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### **Sinai Second Agreement: Assessment and Reactions.**

Kissinger followed a unique policy in his mediation efforts between the Arabs and Israel by eliciting proposals from each side, getting preliminary reactions, identifying obstacles and then starting the diplomatic process in order to bridge the substantial gaps.

On March the 10th 1975, President As-Sādāt presented to Kissinger concrete written proposals for onward transmission to the Israeli government. After being informed that the Israeli government had rejected these proposals, Kissinger, on March the 23rd, said that it was “a sad day for America which has invested hope and faith, and we know it is a sad day for Israel, which needs and wants peace so badly.”

After the failure of Kissinger’s most recent shuttle, Ford ordered a reassessment of the American Middle East policy. Such a policy review is considered a pressure tactic against obstinate states who refuse to accept Washington’s “advice“. The White House announced that this reassessment would include “all aspects and all countries.” President Ford in an interview, on March the 27th, said that “the chances of a Middle East peace would have been enhanced if Israel had shown greater flexibility in the negotiations.“ A committee headed by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Joseph J. Sisco, handled the re-assessment of the U.S. Middle East policy. Sisco’s committee as reported by “The New York Times” found no need for major changes in American policy.<sup>1</sup> Thus, this U.S. foreign policy instrument proved to be ineffective. It failed to cause any change in the Israeli negotiation strategy. While the reassessment threat may have caused some uneasiness among the Israeli military establishment, the civilian leadership was hardly impressed by such tactics. Their allies in the U.S. Congress and elsewhere were much too strong to be intimidated by a president who had assumed the office at the resignation of a humiliated

<sup>1</sup> Keesing’s (July 21-27, 1975), p. 27230; William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Towards the Arab Israeli Conflict, 1967*, pp. 269-270.

incumbent and whose own public popularity was still untested. This event, however, opened a contest of wills between the incumbent president and the Zionist lobby which generated significant public and Congressional pressure on the White House.

On March the 29th, As-Sādāt in an address to the People's Assembly (Egyptian Parliament) blamed Israel for the breakdown of Kissinger's mission. He said that Israel was gambling on a change in the attitude of the American government in Israel's favor after the American Presidential Election at the end of 1976. He assured the audience that Egypt would not accept any thing less than full sovereign control over the Sinai Peninsula which he said Israel must vacate if it wished to live in peace and harmony with its Arab neighbor. In the address, As-Sādāt announced that Egypt would reopen the Suez canal on June the 5th.

By the third week of April, reassessment resulted in the following three options: a return to the Geneva Conference with a detailed American peace plan that would require Israel to withdraw from all Arab territories and would offer to Israel strong U.S. guarantees for its security. The second option entailed searching for a virtually complete settlement, especially on the Egyptian-Israeli front, but would fall short of calling for full withdrawal and final peace. The third option was to resume the step-by-step policy which was halted in March.<sup>2</sup>

Kissinger was not optimistic about his consultations with Allon, Ḥusayn and with the Soviets about his new approach to peace in the Middle East. The American public support was not strong and several House members and Senators openly criticized Kissinger, accusing him of exerting too much pressure on Israel. In view of the options presented by the reassessment review and by the domestic pressure, Ford and Kissinger decided that the best course to take was to resume the step-by-step diplomacy.<sup>3</sup>

Ford and Kissinger, following Rogers' approach, were prepared to take a tougher stand with Israel until an agreement could be reached. The majority in Congress were not concerned with strategy but were opposed to denying aid to Israel. Kissinger was determined to keep the Russians out of the peace negotiations. For this reason he needed Israel's cooperation in making an acceptable deal with the Arabs.

At this time, several international events affected the U.S. self-confidence. For instance three days after Kissinger left for the Middle East in

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 270.

<sup>3</sup> Steven Speigel, *The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict. Making America's Middle East Policy from Truman to Reagan*, University of Chicago Press, 1985, pp. 296-297.

March, King Fayṣal of Saudi Arabia was assassinated by a mentally-disturbed nephew. In April and May, Cambodia, South Vietnam and Laos fell to the Communist forces. Therefore, Ford and Kissinger needed a victory in foreign relations. They were not prepared to let U.S. interests be sacrificed at Israel's caprice.<sup>4</sup>

Noteworthy, the Israeli lobby exercised its role on the U.S. policy makers in order to stop the U.S. from putting pressure on Israel. This effort was led by the American Israeli Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) which arranged to have an open letter sent to President Ford, signed by the "usual" seventy-six Senators. This letter demanded massive military and economic aid for Israel. Recalling this event, Ford recorded that this letter really irritated him. Both Ford and Kissinger blamed Israel for the Senators' letter. Ford in his memoirs recalled the event and said that "it really bugged me". He said that Israel was behind the senators' letter. The letter called upon President Ford to make a public statement indicating that the U.S. "acting in its own national interest stands firmly with Israel." Kissinger was also irritated by the Senators' letter and told the Israeli ambassador in Washington, Shimca Dinitz, "you will pay for this. What do you think? That this is going to help you? you are crazy...." Ford wrote, "Israeli lobby, made up of patriotic Americans, is strong, vocal, and wealthy, but many of its members have a single focus." Instead of bowing to the AIPAC pressure, Ford became more determined to continue the process of reassessment.

After the Ford-Rabin meeting in June, Israel began to show more flexibility in its negotiation strategy. Instead of seeking further concessions from Egypt, which both As-Sādāt and Kissinger opposed, Israel resolved to accept American diplomatic, military, and economic assistance.<sup>6</sup>

Kissinger was disappointed that Israel had failed to arrange a second agreement in Sinai. Kissinger's point of view was that the leadership was short sighted, incompetent and weak and Israel had no foreign policy. Ford blamed Rabin for his lack of flexibility.

The U.S. foreign policy witnessed difficulties as a result of the vehemence of the South-East Asian conflict and the beginning of a tragic civil war in Lebanon during the three months of reassessment that followed the collapse of the Egyptian-Israeli talks on March the 22nd.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography*, New York: Simon R. Schuster 1992, p. 634.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Spiegel, *op.cit.*, p. 300.

<sup>6</sup> William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, p. 263.

<sup>7</sup> "Newsweek", *A wide world of woes*, April 7, 1975, p. 10.

Pledged to a reassessment of policy, Kissinger met with prominent persons such as Dean Rusk, McGeorge Bundy, George Ball Douglas Dillon, Cyrus Vance, George Shultz, Robert McNamara, William Scranton, and other, to obtain their views on the issue. George Ball criticized Kissinger's policy and blamed him for isolating the Soviet Union with his step-by-step policy. Ball favored a more comprehensive agreement in which the Soviet Union and the U.S. together would prepare it and negotiate it in Geneva. Ball was opposed to Kissinger's attempts to divide the Arabs and to exclude the Soviet Union from the peace process. Also, Ball did not exclude the possibility of imposing a joint U.S.-U.S.S.R settlement on the Arabs and Israelis. In addition, others favored a return to the Geneva Conference and considered it a major effort to work out an American peace plan. Also, Kissinger heard the same recommendation from eminent academics and from the American ambassador in Egypt.

The Kissinger step-by-step strategy which was predicated on the exclusion of the P.L.O. from the peace-talks, became invalid as the Palestinian people could no longer be ignored after the Rabat Summit's declarations.

President Ford blamed Israel for Kissinger's failed mission and touched off the most serious breach between the two countries since Dwight Eisenhower forced Israel to withdraw from Sinai after the 1956 tripartite aggression against Egypt. Henry Kissinger told a Washington press conference that the U.S. position in the Middle East was in a "potentially grave danger". Ford and Kissinger blamed Israel's "inflexibility" for the breakdown in the talks.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. used the term "reassessment" to put pressure on Israel. However, Washington was not alone in making a reassessment of its policy. President As-Sādāt did some reassessment of his own by visiting four Arab nations in order to put together a united Arab front for the forthcoming Mid-East talks and to line up some solid financial help for Egypt. As-Sādāt urged the Iraqi government to soften their position regarding the peace negotiations. Iraq granted As-Sādāt a \$35 million loan for the Suez canal reconstruction and an outright gift of \$80 million in crude oil. Also, Kuwait pledged to speed up delivery of a promised \$1.3 billion worth of aid. In addition, a Beirut newspaper reported that As-Sādāt even planned to call on U.S. for financial aid to revive Egypt's economy and to meet its foreign financial obligations which included a multi-billion dollar debt to the Soviet Union.

<sup>8</sup> "Newsweek", Mideast: The Sadat shuttle, May 26, 1975, p. 28.

As-Sādāt flew to Jordan and reassured King Ḥusayn that he still had a role to play in the bargaining game. The As-Sādāt—Ḥusayn meeting was an attempt to freeze the role of the Palestinian in the talks.<sup>9</sup> This attempt was As-Sādāt's way of satisfying Israel's persistent refusal to deal with the P.L.O. or with the Palestinians.

President Ford decided to confer with As-Sādāt and Rabin, to explore the prospects of realizing peace. At the Ford-As-Sādāt summit at Salzburg on June the 1st and 2nd, As-Sādāt appealed for a public statement from Ford endorsing Egypt's demand for a complete Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 borders. Ford could not oblige As-Sādāt on this issue, as the U.S. strategy was to achieve a limited agreement in Sinai. However, As-Sādāt insisted upon Israeli withdraw from the passes and from the oil fields. As-Sādāt also opposed Israel's proposal that it be allowed to keep its intelligence gathering facility at Umm Ḥuṣayba.<sup>10</sup>

Ford warned Rabin that if there was no agreement between Egypt and Israel, the U.S.A. would go to Geneva with a plan of its own, even if it cost him votes and stirred up opposition in the Congress. Rabin told Ford that Israel was willing to give up a strip of land in the south near Abu Rodies, according to the Egyptian demand of March the 6th. Ford asked Rabin to show him the Israeli plan on a map. Rabin and his aides drew a line on a map and brought it to Ford. Kissinger told Rabin that he would send the map to Egypt. The Israeli cabinet, after they had heard Rabin's report about his meetings in Washington, became furious, because of the map he gave to Ford. Rabin replied that he had made a mistake in drawing the line too far to the East and promised to correct it. The Israeli diplomatic courier, Colonel Ephraim Paran, was given the duty to take a new map to Washington. Two days later, Paran delivered the map to Dinitz who forwarded it to Kissinger. The new map showed Israeli's old position submitted in mid March. Israel's proposed withdrawal line was only half-way across the passes, a position that had been firmly rejected by As-Sādāt. Kissinger told Dinitz that he had already forwarded to Egypt the map demarcated by Rabin.<sup>11</sup>

President Ford accompanied by Kissinger and Sisco convened a meeting with President As-Sādāt, the Vice President Muḥammad Ḥusnī Mubārak and the Foreign Minister Fahmī. The Ford—As-Sādāt discussion centered on proposals under which certain institutions such as the World Bank and the

<sup>9</sup> William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, p. 271.

<sup>10</sup> Matti Golan, *The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger, step by step diplomacy in the Middle East*, New York 1976, pp. 243-245.

<sup>11</sup> "Newsweek", *The road to peace and to '76*, June 16, 1975, p.15.

U.S. Export-Import Bank would combine with Saudi Arabia and Iran to offer up to \$20,000 million for Egyptian economic development.

As-Sādāt in his meeting with Ford at Salzburg raised the question whether the U.S. supported Israel's plans to retain some of the territory it won the 1967 war. Ford replied: "are you prepared to enter a discussion which could lead to an interim settlement with Israel?... As-Sādāt answered, yes?". As-Sādāt praised Ford as "an honest and straightforward man... peace loving and a peace struggler."<sup>12</sup>

Ford and As-Sādāt welcomed Israel's decision to reduce its force-level on the east of the Suez Canal on June 5th, the day of reopening the Canal. Rabin visited the U.S. on June 11th and 12th and discussed with Ford and Kissinger, the problem of a further Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement in connection with American assistance to Israel which comprised of \$2,500 million in military and economic aid in 1975-1976 fiscal year.

On June the 12th, at a press conference, Rabin and Kissinger announced that progress had been made towards a resumption of bilateral Egyptian-Israeli talks and reported on June the 15th that Israel was no longer insisting on a formal declaration of non-belligerency by Egypt.<sup>13</sup>

Israel's Treasury Minister believed that Israel would face an economic tragedy unless the United States offered massive help. Therefore, Israel gave in to the American pressure and found no way out of retreating from the passes. It was encouraged to prepare a new plan for a withdrawal from the passes. Kissinger told the Israelis that they must withdraw to the eastern slopes of the passes, while allowing Egypt to bring its troops to the western slopes. This plan would require the establishment of a U.N. buffer zone at the peaks of the hills, between the Egyptian and Israeli forces. Such a plan would allow Israel to claim that it was not withdrawing completely.<sup>14</sup>

Kissinger made it clear that he had no intention of returning to the Middle East without a clear understanding that Israel and Egypt were very close to an agreement. Israel decide to pull back from Al-‘Arīš to Šarm aš-Šayḥ, and to return both the Abū Rudies oil fields and the strategic Mitla and Gidi passes to Egyptian control. Much of the area from which Israel pulled back was demilitarized and Israel was allowed to retain early warning sensing devices in the passes. Egypt spelled out some of the "elements of non-

<sup>12</sup> Keesing's (July 21-27, 1975), p. 27231.

<sup>13</sup> Matti Golan, *The Secret Conversations*, pp. 246-257.

<sup>14</sup> "Newsweek", Getting a little closer, June 23, 1975, pp. 11, 12.

belligerency.” One potential sticking point was the time table for withdrawal of the Israeli forces to the new lines.

The P.L.O. described As-Sādāt as a “traitor” because of his warm new relationship with the U.S. As-Sādāt requested permission to send military officers to the Western countries for training. Newsweek disclosed that President Ford raised the possibility of using Alexandria harbor for American naval facilities. The Ford administration considered a proposal to have Saudi Arabia, Iran, the U.S. and Western Europe offer a loan in the amount of \$750 million to Egypt.

Rabin requested U.S. assistance in the amount of \$2,2 billion; he also urged a speedy approval of the sale to Israel of Land surface-to surface missiles and the new jet fighter, and proposed that as part of the peace process, Kissinger announced publicly the U.S. guarantees for Israel’s security.<sup>15</sup>

Kissinger resumed his shuttle on August the 21st, 1975. The talks were visible before the new shuttle rounds began, because American technicians were given the duty to man the warning stations in the middle of the passes, during the period of Israeli troop withdrawal to the eastern slopes of the passes. The U.S. pledged to provide Israel \$2,6 billion in military aid including the F-16 jet fighter. Kissinger when asked about Ford’s comment that Kissinger’s efforts was “one of the greatest diplomatic achievements of this century.” Kissinger responded “why this century?”<sup>16</sup>

On September the 4th 1975, Egypt and Israel signed an agreement in Geneva. The Sinai agreement provided for the Israeli withdrawal from the passes and the oil fields, in return for which Egypt gave political concession and the U.S. pledged to provide economic and political support to Israel. Also, Israel agreed to observe the cease fire on the land, the sea and in the air and to refrain from any sort of threat or use of force or military blockade. Egypt and Israel established a new buffer zone and agreed to extend the mandate of the UNEF annually. Both agreed on continuing negotiations and Egypt pledged to permit Israel to use the Suez canal for non military cargoes. An annex to the agreement spelled out some details for the implementation of the agreement, and the U.S. assurances to Israel and Egypt for military and economic assistance.

The 1975 agreement did not achieve peace but it did establish a period of relative tranquillity and stability. The U.S. continued to play a central and an

<sup>15</sup> Walter Isaacson, *Kissinger Biography*, p. 635.

<sup>16</sup> Bernard Reich, *U.S. Policy, “Current History”* (70:412, January 1976), p. 4.

indispensable role in the resolution of the Arab-Israeli strife. The 1975 accords were considered a significant step toward an Arab-Israeli settlement, in Kissinger's view point.<sup>17</sup>

The Second Sinai Agreement was modeled in part on the previous disengagement pacts. Also, Egypt and Israel committed themselves to solving their problems peacefully and not to resort to the threat or use of force against each other. Egypt pledged to allow Israeli non-military cargoes destined for or coming from Israel to pass through the Suez canal. The agreement itself would remain in force until superseded by a new agreement. Complimentary to Sinai II agreement, the U.S. signed four secret agreements, three with Israel and one with Egypt.

The U.S. and Israel agreed on a memorandum which embraced 165 points which dealt with military assistance, oil supply, economic aid and a number of political points. Both the U.S. and Israel agreed to consult each other in the event of any threat to Israel from a "world power."

A special memo was signed regarding the Palestine issue: no recognition of and no negotiation with the P.L.O. unless the P.L.O. accepted the U.N. resolutions 242 and 338 and recognized the Israeli state. The U.S. would coordinate its strategy with Israel at Geneva and would agree to keep the negotiations on a bilateral basis. The U.S. committed itself to Egypt to exert its efforts to support further negotiations between Syria and Israel, to provide assistance for the Egyptian early warning system in the buffer zone and to consult with Egypt regarding Israeli violations of the agreement.<sup>18</sup>

#### Reactions to Sinai II

The Second Sinai Agreement resulted in a stabilization of the area, reduction of the chances of war, and the end of oil embargo slowed down the possibilities of confrontation between superpowers, while Egypt followed a moderate position regarding its differences with Israel.

Kissinger welcomed Saudi Arabia's support for the Second Sinai Agreement and for As-Sādāt's policy. He discovered Syria's vital role in respect of inter-Arab politics and he wished to draw Syria towards a moderate settlement with Israel. He believed that Golan not Sinai would be

<sup>17</sup> William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, pp. 274-275.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 277.

difficult for him to manage unless Israel moderated her positions and gave up the settlements along the post 1967 cease fire lines.

As-Sādāt insisted on the Second Sinai Agreement but Al-Asad disagreed with As-Sādāt. Although he did not entirely reject the concept of a second step, he also made it clear that he was not prepared to pay much of a price for it. Also Al-Asad attacked the Second Sinai Agreement and concluded that As-Sādāt had abandoned the struggle against Israel and had given up pressing for international recognition of the P.L.O.

Kissinger demonstrated his willingness to achieve a comprehensive settlement prior to Syria's renewal of the U.N. disengagement observation force in late November 1975.<sup>19</sup>

Egypt and Israel agreed on the continuation of peace talks and Egypt pledged to allow Israel non military cargoes to use the Suez canal. The 1975 agreement did not achieve peace for the Arabs and Israel, but realized tranquillity and stability from which new efforts toward peace could be initiated.<sup>20</sup>

The writer (Alvin Z. Rubinstein) claimed that Egypt realized benefits from the Sinai agreement. In February, 1976, Egypt regained an important area comprising of the oil fields at Ras-Suder and Abu Rudies, which were located along the upper eastern half of the Sinai Peninsula, plus the Mitla and Giddi passes, the key strategic routes between Israel and Egypt. Thus, Israel gave back to Egypt an additional 1,900 square miles of territory. The U.S. agreed to help Egypt in building an early warning system at the eastern terminals of the passes, to guard against any surprise Israeli attack.<sup>21</sup>

The Sinai Agreement contained the following provisions:

- “1) There shall be two surveillance stations to provide strategic early warning, one operated by Egyptian and one operated by Israeli personnel. Each station shall be manned by not more than 250 technical and administrative personnel. They shall perform the functions of visual and electronic surveillance only within their stations.
- 2) In support of these stations to provide tactical early warning and to verify access to them, three watch stations shall be established, three

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Reich, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Rubinstein, *Egypt since the October War*, “Current History” (January 1976), p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>22</sup> William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, p. 278.

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unmanned electronic-sensed or fields at both ends of each pass and in the general vicinity of each station and the roads leading to from these stations.”<sup>22</sup>

Following its traditional policy of support for Israel at the United Nations and other international agencies, the United States opposed the U.N. General Assembly resolution, passed on November the 10th, 1975, defining Zionism as “a form of racism or racial discrimination”. While Kissinger ignored the Palestinians in his diplomatic efforts, his deputy, Harold H. Saunders, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, on November the 12th, issued a statement before the House Subcommittee highlighting the importance of the Palestinian issue in the Arab-Israel conflict. Saunderson’s statement had been checked by Kissinger who cleared it with President Ford. Saunderson said that the “legitimate interests of the Palestinian Arabs must be taken into account in the negotiating an Arab-Israeli peace.” The Saunderson’s testimony infuriated the Israelis but Kissinger dismissed their protests. The timing of Saunderson’s statement was meaningful. It showed that the U.S. fully understood what needed to be done to achieve a stable peace between the Arabs and the Israelis. Perhaps, it was a signal to the Israelis that they must prepare themselves for a future that would require accommodation with the Palestinians.<sup>23</sup>

Kissinger’s policy towards the Arab-Israeli conflict was attacked by right-wing Senator Henry Jackson, by the former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger and by New York Congressman Moynihan and by others. These critics were known for their pro-Israel stances. Others in Congress were not pleased with the Second Sinai agreement because it put additional financial burden on the U.S. tax-payers who were expected to dish out about \$2.25 billion in financial aid to Israel in the fiscal year 1976. This amount would come out of the total U.S. foreign aid for the year which stood at \$3 billion. This meant that the rest of the developing world would end up with no more \$700 million for the fiscal year 1976.

President Ford was occupied with domestic politics in 1976 because it was an election year.<sup>24</sup> Ford’s party was hesitant to nominate him because Ronald Reagan, former governor of California, was mounting a strong challenge to Ford’s leadership, with the support of the most conservative element in the party.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 280.

President Ford's policy improved the U.S.-Egyptian relations. In October, 1975, As-Sādāt visited the U.S. and asked for American economic and military assistance. Thereupon, a debate between Congress and the U.S. administration began, to negotiate a reduction in the aid to Israel from \$2,25 to \$1,8 billion and, simultaneously, to urge Congress to consider approval of a sale of six C-130 transport planes to Egypt.

The U.S.'s supplemental arms to Egypt took a new turn in mid-March 1976 after As-Sādāt abrogated the Soviet-Egyptian treaty.

My point of view is that Kissinger drew up his diplomatic plan for a settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict without creating a general consensus. He called it a step-by-step approach and applied it during the presidencies of Nixon and Ford. He could not achieve a comprehensive peace in the area, but he was able to realize a modicum of stability during his leadership of the State Department. Americans were sympathetic with Israel, a sentiment that was particularly strong in Congress and in the press. The Arabs, on the other hand, did not have the human and political resources in the United States to effectively compete with their adversaries. Even Arab oil did not make much difference in molding the U.S. Middle East policy. Nevertheless, Kissinger attempted to strengthen the U.S. ties with the Arab world, to realize the U.S. interests and to minimize the Soviet influence in the area and to maintain Western allies' interests, specially in ensuring oil flow to them.

The first goal of the U.S. was to search for an Arab-Israeli settlement and the second goal was to pursue a settlement through a step-by-step process. Kissinger envisaged that the Arab-Israeli negotiations would continue for several years. In short, the Egyptians wanted a quick withdrawal and the Israelis were pleading for time.