further. But the events in the Congress, courts, media, and a number of disputes in international areas were to show how ephemeral were our hopes of making detente irreversible.

VI. The October War

Moscow, Washington, and the Middle East

The October 1973 Arab-Israeli War engaged the superpowers in a competition that bordered on confrontation, but also in a collaboration that meant close day-to-day contact, mainly through the confidential channel between Moscow and Washington. The two countries found themselves deeply involved both as partners seeking the earliest possible end to the war, and as rivals supplying their traditional clients with arms. At the same time, the crisis demonstrated that tension could be localized and prevented from disrupting relations between Washington and Moscow. This was the first serious international conflict under the conditions of detente, which was strongly affected by it.

While both powers cooperated in bringing the war to an end, they sought to manipulate events to serve their own ends and to extend their own influence in the Middle East. Both shared the objective of preventing the war from engulfing them while preserving their relationship. But as it became clear later on from Kissinger's memoirs, he was at the same time prepared to use and even sacrifice this relationship to reduce and if possible eliminate Soviet influence in the Middle East under the cover of detente. He made it clear that the United States was not willing to sacrifice its geopolitical position for detente. He wrote in his memoirs that it was often forgotten that "detente defined not friendship but a strategy for a relationship between adversaries. After all, a principal purpose of our Mideast policy was to reduce the role and influence of the Soviet Union, just as the Soviets sought to reduce ours." *

American policy during the war seemed to be designed almost exclusively by Kissinger, while Nixon was preoccupied with Watergate and its ramifications. In a way, one could say it was Kissinger's war as far as the American side was concerned. Thus an important part of American diplomacy was to play the Arab-Israeli rivalry in such a way that both sides would

* Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little, Brown, 1982), p. 600.
become dependent only on the United States and the Soviet Union would be rendered irrelevant to the peace process.

That was the key difference in the American approach to the Middle East, especially Kissinger's view of a settlement. While Brezhnev and the Politburo as a whole, in the best tradition of detente, were trying to organize a joint Soviet-American effort while advancing Arab and their own interests, Washington was actually seeking to exclude the Soviet Union, as was evident in the period at the end of and just after the war. Meanwhile Washington remained in constant communication with Moscow, especially at the start of the war, maneuvering to bring joint sponsorship of a cease-fire at the time most convenient for Israel.

The Soviet goals during the war were rather simple: to win back Arab confidence, prevent their military rout, and to bank on our hopes that the new collaborative relationship with the Nixon administration would allow us to share in the peace process.

Even before the war broke out in October of 1973, the Soviet government had warned Nixon and Kissinger several times of the rising danger of an Arab-Israeli military conflict. Moscow argued that the only way to head off the war was for the Soviet Union and the United States to agree on principles for a peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. This was first said to Kissinger in May when he arrived in Moscow to prepare for the summit meeting. At the summit itself in June, Brezhnev personally emphasized the same warning during his heated discussions with Nixon in San Clemente. And in September, Gromyko repeated all this once again to Nixon and Kissinger when they held their regular meeting during the UN General Assembly.

Later on Kissinger would admit that they had dismissed these Soviet warnings "as psychological warfare because we did not see any rational military option that would not worsen the Soviet and Arab position." In other words, Nixon and Kissinger actually refused to join the Soviet Union in sharing responsibility to defuse a critical situation. Who knows? perhaps both governments could have jointly prevented the outbreak of war by more energetically engaging Israel and the Arabs in the process of a peace settlement.

The war forced Washington and Moscow to reestablish close contacts to deal with crises. But cooperation was not a smooth process. From the beginning of the war on October 6 until the cease-fire on October 20, the two powers alternated between urging a prompt cease-fire and using delaying tactics to postpone one, depending on the tide of battle and their reckoning of the course of hostilities. Both resumed supplying their warring clients with arms and munitions, using this leverage to press for a cease-fire when they believed the time was ripe.

At the crucial stage of the conflict, when Israel broke the cease-fire, Washington put its armed forces on alert. This was supposedly done in response to a Soviet threat of unilateral interference, but in reality it was prompted both by insufficient trust between Washington and Moscow and by Israel's desire to gain additional territorial advantage at the last moment with the support of American diplomacy. Ultimately we worked out a cease-fire agreement and cosponsored the negotiations on a peace settlement in the Middle East, although Washington was doing everything to put them under its exclusive control.

During the war, practically all high-level messages between Washington and Moscow went through the Kissinger-Dobrynin confidential channel. Personally, I was in a rather difficult position. Because of the military secrecy and probably out of concern that the Americans could be decoding our cables, Moscow reduced the flow of information to our embassy in Washington about battlefield and diplomatic events connected with the war. The lack of information made me unusually restrained in my comments to Kissinger. Later I was amused when reading in his memoirs how skillfully he spoke during our conversations, saying one thing but actually being guided by a different motive. Once again he proved himself a versatile diplomat, especially when stalling to gain time for himself and Israel. In spite of this, I believe, we understood each other well enough.

The account here does not pretend to be a comprehensive diplomatic history of the Arab-Israeli War, but only a review of the Soviet-American exchanges in which I participated. It contains detail that has never before been published and will enrich the historical record of events which themselves were matters of high drama.

The War Begins

For me, the war began early in the morning of October 6, when I was awakened at 6:40 A.M. by Kissinger telephoning from New York. He asked me to pass on to Moscow immediately the information he would give me about the threat of an attack on Israel. On behalf of the president he assured the Soviet leadership that the United States was just as concerned as the Soviet Union in preventing another major military outbreak in the Middle East. The Americans were not playing games, he stressed, but proceeded from the need for drastic action to prevent events in the Middle East from spinning out of control.

Kissinger's call was a complete surprise. After Brezhnev's talk with Nixon in San Clemente in June concerning a growing threat of a military conflict between Arabs and Israelis, I received no telegrams from Moscow on
the subject. I knew that the Middle East was tense, but I did not know the war was so close. Our embassy was not informed of the conversation Anwar Sadat had with our ambassador in Cairo on the eve of the war, when the Egyptian president rather clearly hinted at hostilities but did not name an exact date. Neither were we informed about evacuation of Soviet families from Egypt and Syria.

Some hours later Kissinger told me that Egypt and Syria had launched military operations against Israel all along the Suez Canal and Golan Heights cease-fire lines established following the Israeli occupation of Arab territories during the previous Arab-Israeli war, the Six-Day War of 1967. Kissinger was already in New York for the annual session of the United Nations General Assembly, and he wanted to convene the Security Council. He wanted both the Soviet and American representatives to be instructed to take a measured position without siding entirely with their traditional clients. The United States, he said, intended to propose a resolution calling for a cease-fire and return to the previous position and setting up a special committee to deal with the conflict.

Moscow replied promptly: "The Soviet government received reports about the beginning of hostilities in the Middle East simultaneously with you. We are taking all reasonable measures to clarify the real situation in the region, because the reports coming to us are highly contradictory. . . . We are considering, like you, possible steps to be taken to remedy the situation. We hope to communicate with you soon to coordinate our actions."

From October 6 to 8 an intensive exchange went on through the confidential channel between Moscow and Washington. Brezhnev tried to avoid a Security Council meeting on the ground that Israel had long been an aggressor by holding onto the Arab lands it had occupied for years. He opposed an Arab withdrawal from their latest gains because they had, in essence, just won back what was theirs. "In this connection," Brezhnev wrote to Nixon on October 7, "it would be very important, to our mind, if Israel stated its readiness to withdraw from the occupied Arab territories without any reservations on the understanding that security would be guaranteed for Israel as well as for other countries in the region. What in this proposal can be unacceptable to Israel?"

During the first days of the conflict, Moscow was under strong pressure from Cairo and Damascus to keep the whole thing out of the United Nations while they thought they were winning on the battlefield. Brezhnev initially agreed with them, although reluctantly because we were against the war in general, and besides, we did not believe that the Arabs would finally win. It was then that Nixon voiced his hope to Brezhnev that the Middle East War would not damage the achievements in Soviet-American relations. At that precise point, he was not sure Israel would win a rapid and final victory and wanted to keep open his lines to the Arabs via Moscow if they were needed.

The lively exchange continued between Moscow and Washington from October 10 through 13 in the confidential channel, which also carried an intense discussion about the Security Council resolution. Moscow sought to broaden it by providing for the phased withdrawal, within a strictly limited period of Israeli troops from all the Arab territories occupied in 1967. Washington opposed mentioning any Israeli withdrawal at all.

Kissinger told me on October 12 to inform Moscow that the United States would not send its troops to the Middle East unless the Soviet Union did likewise. I asked him about reports of a sharp increase in U.S. military supplies to Israel, and he denied them. But on October 13, Kissinger informed me of his reports that Sadat strongly opposed a cease-fire resolution. Nixon therefore no longer supported our mutual efforts in the Security Council: let things take their course—by that time Israel began regaining its strength. Kissinger said the president therefore would be forced to revise his pledge to exercise restraint in resupplying Israel and adjust the U.S. supply line to the level at which the Soviet Union was resupplying the Arabs. By spurning a cease-fire earlier, it was obvious that Sadat had made a gross political and strategic blunder, because it brought military disaster some days later.

Late on the night of October 13 Kissinger called me on the confidential phone and said the White House still believed there should be a cease-fire in place (the Israelis had regained some territory by then). We were still pressing the Arabs' demand that Israel withdraw to the borders it held before the 1967 war, but Kissinger said the very best he could do would be to agree to a reference to Security Council Resolution 242, the postwar resolution prescribing a policy of an Israeli pullback in exchange for peace with its Arab neighbors. Kissinger said the United States would accept nothing more "even if it meant a clash with the Arabs and the Soviet Union."

Earlier in the day I had attended the swearing in of Gerald Ford as vice president to succeed Spiro Agnew, who had to resign in a financial scandal, and the president took me aside. He said he wanted me to inform Brezhnev that both leaders were being provoked on all sides in order to frustrate the process of detente. Many would like to see it flop, Nixon said, "but we should not fall for that because the destinies of our peoples depend on it. Tell the general secretary that I will not give in to pressure and will keep my side of the bargain with the Soviet leadership." While the president was speaking about "provocations from all sides" his secretary of state was more one-sided.

On October 15 I was visited by Senator Fulbright who favored good re-
lations with the Soviet Union as well as supporting the Arabs. He said the Pentagon's secret assessment, given at a White House briefing for the leaders of Congress, was that the Arab military success had peaked, and it would not be long before Israel, heavily resupplied with American arms, mounted a counteroffensive and threw the Arabs back to the other side of the Suez Canal. Fulbright believed it necessary to convince "the short-sighted Sadat" that the best way out for him would be to accept the Security Council resolution for a cease-fire and enter into negotiations. That would enable the United States and the Soviet Union to act jointly which, in turn, would help confirm the policy of detente between us rather than undermine it; pro-Israeli and anti-Soviet elements were already combining against the policy to wreck it if they could.

I believed it was a good assessment, and so I reported to Moscow. Meanwhile both the Soviet Union and the United States began to heavily resupply their respective protégés with arms and munitions.

On October 16, Kissinger informed us that the United States was starting an airlift to deliver supplies to Israel, and the deliveries would increase as the war continued. The White House would call off the operation once a cease-fire came into force, and the Soviet side followed suit. Actually the U.S. airlift had begun on October 12, and ours two days before that. The United States airlifted $2.2 billion worth of military equipment to Israel, and I believe the Soviet Union sent no less to the Arabs.

Kissinger's Maneuvers

The private U.S.-Soviet dialogue on the wording of a draft UN resolution meanwhile continued. Since the negotiations and the situation as a whole were entering a crucial stage, Kissinger hinted to me it might be useful if he were to fly to Moscow to discuss the text of a joint resolution calling for a cease-fire. Brezhnev replied on the next day with an invitation to the secretary of state, and Nixon sent a formal notice that Kissinger would have his full authority.

More than that, while Kissinger was already in Moscow (he arrived there on October 20; I accompanied him), he received another secret message from Nixon, to be conveyed orally to Brezhnev. It was a remarkable change in the American approach. Nixon said he agreed with Brezhnev's view, as expressed in San Clemente in June, that the two leaders representing the two great powers "must step in, determine the proper course of action to a just settlement, and then bring the necessary pressure on our respective friends for a settlement which will at last bring peace to this troubled area." This very important message, if implemented thoroughly, could have changed significantly the future course of the Middle East peace settlement. But Kissinger never delivered it to Brezhnev because it would undercut his own diplomatic tactics.

Before Kissinger left for Moscow, he appeared to be stalling the negotiations on a UN resolution for a day or two in order to gain time for the advance of Israeli troops; they had already established a bridgehead on the western side of the Suez canal and thus started to outflank the Egyptian force stranded on the East Bank in the Sinai. A completion of this flanking maneuver on the battlefield would have added to his bargaining leverage during the negotiations. But Nixon's new, broader, instruction to cooperate with Moscow in imposing a settlement could only interfere with Kissinger's strategy. "It will totally wreck what little bargaining leverage I still have," he cabled to his deputy Scowcroft. Then he complained by telephone to Haig, who had been transferred back from the Pentagon to replace Haldeman as chief of staff. But Haig refused to interfere; he told Kissinger he had troubles of his own. Under way right around the newly promoted General Haig was the Saturday night massacre; Nixon fired his attorney general and lesser officials from the Department of Justice for refusing to dismiss the Watergate prosecutor, Archibald Cox.

Kissinger virtually ignored the president's instruction, though he did not admit it directly. In his memoirs he states that he adhered to the earlier plan concerning the UN resolution approved by Nixon before his departure for Moscow, but he does not say anything about outlining the new American position to Brezhnev. I do not recall his doing so during the discussion of a few hours he had with Brezhnev and Gromyko.

To Kissinger's surprise, the Soviet leaders rather quickly agreed to a compromise draft resolution. It called for an immediate cease-fire and compliance with Resolution 242 (the latter part was basically the American draft). Moscow accepted it, believing it to be a balanced document and knowing that the military situation was irreversibly changing in favor of Israel (Sadat at that moment was pleading with us to hurry with a cease-fire resolution). That was why Brezhnev proposed to Kissinger that our two countries immediately and jointly introduce the resolution in the Security Council.

But Kissinger, it seemed, wanted to wait a bit longer. He said he needed time for consultations with Israel to persuade it to agree to a cease-fire. The Israelis quickly realized that they could take advantage of a few hours' confusion at the beginning of the cease-fire and encircle the Egyptian Third Army on the East Bank of the Suez Canal. Actually, it was a premeditated violation of the agreement from the start. Later, Kissinger wrote about the Israeli action with evident approval. The only thing that remains unclear is whether Nixon knew about this at the time.
Late at night on October 22, the Security Council adopted an important resolution, No. 338, declaring an agreement on the cease-fire. For all their intense rivalry, the two superpowers jointly sponsored it.

**A New Crisis**

Although the crisis appeared to draw to a peaceful end, its peak had not in fact been passed. After just a few hours of the cease-fire, the agreement suddenly collapsed. Israeli troops broke the pledge by advancing to the Suez Canal in an attempt to encircle and crush the Egyptian Third Army Corps of some 25,000 men which still was on the eastern side of the canal.

The next day Nixon received an angry message from Brezhnev on the hot line: “Mr. President, Israel has grossly violated the Security Council decision on the cease-fire in the Middle East. We are shocked that the agreement reached just two days ago has been virtually blown up by this action of the Israeli leaders. You are in a better position to know why Israel has committed this perfidious action. We can see only one possibility to remedy the situation and implement the agreement. The only way to do that is to force Israel to comply immediately with the Security Council decision. Too much is at stake, not only as regards the situation in the Middle East, but also in our relations.”

Nixon replied that the United States “was assuming full responsibility for ensuring the termination of military operations by Israel.” But he replied that information available to him indicated that the Egyptians were to blame for breaking the cease-fire. “A historic settlement was reached by you and me,” he wrote, “and we should not let it be broken.”

Through the day there were active contacts between the White House and the Soviet Embassy to align our positions at another meeting of the Security Council called to discuss the cease-fire. Brezhnev addressed Nixon once again on the hot line: “I would like to inform you that the Egyptian side is ready to cease fire immediately if the Israeli armed forces do the same. You can inform the Israeli government categorically.” The message stressed the need for a joint U.S.-Soviet position before the Security Council.

I was then in Moscow attending Politburo sessions on the crisis and heard Anwar Sadat’s calls to Brezhnev on a special phone, with the Egyptian president begging “to save me and the Egyptian capital encircled by Israeli tanks.” When Brezhnev called our chief military representative in Cairo, he replied that there was no immediate threat to Cairo but said that “Sadat completely lost his head” when he learned that several Israeli tanks had crossed the Suez Canal and were heading toward Cairo. This turned out to be a reconnaissance by three or four tanks, which soon withdrew.

But it was the Egyptian Third Army Corps that was the real focus of developments, surrounded as it was by the Israelis in the Suez area. Unless the cease-fire took effect immediately, it would be crushed. Another Security Council resolution, No. 339 of October 23, also cosponsored by the Soviet Union and the United States, was quickly passed. It called on both sides to return to their cease-fire positions and provided for UN observers.

On the morning of the next day, Brezhnev indignantly informed Nixon that the Israeli forces were engaged in fierce fighting on the west and east side of the Suez Canal “just several hours after the second Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire.” He expressed confidence that the president would be able to influence Israel to stop violating the new resolution. The Soviet leadership itself hardly had at that time the means to influence developments on the ground, which angered the Kremlin. There was a lot of harsh criticism of Israel and the American administration, because the Kremlin strongly believed that Israel could not act without at least tacit knowledge of the White House.

The Soviet government issued a public statement concerning “Israel’s perfidious attack” on the Egyptian forces and population centers. “The Soviet government warns the Israeli government about the most grave consequences of the continuation of its aggressive actions against Egypt and Syria,” it said. Moscow then received another urgent message from our chief military adviser in Egypt reporting that the Israelis were continuing their offensive, and that the Egyptian Third Army Corps was surrounded and would be annihilated unless the cease-fire came into effect immediately. Our embassy in Cairo reported that Sadat’s rule was about to collapse.

The same night Brezhnev called an urgent meeting of the Politburo. Vasily Grubjakov, an assistant to Gromyko who was with him at that important meeting, told me later that the most aggressive stand was taken by Defense Minister Grechko. He insisted on an impressive “demonstration of our military presence in Egypt and Syria” and was supported by Podgorny. Kosygin was flatly opposed, and Gromyko supported him. Brezhnev, following a cautious line and trying to maneuver between the Arabs and the United States, also came out against any involvement of our troops in the conflict.

So after an argumentative meeting they finally approved a message to Nixon which was strongly worded but did not contain any threat to act unilaterally. However, a stronger phrase about our possible involvement appeared in the text of the message as it reached Washington. It is anybody’s guess how and when it was inserted, since the main participants of the meeting are no longer alive. The final decision could have been influenced by a last-minute telephone appeal from Sadat.
As a result the message warned Nixon that in breaking the cease-fire Israel was "flagrantly challenging both the Soviet Union and the United States, since the Security Council decision rests on our agreement." Brezhnev proposed that Soviet and American military contingents be dispatched to Egypt and he warned "bluntly that if you do not deem it possible to cooperate with us in this respect," he was ready to act alone. Brezhnev concluded: "Let us implement that agreement in this concrete case and in this complicated situation. This will be a good example of our coordinated action in the interests of peace." As appears from the last phrase, the Soviet leaders were still hoping for some cooperation with the American administration.

To add to their pressure, the Soviet Air Force mounted several symbolic exercises in Transcaucasia, and one or two Soviet transports flew to Cairo. But as I learned later from Moscow, Washington never had any real cause for alarm because the Politburo did not have any intention of intervening in the Middle East. It would have been reckless both politically and militarily, for at that time the Soviet Union was not prepared to mount immediately a large-scale intervention in the region. And even if we could have done so, it would have transformed the Arab-Israeli War into a direct clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. Nobody in Moscow wanted that.

In his memoirs Kissinger claims that Washington feared Soviet intervention. Maybe so. But it appears more likely that a major factor in American behavior was its determination not to accept a joint Soviet-American military presence to supervise or observe the cease-fire under UN auspices. For the administration that would have been tantamount to Soviet military penetration in the Middle East, which Kissinger would have found unacceptable.

Kissinger sounded nervous as I read to him Brezhnev's message over our confidential telephone line on the evening of October 24. He read it back to me to be sure he had understood it correctly and promised to report it promptly to the president.

He telephoned back at 10:15 P.M. to say that Nixon had ordered a meeting of presidential advisers and assistants at the White House. The president hoped that the general secretary would await the outcome of that meeting and that in the interim the Soviet Union would not act by itself and create a grave situation.

In his reply, Nixon agreed with Brezhnev that our accord to act jointly to preserve peace was of the highest value. He nevertheless declined Brezhnev's proposal for joint action by dispatching Soviet and American military contingents to Egypt, saying that it "was unsuitable under the circumstances." Nixon said that Washington had no information about Israeli cease-fire violations on any appreciable scale. Therefore, he stressed, the Soviet warning of unilateral actions caused grave concern and could have incalculable consequences. Nixon expressed his readiness to strengthen the UN supervisory forces with additional manpower and equipment and declared himself ready to include some American and Soviet noncombat personnel, if that was what Brezhnev meant by the joint dispatch of contingents to the Middle East.

The Superpower Stakes Rise: A U.S. Combat Alert Is Declared

Shortly after receiving Nixon's message, our embassy heard news flashes on the radio that the U.S. armed forces were being put on combat alert. There was no official confirmation, and initially the Soviet Union was not mentioned in the reports. But then we heard about a purported Soviet threat to send forces to the Middle East to impose a cease-fire even if the United States did not join in. Broadcasts reported Soviet aircraft moving closer to the region and stressed the White House's refusal to give in to Soviet pressure. The firm stand "taken by the White House"—it was said—was designed to "prevent Soviet military interference" in the Middle East.

Frankly speaking, I was not unduly alarmed at these reports, in contrast to the Cuban crisis of 1962. But I was rather angry. I called Kissinger on our special telephone and demanded an explanation in a tone that was highly unusual in our personal relationship—the more so because in our private conversations he had never as much as hinted at the possibility of an alert. I stressed that it was clearly contrary to the spirit of his recent negotiations in Moscow, and I did not see why the U.S. government was trying to create the impression of a dangerous crisis.

Kissinger excused himself by saying that the White House instructions for limited combat readiness should not be taken by Moscow as a hostile act on the part of the U.S. government and were mostly determined by "domestic considerations." He assured me that the order would be revoked the next day, and that in the meanwhile I could urgently inform Brezhnev about it in strict confidence. Indeed, the order was revoked on October 26.

Kissinger did not specify what he meant by domestic considerations. For my part, I stressed the total incompatibility of the American alert with the general level of relations we had been trying to promote between our countries. That evening, we had a similar tense conversation when we met accidentally at the Kennedy Center, which we both attended for the opening of a new opera (during a "grave crisis"). Donald Kendall happened to be there and wondered what was going on. I told him, "Oh, it's just Henry playing his diplomatic game."
The End of the War: Nixon Becomes Apologetic

I was not of course present at the important White House meeting on the night of October 24 that ordered the alert, but I received a fairly detailed account two days later from Deputy Secretary of State Rush at lunch in his apartment, which had been scheduled two weeks before. (Rush had obviously been hurt by the fact that Nixon, who had repeatedly hinted at the chance of his appointment as secretary of state, finally appointed Kissinger with Rush as his deputy.) Nixon was not at the meeting, for reasons not clear to Rush. The later, official explanation was that the president was tied up with Watergate, but I found it hardly tenable. If the White House regarded the threat of Soviet interference in the Middle East—and a possible conflict—as seriously as Kissinger later wrote it did, then surely the president’s participation in the meeting would have been essential. But why was he not there? Was he less worried than some of his assistants? And why did he later become apologetic about his message to Brezhnev?

According to Rush, those who participated in the meeting included Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger; the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Thomas Moorer; and CIA Director William Colby. They had information about Soviet air maneuvers and discussed the possibility of a confrontation, but there was no unanimity, and some doubts, about whether the Soviet Union really wanted to stage one with the United States. At the same time, they understood that Israel had violated the Sunday resolution of the Security Council and took advantage of the cease-fire to occupy as much Egyptian territory as possible.

Kissinger was, according to Rush, very agitated throughout the meeting, which he chaired. He declared that it was important to understand the Russians’ real intentions, which were to send their troops to the Middle East to consolidate Soviet influence in the region. That was why Kissinger strongly objected to dispatching a joint Soviet-American military contingent to the Middle East: the Russians would surely take advantage of it to reestablish their physical presence in Egypt and elsewhere in the area. He then proposed placing the U.S. armed forces immediately on a temporary combat alert to demonstrate Washington’s firm opposition to any introduction of Soviet troops in the Middle East.

Not all the participants agreed at once with this plan. Some proposed warning Moscow if necessary that the United States would put its troops on alert if the Soviet Union began planning the unilateral dispatch of its troops to the Middle East. But Kissinger finally gained the upper hand, and that decision was approved by the president several hours later. Rush was convinced that Kissinger’s profound pro-Israeli bias showed up at the meeting even at the expense of Soviet-American détente and their relations.

But I think that Kissinger, as usual, was pursuing his strategic goal of securing American influence and dominance in the Middle East. It was a continuation of his global “realpolitik” toward the Soviet Union, with détente only as a part of this policy.

On the very same day, the UN Security Council adopted still another resolution, which finally put an end to the war by sending a UN peacekeeping force to the Middle East, pointedly excluding contingents from any of the five permanent members of the Security Council. The next day, October 26, both Nixon and Brezhnev spoke out in favor of the creation of a UN supervisory peacekeeping force. The war was over.

Nixon also held a press conference claiming credit for Middle East peacemaking—a credit he really needed to offset the rising Watergate scandal. He attributed the administration’s success in avoiding a confrontation to his good personal relations with Brezhnev and likened the whole think to the Cuban crisis. I called Kissinger next day and told him this comparison was hardly relevant and essentially incorrect. He called me back in a couple of hours to tell me that the president agreed that it had been a lame comparison.

Brezhnev, spurred by the latest developments, sent an angry message to Nixon the next day, October 28. It said that “as I and my comrades see it, there is a credibility crisis.” All the assurances given to Moscow and Cairo for more than a week about compliance with the cease-fire and the resolutions of the Security Council, he said, had served only to demonstrate direct American support for the Israeli military, which continues to behave “provocatively with a clear, or, I should say, naked aim.” The situation, he said, was the result of misleading and even deceptive information reaching the president “aimed at encouraging the aggression and worsening relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and . . . at undermining our personal mutual trust.”

Brezhnev did not hide his own and his colleagues’ suspicions about Kissinger’s behavior. Clearly impressed by Brezhnev’s message, Nixon invited me to come to Camp David October 30 to discuss the matter in private. He spoke in a conciliatory and even apologetic manner, stressing his intention to continue his policy of improving Soviet-American relations. He said he saw the previous week as just an unpleasant episode in our relations and asked me to inform Brezhnev personally that he would not permit the Israelis to crush the encircled Egyptian Third Army Corps. He also expressed his readiness to cooperate with us through the United Nations to settle the crisis.
"Please inform the general secretary," he concluded, "that as long as I live and hold the office of president I will never allow a real confrontation with the Soviet Union." He conceded that he might have lost his cool a bit during the crisis, but that could be explained partly by the siege of his political opposition and personal enemies who were using the pretext of Watergate to undermine his authority. To tell it in plain human words, he said, it was very hard for him at times. That was the first time I heard Nixon admitting to the depth of his domestic troubles because of Watergate. Kissinger was not present at the conversation, and Nixon may have wanted to disassociate himself from some of his secretary of state's behavior during the crisis. I do not know for sure.

Kissinger himself in due course found it necessary, for his own private reasons, to express his regrets for the alert. Early in November he conceded to me that "the White House had made a mistake putting its forces on high combat alert. The general secretary proved to have more nerve than the president. We could see now we had made a rash move damaging American-Soviet relations. That is undeniable. But the main thing for all of us is not to worsen that damage by further mutual recriminations and offenses, just because we have admitted what could have been a gross miscalculation on our part."

Many American historians describe the Middle East War as the deadliest crisis in our postwar relations, comparable to the Cuban crisis. While it was indeed a serious political crisis which made a rather unpleasant impact on our relations, there was no threat of a direct military clash between us. At least that was and is Moscow's assessment. We took no measures to put our armed forces on high combat alert even in response to the American move, and we certainly did not alert our strategic nuclear forces as the Americans did. One cannot help but think that the myth of the Middle East being saved from a Soviet armed invasion was consequently put into circulation by the high American participants in the events in order to justify their rather unseemly role in the course of the crisis.

The protracted Arab-Israeli conflict nevertheless ended with the active behind-the-scenes involvement of Washington and Moscow. The involvement was characterized by an intricate pattern of cooperation and rivalry. Both countries worked to settle the conflict between the Arabs and Israel and arrange a truce through the UN Security Council. Detente notwithstanding, the conflict clearly showed that both countries did not necessarily have parallel objectives and interests. The Middle East War never grew into a direct military confrontation between the Soviet Union and the United States—in contrast to the Cuban crisis—precisely because of the remarkable new level of Soviet-American relations. Moreover, the conflict ended in an agreement between the Arabs and Israel to begin direct negotiations in Geneva in December, cochaired by the Soviet Union and the United States. All that represented a certain success for the policy of detente. Characteristically, neither government called the process into question or denied its usefulness during the conflict or afterward. At the same time, the conduct of the Middle East War showed that the process was very delicate and fragile; it definitely damaged the trust between the leadership of both countries.

The October crisis and the American role were discussed soon after the war by the Politburo. Did the Middle East policy of Nixon and Kissinger indeed demonstrate that they had no interest in cooperating with the Soviet Union when it really mattered? Had they really considered a military clash with us? And if so, what about detente between us? All these were legitimate questions. And they somewhat cooled the excitement about detente that had reigned in Moscow after the summits. Yet the ultimate result of this comprehensive and animated review was once again our reaffirmation of detente as a useful and important policy, while recognizing that in some areas such as the Middle East it would be very difficult to reconcile our different approaches. The rivalry would remain. Detente had its limits.