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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

## THE YOM KIPPUR WAR: SOCIO-POLITICAL AND DIPLOMATIC REPERCUSSIONS

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### Abstract

One of the hardest fought wars of all in the twentieth century was in 1973, when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel on the Jewish holy day of atonement (*Yom Kippur*). Egypt and Syria staged this war against Israel as a response to the Arab territories Israel captured during the Six-Day War of 1967 which include the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. The war did have a major influence on how Egypt and Israel eventually came to an agreement that resulted in Egypt receiving the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for long-term peace. The war proved costly for Israel, Egypt, and Syria, having caused momentous casualties, and having disabled or destroyed large quantities of military equipment. The study was carried out with the aid of secondary sources and internet materials. The result of the findings in this study shows that the *Yom Kippur* War of October 1973 was a turning point in Israeli's military and strategic thought. Undeniably, the war taught all parties involved valuable lessons, but it seems that the Israelis have discussed the conflict's tactical direction, startling strategic shortcomings, and political ramifications the most. The paper concludes that the Arab-Israeli leaders in collaboration with the world superpowers need to come together to find a middle ground and a fair centre-stage where peace and harmony will be given utmost priority. This is the only way the differences between the two warring nations can be resolved.

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### Introduction:-

One of the hardest fought wars of all in the twentieth century was in 1973, when Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack on Israel on the Jewish holy day of atonement (*Yom Kippur*). Egypt and Syria staged this war against Israel as a response to the Arab territories Israel captured during the Six-Day War of 1967 which include the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights. Beginning on October 6, 1973, and lasting until October 26, 1973, the war took place during Ramadan, the holy month of fasting in Islam. Therefore, the war was declared with the diplomatic goal of convincing a chastised—if still unbeaten—Israel to negotiate on terms more advantageous to the Arab countries. This ultimately led to the United States and the Soviet Union engaging in an indirect confrontation in defence of their respective allies.

However, the unresolved Palestinian issue, ongoing border tension, the shift in Egypt's and Syria's leadership, and the failure of additional diplomatic attempts to resolve the conflict all contributed to the global powers' increased

interest in the region and ultimately led to the *Yom Kippur* war. After the 1967 war, the requirements for resolving the conflict had simply not been met: the superpowers lacked the will and capacity to impose peace; the Arab states were unable to make peace from a position of complete defeat; Israel was unwilling to make concessions following its enormous victory; and the international community was unable to create an appropriate environment for negotiations<sup>1</sup>. Years of intermittent fighting ensued after all of these, and Anwar Sadat—who took office as president of Egypt soon after the War of Attrition (1969–70)—attempted to mediate a peaceful resolution provided that Israel returned the territories it had taken in accordance with United Nations’ Resolution 242.<sup>2</sup> When Israel refused to accept those conditions, the conflict escalated into a full-fledged war in 1973.

In recognition of the foregoing viewpoint, this paper shall be channelled towards an exposition of the *Yom Kippur* War of 1973. To achieve this feat, this paper shall kick-off with an exposition of the *Yom Kippur* war of October 1973, to be followed by a discourse on the Arab-Israeli States beyond the *Yom Kippur* War with particular reference to the Socio-political and diplomatic repercussions of the war. The paper ends with a conclusion which is a peroration of our main findings.

### **An Exposition of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973**

On October 6, 1973, at about 2PM—the Jewish Day of Atonement, *Yom Kippur*—Egyptian and Syrian forces staged a surprise attack on Israeli forces situated on the Suez Canal and the Golan Heights. This war, which was referred to by Israelis as the *Yom Kippur* War, by Arabs as the Ramadan War, and generally by non-partisans in the West as the October War of 1973 or Fourth Arab-Israeli war came as a surprise to Israel, to the extent that Israeli intelligence had failed to foresee the battle despite evidence to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> Israeli confidence in its early warning systems and air superiority was out of place, and Egyptian missiles were soon taking a heavy toll on Israeli warplanes. And as Don Peretz explains in his book, *The Arab-Israeli Dispute*, the Arab nations’ exasperation with Israel’s sovereignty over the Golan Heights, Sinai, West Bank, and Gaza Strip had been underestimated by Israel. It also thought the Arabs were weak, given that Egypt had recently kicked out its military advisors from the Soviet Union. Sadat further convinced Israel that his assertions were hollow threats when he repeatedly declared that 1971 will be the year of decision but did not carry them out.<sup>4</sup>

Obviously, Israeli military and political decision makers had grown content, convinced of their own indomitability, and mobilization of the Egyptian army had been interpreted as annual manoeuvres. Commenting on this, the commander of the Armed Corps, General Avraham Adan, gives an insightful account into Israeli thinking at that time:

My colleagues and I were certainly surprised. The underlying assessment of Israeli Intelligence was that the armed forces of the Arab nations were still unprepared for war; hence the probability of war seemed exceptionally low. For the past ten days, the Director of Military Intelligence had stuck to this evaluation, offering reasonable explanations about the build-up of forces. Moreover, the evening before, when he had briefed us about the evacuation of families of Soviet technicians from Egypt and Syria, he explained it as just the result of the widening gap between the Arabs and the Soviets. Now suddenly, without any signs of emotion or embarrassment, the Director of Military Intelligence was predicting that war would erupt within hours.<sup>5</sup>

Even when the Defence Minister, Moshe Dayan, was informed that Egypt and Syria were going to attack, and Israeli reserves were partially mobilized, a pre-emptive strike was ruled out, however, for reasons that Israel would be seen as the belligerent and thereby isolate the United States. To support this claim, Israeli Prime Minister, Golda Meir, in her autobiography, asserted her claim saying:

<sup>1</sup> Malcom Yapp, *The Near East since the First World War: A History to 1995*, 2<sup>nd</sup>ed (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 416-419.

<sup>2</sup> See Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine: A History of Settler Colonial Conquest and Resistance* (Great Britain: Profile Books Ltd., 2020), 164.

<sup>3</sup> Kristen E. Schulze, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 3<sup>rd</sup>ed (New York: Routledge, 2017), 46.

<sup>4</sup> Don Peretz, *The Arab-Israel Dispute*, Facts on File (New York, 1996), 43

<sup>5</sup> Adan, Avraham, *The Yom Kippur War: An Israeli General’s Account* (New York: Drum Books, 1986), 6.

I know all the arguments in favour of a pre-emptive strike, but I am against it. We do not know now, any of us, what the future will hold, but there is always the possibility that we will need help, and if we strike first, we will get nothing from anyone.<sup>6</sup>

Explaining this, Kristen Schulze in his book, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, notes that the fundamental reason covering Meir's decision was the United States' concern about drawing the Soviet Union into the conflict, alienating Egypt, the possibility of an oil embargo and involvement in yet another foreign war. Full mobilization was also ruled out at that point. Israeli mobilization earlier in the year had already placed a heavy burden on the economy and, being amid a general election, the government could not risk further costs, should the attack not occur after all.<sup>7</sup>

As expected, Egypt launched a massive airstrike and artillery assault on Israel, and Syria invaded the Golan Heights. Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal and pushed back Israeli troops. In the north, while Israel was still mobilizing, Syria took Mount Hermon. In fact, the Israel Defence Forces was outnumbered 12 to 1 when the fighting began as the intensity of the Egyptian and Syrian assault, so different from the situation in 1967, swiftly began to deplete Israel's reserve stocks of munitions. In the first few days, Israel came close to defeat and had been forced to retract from several positions. With Israel threatened by catastrophe, Prime Minister Meir turned to the United States for aid, while the Israeli general staff quickly improvised a battle strategy.<sup>8</sup>

Although Washington was reluctant to send arms during the first week of the conflict, fearing it might antagonize the Arabs, while also hoping that Israel might become more accommodating, the reluctance was further fuelled by the fact that the United States' Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, had received a message from Sadat stating that this war was only a limited operation aimed at forcing an Israeli withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967, which would be followed by a peace settlement.<sup>9</sup> Washington's reluctance to help Israel changed when the Soviet Union launched its own resupply effort to Egypt and Syria. President Richard Nixon countered by establishing an emergency supply line to Israel, even though the Arab nations imposed a costly oil embargo, and various American allies refused to facilitate the arms shipments.<sup>10</sup>

With reinforcements on the way, the Israeli Defence Force speedily turned the tide. A daring Israeli helicopter assault disabled portions of the Egyptian air defences, which allowed Israeli forces commanded by General Ariel Sharon to cross the Suez Canal and threaten to destroy the Egyptian Third Army. On the Golan Heights, Israeli troops, at high cost, repelled the Syrians and advanced to the edge of the Golan plateau on the road to Damascus. On October 22, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 338, which called for an immediate end to the fighting. In spite of this, however, hostilities continued for several days afterwards, prompting the UN to restate the call for a cease-fire with Resolutions 339 and 340. On 25 October, the Egyptian Third Army was resupplied; Arab dignity was saved, and the United States was able to gain influence in Egypt, while Israel still emerged victorious. At this point, the United States, alarmed by Soviet threats of direct military intervention and on nuclear alert, secured a cease-fire in place on October 26.<sup>11</sup>

One ultimate factor of the war was the so-called oil weapon. Ensuing from the outbreak of the war, the Arab member-states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) stopped oil exports to the United States and the Netherlands and reduced overall exports by 25 per cent. The embargo, which lasted until 1974, was designed to punish those states that were considered visibly supportive of Israel and served to boost Arab confidence further. In the end, nevertheless, it was the fact that the Arabs for the first time had not been militarily defeated, and the political gains from the war, which created conditions that were much more advantageous to negotiations than at any time since 1948.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Golda Meir, *MyLife: The Autobiography of Golda Meir* (Aylesbury: Futura Publications Ltd, 1975), 359.

<sup>7</sup> Kristen E. Schulze, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 47.

<sup>8</sup> Nadav Safran, "Trial by Ordeal: The Yom Kippur War, October 1973." *International Security* 2, no. 2 (1977), 133–70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538730>.

<sup>9</sup> T.G. Fraser, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2009) "Israel"

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Israel"

<sup>12</sup> Kristen E. Schulze, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 49.

### **The Arab-Israeli States Beyond the Yom Kippur War: Socio-Political and Diplomatic Repercussions of the War**

Suffice it to point out that while the Arab-Israeli conflict did not immediately change due to the Fourth Arab-Israeli War of 1973, it did have a major influence on how Egypt and Israel eventually came to an agreement that resulted in Egypt receiving the Sinai Peninsula in exchange for long-term peace. The war proved costly for Israel, Egypt, and Syria, having caused momentous casualties, and having disabled or destroyed large quantities of military equipment. Besides, although Israel had staved off any advance by Egypt to recapture the Sinai Peninsula during the war, it never restored its seemingly impenetrable fortifications along the Suez Canal that Egypt had destroyed on October 6. The results of the conflict therefore required the two countries to coordinate arrangements for disengagement in the short term and made more immediate the need for a negotiated permanent settlement to their ongoing disputes.<sup>13</sup>

What is more, in a bid to maintain the cease-fire between Israel and Egypt, a disengagement agreement, reached on January 18, 1974, stipulated that Egypt would decrease the number of its forces on the east side of the canal and that Israel would withdraw its forces into the Sinai west of the Mitla and Gidi crossings. A buffer zone was created between the two armies by a peacekeeping force of the United Nations. Another agreement, signed on September 4, 1975, was added to the Israel-Egypt one. It involved the enlargement of the UN buffer zone and additional force withdrawal. When Israel and Egypt signed a permanent peace deal on March 26, 1979, history was created. This deal allowed Israel to completely leave the Sinai Peninsula and restored diplomatic relations between the two nations.

Politically speaking, the Arabs had triumphed in the conflict, and as a result, Egyptian confidence had greatly increased. From the Egyptian perspective, the United States was the only country that had spared Israel. The notion that Israel was unbeatable had collapsed. Furthermore, Sadat had been known around the globe as a skilled political strategist, becoming a global statesman after the war—something Gamal Abdel Nasser had always wanted to do but never managed to accomplish. He was acclaimed as the “hero of the crossing,” which was proof of this. Despite the Israeli victory, there was a significant loss of trust, which prompted a public outburst of rage directed at Prime Minister Golda Meir and Defence Minister Moshe Dayan. Moreover, the Agranat Commission conducted a thorough probe into the intelligence failure. The commission’s report ignored the political leadership’s role in Israel’s defeats while harshly criticizing military discipline, training, and intelligence.<sup>14</sup>

Consequent upon the foregoing, Golda Meir’s government resigned in April 1974, exhausted and discredited by the war. Nevertheless, the Labour Party led by the 1967 war hero and former Israeli ambassador to Washington, Yitzhak Rabin, helped the party win by a slender majority in June’s election. It would take “seven lean years,” according to Rabin, the first Israeli Prime Minister who was born and raised in his homeland, for the West—including the US—to stop heavily relying on Arab oil. Thus, he contended, Israel had to exchange time for space, work closely with Washington, and support Egypt’s newfound pro-American stance.<sup>15</sup>

Along these lines, human losses and a general feeling of uncertainty reinforced the quest for a settlement. An estimated 8,000 Israelis and almost 20,000 Syrians were injured, with an estimated 3,000 Israelis and 8,500 Egyptian and Syrian soldiers killed.<sup>16</sup> It was the first Arab–Israeli war in which Israel suffered a high casualty rate, had men missing in action and had prisoners taken by the enemy. These traumatic effects led to the emergence of an Israeli peace movement. Paradoxically, the insecurity created by the war also gave rise to Israel’s religious right. Thus, it was not the victory of the 1967 June War, but the devastation of the *Yom Kippur* War that revived the idea of a larger “Eretz Yisrael” (Land of Israel), thereby leading to a government-backed settlement policy driven more by ideology than security.<sup>17</sup>

In another development, Egypt’s Sadat persuaded the US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, that his country was ready to abandon both its Soviet and Syrian allies for a fresh start with the United States. In Sadat’s opinion, the

<sup>13</sup> Yom Kippur War: Middle East (1973), <https://www.britannica.com/event/Yom-Kippur-War> accessed, November, 19, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Tessler, *History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

<sup>15</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Israel”

<sup>16</sup> Don Peretz, *The Arab-Israel Dispute*, Facts on File, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Marcia Dreznon-Tepler, *Interest Groups and Political Change in Israel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990).

only place where Israel could be persuaded to surrender the Sinai without more violence was in Washington. With Nixon's backing, Kissinger was able to persuade Israel to end the war before an outright Egyptian military defeat. Through intensive travel between the various capitals, or what was soon dubbed "shuttle diplomacy," Kissinger was able to secure disengagement agreements on both the Syrian and Egyptian fronts in 1974. This became known as the "step by step" process, which was intended to fulfil the intent of Security Council Resolution 242 that territory be exchanged for peace.<sup>18</sup>

In furtherance, in September 1975, Rabin and Egypt came to a second disengagement deal, but there was little progress with Syria. The Labour government's preferred course of negotiations with Jordan's more accommodative King Hussein—dubbed the "Jordanian option"—was threatened in October 1974 when an Arab summit conference in Rabat, Morocco, proclaimed Arafat's PLO to be the exclusive representative of the Palestinians on what had been the "quiet" front—the West Bank and Gaza. A year later, Kissinger gave confidential assurances to Rabin that the PLO would not be acknowledged by the US as a representative of the Palestinian people until it had stopped terrorism and acknowledged Israel's legitimate right to exist.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, after the War, the Gush Emunim movement in the West Bank gained momentum. From 1974 until 1987, it established small villages close to densely populated Arab areas, significantly complicating Israeli policy and inciting criticism from around the world. The secular Israeli government resisted these attempts, but it hardly ever employed force to drive out the settlers, who defended themselves by claiming Zionist rights to the land. Even so, when Menachem Begin's opposition Likud government took office in 1977, there were less than 4,000 of them.<sup>20</sup>

From the diplomatic flank, the Yom Kippur War left the country in bad economic shape. Prior to the conflict, there had been an abrupt combination of a rapid rate of inflation and a sluggish economy; prices kept rising despite declining demand and supply. The global economic downturn decreased the market for Israeli exports and, for the first time in a long time, joblessness emerged as an issue. In addition, Israel's international standing declined, and the nation incurred significant debt from its acquisition of armaments. Under the threat of Arab oil sanctions, the majority of Israel's carefully nurtured African allies severed ties one after another, leaving the Jewish state alone with an equally isolated South Africa. The UN General Assembly's 1975 adoption of Resolution 3379, which linked Zionism to racism, and the PLO's growing support in Europe and Asia further complicated matters for Israel. Meanwhile, the internal strife and corruption negatively impacted Rabin's political position at home.<sup>21</sup> Even Israel's incredible operation at the Entebbe airport in Uganda in July 1976, where commandos saved the Israeli occupants of an Air France aircraft that had been taken over by Palestinian and German terrorists did not help much. Being a newcomer to politics, the former general struggled to maintain control over a government that included his main opponent, Shimon Peres, as defence minister and few others who owed him any political loyalty.<sup>22</sup>

Rabin suffered a further setback when he travelled to Washington in March 1977 to meet with Jimmy Carter, the newly elected American president, who promoted a "comprehensive approach" to Middle East peace rather than Kissinger's incremental plan. Carter promoted a "homeland" for the Palestinians and called for an international summit to settle all of the fundamental issues between Israel and the Arab world. The Israelis fiercely rejected this idea, which they saw as a code word for a Palestinian state due, in part, to its resemblance to the language of the Balfour Declaration and the possibility that it would give the PLO leadership. In April of the same year (1977), Rabin resigned because of a serious disagreement with the United States and a personal scandal, and as a result, Shimon Peres took over as Labour's new leader.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion:-

The Yom Kippur War of October 1973 was a turning point in Israeli's military and strategic thought. Undeniably, the war taught all parties involved valuable lessons, but it seems that the Israelis have discussed the conflict's tactical direction, startling strategic shortcomings, and political ramifications the most. New aspirations for peace are

<sup>18</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Israel"

<sup>19</sup>See Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*, Second Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 208 - 229

<sup>20</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Israel"

<sup>21</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Israel"

<sup>22</sup>See Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine: One Land, Two Peoples*.

<sup>23</sup>Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Israel"

currently being expressed despite the persistent threat of escalating hostilities. This is due to the fact that achieving effective and sustainable growth requires both freedom and the realization of socio-political, economic, and harmonious peace and harmony.

Yet, the challenges faced by conflicting or warring nations and its effect have opened the Pandora's Box to the society thereby causing instability and fragility. This, unquestionably, has been the situation of the Arab-Israeli communities which have been steeped in one form of crisis or the other chiefly due to their struggles for land. What this means is that the Arab-Israeli leaders in collaboration with the world superpowers need to come together to find a middle ground and a fair centre-stage where peace and harmony will be given utmost priority. This is the only way the differences between the two warring nations can be resolved.

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