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WILLIAM E. COLBY
AS DIRECTOR OF
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE
 1973-1976

by Harold P. Ford

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~~Secret~~*Chapter 3***The Yom Kippur War of October 1973**

A thorough search of the material issued prior to 6 October [Egypt's and Syria's sudden attacks on Israel] has failed to turn up any official statement from any office or committed officer responsible for producing finished, analytical intelligence which contributed anything resembling a warning, *qua* warning. There was an intelligence failure in the weeks preceding the outbreak of war in the Middle East on 6 October 1973. . . . The principal conclusions concerning the imminence of hostilities reached and reiterated by those responsible for intelligence analysis were—quite simply, obviously, and starkly—wrong.

Intelligence Community's Postmortem, December 1973¹

Colby's tenure as DCI began with a major intelligence failure. He had been Director less than a month when Egypt and Syria suddenly attacked Israel. Colby and the Intelligence Community did not alert policymakers that a renewed Arab-Israeli war was about to break out, nor did they forecast that the fighting might provoke a US-Soviet confrontation in the Middle East. Although Colby, CIA, and the Intelligence Community did lend the administration excellent crisis management support once the war was under way, their misreading of its outbreak heightened White House dissatisfaction with CIA and US intelligence, and did not get Colby off to a flying start as DCI.

That the sudden Egyptian-Syrian attacks had taken the intelligence and policymaking communities by surprise is beyond question. President Nixon, in his memoirs, recalled that, "as recently as the day before, the CIA had reported that the war in the Middle East was unlikely, dismissing as annual maneuvers the massive and unusual troop movement that had recently been taking place in Egypt."²

the Office of Current Intelligence—the principal CIA office passing tactical assessments of the crisis to the White House—agreed. He later remarked that he did not recall anyone "anywhere

¹Emphasis in the original. This postmortem was prepared at the request of Colby, made shortly after the sudden Egyptian-Syrian attacks on Israel had taken US intelligence by surprise. The postmortem's text is given in Attachment to USIB-D-15/2/24, 17 January 1974.
²Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 920.

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in the Intelligence Community who definitely felt war would occur soon, or who markedly differed from the general consensus" that the early October crisis was simply another war scare such as they had seen repeatedly since May.³

Colby's recollection is similar: "It was obvious that the intelligence process had failed notably in this performance."⁴ Henry Kissinger also agreed: "October 6 was the culmination of a failure of political analysis on the part of its victims. . . . Clearly there was an intelligence failure, but misjudgment was not confined to the agencies [CIA and DIA]." In Kissinger's view, every policymaker knew all the facts. The problem was that the US "definition of rationality did not take seriously the notion of [the Arabs] starting an unwinnable war to restore self-respect. There was no defense against our own preconceptions or those of our allies."⁵ Nor did the United States have a monopoly on poor intelligence performance. Israeli Lt. Gen. Haim Bar-Lev later stated that his country's defense intelligence agency had erred: "The mistake lay in the evaluation of the intelligence data and not in the absence of accurate and reliable information."⁶

The Intelligence Community also failed to alert US decisionmakers to the related oil/financial crisis that ensued between October 1973 and January 1974, when the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) raised oil prices by 400 percent. As the US Senate's Select Committee on Intelligence (SSCI) later stated, US intelligence analysis at the time was not as perceptive as public sources were on the possibility that the Saudis might use oil as a political weapon. By comparison, said this Congressional report, analysis within the Intelligence Community had tended to stress continuation of the status quo in Saudi policy toward the United States, examining the question of oil price levels within the context of a narrow supply and demand framework and displaying only limited integration of political and economic factors. The Agency's response to these SSCI criticisms held that, because CIA's analysts had not anticipated the Middle East war, they concluded that Saudi Arabia and the other Arab nations would not employ oil as a political weapon.⁷

[redacted] interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 2 April 1987 (hereafter cited as [redacted] interview by Ford, 2 April 1987) (~~Confidential~~).

³Colby, *Honorable Men*, p. 366.

⁴Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 459 and 465.

⁵Lt. Gen. Haim Bar-Lev, as cited in CIA Warning Staff Study, *The DCI's Duty and Authority to Warn*, 24 December 1985, (hereafter cited as *DCI's Duty and Authority to Warn*), p. 7, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 2, folder 16, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~).

⁷US Congress, Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, Subcommittee on Collection, Production and Quality, *US Intelligence Analysis and the Oil Issue, 1973-1974*; Staff Report, 95th Cong., 1st sess., December 1977 (hereafter cited as SSCI, *Intelligence Analysis and the Oil Issue*), *passim*.

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The Intelligence Community's misreading of these questions had begun in the spring of 1973 with the production of a National Intelligence Estimate (NIE), *Possible Egyptian-Israeli Hostilities: Determinants and Implications*. With no dissenting opinions, the USIB agencies had agreed that Sadat's campaign of growing threats was one of psychological brinkmanship, undertaken chiefly in "hope of inspiring US pressure on Israel." The situation could get out of hand, the Estimate concluded, but substantial Egyptian-Israeli hostilities appeared "unlikely in the next few weeks." Sadat did not yet appear committed to an attack on the Israelis, and, since Egypt's military capabilities were so limited, the participation of other even less impressive Arab forces—such as those of Syria—on a second front would "matter little in military terms." Egyptian forces, according to the NIE, probably could conduct small commando raids into the Sinai Peninsula, but did not have the capability to seize and hold any portion of it in the face of Israeli opposition. The only implications for the United States foreseen by the Estimate were those that would attend "another mauling" of the Arabs by the Israelis.⁸

Substantially similar views marked the assessments prepared by Colby and the Intelligence Community, right up to the Egyptian-Syrian attacks of 6 October. No NIEs or SNIIEs (Special National Intelligence Estimates) were requested or undertaken between the National Intelligence Estimate of May and the end of September. This reflected the fairly relaxed view US intelligence had of the developing crisis. Finally, on 30 September, worried by evidence of unusual concentrations of Syrian tanks on the Golan Heights, Henry Kissinger (who had become Secretary of State just a week earlier), tasked CIA and State's INR to give him their immediate assessments, at the same time requesting a coordinated NIE.⁹

Although production of this NIE was overtaken by events within a week, Colby and INR each gave Kissinger quick evaluations. As events turned out, however, these analyses also left much to be desired. INR held that evidence concerning the military buildups in Egypt and Syria was inconclusive: although the possibility could not be excluded they might attack Israel in the near future, the chances of such were deemed

⁸NIE 30-73, "Possible Egyptian-Israeli Hostilities: Determinants and Implications," 17 May 1973, *passim*. (~~Secret~~)

⁹Kissinger often had more regard for CIA's Directorate of Operations (DO) officers than he did for Directorate of Intelligence (DI) or Office of National Estimates analyses. For example, in an earlier Middle East war scare of May 1973, Kissinger telephoned and told a CIA officer that he wanted only the judgments of the DO, not those of "those DI bastards." George Lauder, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 3 March 1987 (hereafter cited as Lauder interview by Ford, 1987) (~~Secret~~).

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"dubious."¹⁰ For the INR, CIA, and DIA assessments immediately before the Egyptian-Syrian attacks, CIA's study concluded that Egyptian and Syrian military moves looked "very ominous," but "the whole thrust of President Sadat's activities since last spring has been in the direction of bringing moral, political, and economic force to bear on Israel in tacit acknowledgement of Arab unreadiness to make war."¹¹

Following these rather calm immediate analyses of 30 September, CIA, INR, and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) made similar judgments right up to—and even after—the 6 October Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel. On 5 October, CIA concluded that, although large military exercises were under way in Egypt, the Egyptians "do not appear to be preparing for a military offensive against Israel." Indeed the military preparations thus far, said CIA, "do not indicate that any party intends to initiate hostilities." And, on the very day the Arabs attacked Israel, CIA estimated that neither the Egyptians nor the Syrians appeared bent on initiating hostilities. For Egypt to attack now, said this CIA study, would make little sense: "Another round of hostilities would almost certainly destroy Sadat's painstaking efforts to invigorate the economy and would run counter to his efforts to build a United Arab political front, particularly among the less militant, oil-rich states. For the Syrian president, a military adventure now would be suicidal." And later on 6 October, even after news of the outbreak of war had reached CIA, its Watch Committee could find no hard evidence of a major, coordinated Egyptian-Syrian offensive across the Canal or in the Golan Heights area. Rather, the Watch Committee reported:

¹⁰For the INR, CIA, DIA assessments immediately before the Egyptian-Syrian attacks, see Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 462-467; Nixon materials, box 129, NSC files/HAK files; *Sunday Times* (London) Insight Team, *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday, 1974), p. 104; CIA postmortem: US Congress, House Select Committee on Intelligence (Pike committee): Hearings on *US Intelligence Agencies and Activities: The Performance of the Intelligence Community*, 94th Cong., 1st sess., 11, 12, 18, 25, 30 September and 7, 30, 31 October 1975 (hereafter cited as Pike committee, Hearings, *Intelligence Agencies and Activities*), p. 637. During the months before the war, there had been a certain division of judgment within the State Department, so that some of its intelligence assessments were occasionally more alarmist than the above INR judgments. For example, shortly after the earlier NIE in May 1973, Ray S. Cline, INR's Director, had given Secretary of State William Rogers a special memorandum that held the resumption of Arab-Israeli hostilities "will become a better than even bet" by autumn (Pike committee report, as cited in *CIA: The Pike Report* [Nottingham, England: Spokesman Brooks, 1977], pp. 141-142. Although the House of Representatives voted not to publish the Pike committee's report [as discussed in chapter 11, below], a leaked version of the "Report" appeared in the *New York Village Voice*, and then was published in England—with an introduction by Phillip Agee—as *CIA: the Pike Report*. Cline has also claimed that at the last minute, on 5 October, he prepared a private assessment for Kissinger that held that hostilities probably were imminent, but could not get this alert through to the Secretary before Egypt and Syria attacked Israel the next day (Cline interview by Ford, 31 March 1988). In any case, frictions with Kissinger, (discussed in chapter 2), led Cline to resign from State a few days later.

¹¹(London) *Sunday Times* Insight Team, *The Yom Kippur War*. See also CIA postmortem: Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 464.

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the weight of evidence indicates an action-reaction situation where a series of reponses by each side to perceived threats created an increasingly dangerous potential for confrontation. . . . It is possible that the Egyptians or Syrians, particularly the latter, may have been preparing a raid or other small-scale action.¹²

Clearly, CIA and the Intelligence Community did not cover themselves with glory. Even worse, Lawrence Eagleburger (then a senior assistant of Kissinger's) claims that "Henry reading some fairly raw intelligence came to the conclusion that Sadat was going to start a war before the Intelligence Community itself did, but too late all the same."¹³ William Quandt (then a National Security Council staffer responsible for handling Arab-Israeli matters) explains that Kissinger's greater degree of alarm came from earlier warnings Brezhnev had privately given him that the Arabs were serious and that war was coming. The problem was, Quandt states, Kissinger had not shared this back-channel insight with DCI Colby or the Intelligence Community.¹⁴

A telling indicator that intelligence had not alerted policymakers to the imminent outbreak of war was the fact that, when the attacks came, on Saturday, 6 October, Henry Kissinger was in New York at the UN, President Nixon was at Key Biscayne.

In all, this warning failure marked an inauspicious start for DCI Colby in a situation of enormous consequence for US crisis management, Israeli security, world oil supplies, and the threat of added Soviet presence in the Middle East.

That intelligence performed so poorly was all the more remarkable since before the October War, Andrew Marshall and Kissinger's NSCIC Working Group had drawn some constructive lessons from scrutinizing several previous crisis situations. Concluding that, in those cases intelligence analysts had received too little information on policy-level intelligence needs, the Working Group also found there had been too much current intelligence reporting and—contradicting Nixon and Kissinger's own expressed preferences—too little analytical perspective on the given

¹²CIA: *The Pike Committee Report*, 680-681; Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, pp. 462-467; Top Secret documentation in Nixon materials, box 129, NSC files/HAK files.

¹³Lawrence Eagleburger, to John Ranelagh, as cited in Ranelagh, *The Agency: The Rise and Decline of CIA* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 582-583.

¹⁴William Quandt, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 4 May 1987 (hereafter cited as Quandt interview by Ford, 4 May 1987) (~~Confidential~~).

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developing crises.¹⁵ Moreover, Marshall had called those findings to Colby's attention in May 1973, adding additional recommendations of his own.¹⁶ In the event, however, the five months from May to October proved too short a period for Colby to achieve much in pushing the Intelligence Community toward such needed improvements.¹⁷

There were a number of reasons why US intelligence did not do a better job in anticipating the Egyptian-Syrian attacks on Israel in October 1973. To an important degree, the Intelligence Community relied heavily on Israeli intelligence for data and judgments on the Middle East. Although the Israelis had previously been remarkably accurate, in this instance they were not. President Nixon was "stunned by the failure of Israeli intelligence. They were among the best in the world, and they too, had been caught off guard."¹⁸ Henry Kissinger's recollection is that "every Israeli (and American) analysis before October 1973 agreed that Egypt and Syria lacked the military capability to regain their territory by force of arms; hence there would be no war."¹⁹

¹⁵Jeanne W. Davis, Staff Secretary, National Security Council, Memorandum for the Attorney General, the Deputy Secretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Studies of Intelligence Crisis Support," 23 May 1973, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 1, folder 15, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~); NSCIC Working Group, Memorandum for National Security Council Intelligence Committee, "NSCIC Working Group Summary of Findings Regarding Intelligence Support in Crisis Situations and Recommended Actions," 9 May 1973, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 1, folder 15, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~).

¹⁶Andrew Marshall, National Security Council, Memorandum for William Colby, DCI, subject not given, 22 May 1973 with two attachments: Marshall, Memorandum for Colby, "Areas for Discussion," 21 May 1973; Marshall, Memorandum for the Record, "Additional Insights From the Three Crisis Studies," 21 May 1973; all three memorandums filed in CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 2, folder 16, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~). Those findings and recommendations held that US intelligence should place more emphasis on preparing personality studies of key foreign leaders; meeting the needs of top-level US consumers; presenting conflicting estimative judgments; treating and communicating estimative uncertainties; improving intelligence personnel management and management training; rigorously evaluating the Community's performance and product; preparing serious contingency planning before the possible crises; and developing broader, "less sheltered" views of world politics.

¹⁷The Community's performance in 1973 concerning possible Arab attacks on Israel contrasted sharply with the excellent alerts Helms's CIA had earlier given the White House in the runup to the Six Day War in 1967. Helms considered that performance to have been "the finest, across-the-board execution of our mission at every level that I have seen in my twenty years with the Central Intelligence Agency" (Richard Helms, DCI, Memorandum for CIA's Deputy Directors, 14 June 1967, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 1, CIA Archives and Records Center [~~Secret~~]). As a result of that performance Helms became a regular member of President Johnson's Tuesday luncheons, that inner circle where LBJ and his closest advisers attacked the country's principal questions of national security. Although Helms had a good deal less access to Nixon than he had to Johnson, he still fared better than Colby ever did.

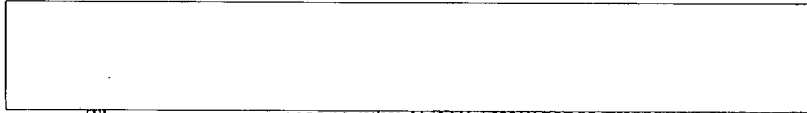
¹⁸Nixon, *Memoirs*, p. 920.

¹⁹Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 459.

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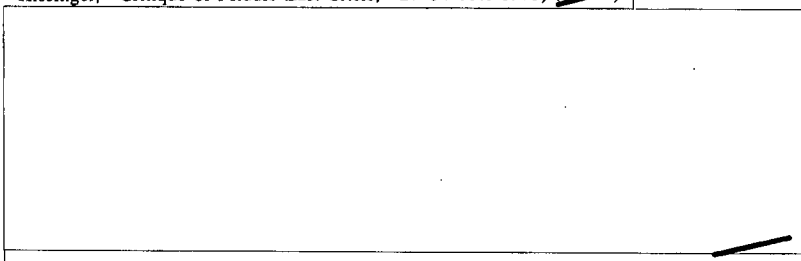


There were many reasons why Israeli intelligence miscalculated the coming attacks. In an earlier invasion false alarm in May 1973 when Israeli Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. David Elazar had predicted war, Israeli military intelligence leaders had disagreed. This judgment had heightened the intelligence officers' credibility. In turn, these officers held stubbornly to certain questionable "lessons" learned from the 1967 war: that Egypt would not attack until its air force had neutralized Israel's, and that Israel would have at least 48 hours' warning before an invasion.

Since Secretary Kissinger had been prodding Israel toward peace negotiations its leaders did not want, they may have deliberately understated their degree of alarm about a surprise attack for fear that the White House would push them all the harder toward such negotiations. Such a thesis can be inferred from Kissinger's own account: "The approaching [Middle East peace] diplomacy distorted the Israelis' perspective as well. They acquired a vested interest in belittling Arab threats lest the United States use the danger of war as a pretext to press Israel for concessions."²¹

In addition, during the crucial week just before 6 October, Israeli attention had been distracted by Palestinian terrorists' attack on a train bearing Soviet Jewish emigres to Vienna (the "Schonau" affair), and by the subsequent negotiations for the release of those emigrants taken hostage. That crisis dominated the news in Israel, while Egyptian and Syrian matters were given back-page treatment. The terrorists in question

²⁰William Colby, DCI, Memorandum for Henry A. Kissinger, Secretary of State, "Critique of Middle East Crisis," 27 October 1973, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 1, folder 15, CIA Archives and Records Center (hereafter cited as Colby Memorandum for Kissinger, "Critique of Middle East Crisis," 27 October 1973) (~~Secret~~).



According to Raymond Rocca (then Deputy Chief of CIA's CI Staff), this unique report on Syrian intentions was in fact produced by the CI Staff, not the NE Division. Rocca holds that this report evidently made no dent on the US Intelligence Community's analysts and just "got lost somewhere in the shuffle" (Raymond Rocca, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 19 August 1987 [hereafter cited as Rocca interview by Ford, 19 August 1987] (~~Secret~~)). Although the report in question was apparently an excellent one, it did not pinpoint just when the attacks might come. In any event, this was just one of many DO reports at the time, others of which subsequently proved to be wrong.

²¹Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 461.

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were members of the Syrian-controlled Sai'qa. It has never been established whether the timing of their terrorist attack was a coincidence or a deliberate act to divert Israeli watchfulness.

Moreover, the mastermind of the Egyptian-Syrian invasions of Israel, President Sadat, had done a brilliant job of misleading the Israelis—and American intelligence. As Kissinger later wrote, Sadat “paralyzed his opponents with their own preconceptions.”²² By orchestrating a false war scare in May, and then repeating more “scares” in the form of Egyptian and Syrian troop concentrations opposite Sinai and the Golan, Sadat lulled Israeli watchfulness. Hence Israeli and US intelligence judged the Arab military concentrations in the first week of October to be simply more of the same. And, whether or not the Sai'qa terrorist attack was also part of a larger Egyptian-Syrian deception plan, Sadat had created a certain aura of “progress” in Arab-Israeli deliberations at the United Nations, a development that found an expectant Henry Kissinger there when the attacks on Israel occurred.

Colby and US intelligence were further harmed by the fact that, by October 1973, the President's personal political crisis was far advanced, and much regular governmental access to the White House had diminished. Nixon's attentions were so distracted that he did not himself participate directly, later in October, in the momentous late-night decision in which Kissinger and a rump session of the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG, discussed below) brought US armed forces to an advanced state of alert (DefCon III) worldwide. In addition, the US intelligence and policymaking communities at the time were focusing on many issues other than Israeli-Arab tensions, such as the continuing Vietnam war, peace negotiations in Paris, SALT issues, and rapprochement with the People's Republic of China.

By coincidence, CIA's analytic capabilities in September-October 1973 were also in some disarray. Having disbanded the Office of National Estimates, Colby had begun to replace it with a system of individual National Intelligence Officers (NIOs), whose new procedures were not yet effective. A number of personnel changes had recently been made, and some of the most knowledgeable Middle East analysts had moved to other jobs. In CIA's Office of Current Intelligence (OCI, the office principally responsible for serving up current intelligence analyses to the White House), the [redacted] chief was new to that area and had just returned from a year away on sabbatical. His boss [redacted] happened to be on leave the week before 6 October. Also, most of CIA's DI officers had not had firsthand experience in the field, or the opportunity to gain the

²²Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 460.

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up-close "feel" so necessary where available evidence is ambiguous. Furthermore, within the DI there was little integrated political-economic analysis as such: its political analysts and economists tended to work independently of each other, a separation that contributed to CIA's failure to anticipate OPEC's use of oil as a weapon. Finally, although some DO officers were more concerned about a possible Arab attack than were their DI colleagues, they could not get the analysts to sound a stronger alarm in their assessments for the White House.²³

Then, too, as we have seen, Kissinger was in possession of certain sensitive intelligence that he did not share with the DCI or the Intelligence Community. Colby later told him, candidly, that he could have done a better job as DCI had the White House not cut him off from certain privileged data. "I fully understand the need for secrecy in our government on these delicate subjects," he wrote, "although it is clear that the back channel in many instances is becoming the main channel, causing lost and even counterproductive motion, aside from anguish, among many not in the circuit."²⁴ Such crucially important back-channel information included earlier warnings Brezhnev had given Kissinger of the Arabs' serious intent, as well as private dialogue between Kissinger and Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, and various private messages from Sadat.²⁵

Last, and perhaps most important, accurate estimates of Arab intentions suffered from certain preconceptions strongly held by many of the Intelligence Community's analysts. These officers tended to denigrate Arab capabilities and to assume that past patterns of Arab military conduct would continue. Some of these analysts were also guilty of mirror imaging, in estimating that it "wouldn't make [American] sense" for Sadat to launch an attack that he knew would probably not carry the day militarily but might advance the Arabs' cause politically. "We had a bit of a mind set," Colby conceded in 1975,²⁶ a conclusion with which many other

[redacted] ex-DI officer, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 16 March 1987 (hereafter cited as [redacted] interview by Ford, 2 April 1987) (~~Secret~~); [redacted] ex-DI officer, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 16 March 1987 (hereafter cited as [redacted] interview by Ford, 16 March 1987) (~~Secret~~); Lauder interview by Ford, 1987 (~~Secret~~); [redacted] ex-Intelligence Community Staff officer, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 31 March 1987 (hereafter cited as [redacted] interview by Ford, 31 March 1987) (~~Secret~~). DIA's analyses were also harmed at the time because certain senior DIA estimators tended to accept Israeli evaluations uncritically and to override more cautionary judgments being made by some of DIA's more junior analysts (several CIA officers, but especially [redacted] interview by Ford, 31 March 1987).

²³Colby, Memorandum for Kissinger, "Critique of Middle East Crisis," 27 October 1973 (~~Secret~~).

²⁴Quandt, interview by Ford, 4 May 1987.

²⁶Colby statement made at a news conference that, as discussed in chapter 11, Colby called to explain why the Pike committee should not include certain sensitive (communications intelligence) data in the report it was preparing at the time. At this unique news conference, held in CIA's auditorium, journalists raised a number of questions concerning the performance of US intelligence two years earlier in the Middle East war.

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observers have agreed. Kissinger later characterized the situation similarly, holding that the Arab attack on Israel had demonstrated the dangers inherent in the tendency of most intelligence services to fit the facts into existing preconceptions and to make them consistent with what is anticipated.²⁷ The House's, later Pike, investigating committee also attributed part of the problem in October 1973 to analytical bias. In its view, one reason for the analysts' optimism could be found in a 1971 CIA handbook, which stated that the Arab fighting man "lacks the necessary physical and cultural qualities for performing effective military services." The Pike committee concluded that, because the Arabs were thought to be so clearly inferior, another attack would be irrational and, thus, out of the question.²⁸ Finally, Robert Morris, a former NSC staffer, listed like reasons for the failure to anticipate the Egyptian-Syrian attack on Israel: "The worst common flaw in the reading of the intelligence was an abiding cultural, perhaps racial, contempt in Washington and Jerusalem for the political posturing and fighting skills of the Arabs."²⁹

The Performance of Intelligence After the October War's Outbreak

Deficient though they had been in sounding the alarm beforehand, DCI Colby and the Intelligence Community did render the policymakers excellent support once the Egyptian-Syrian attacks had begun, which helped the White House's crisis management of subsequent diplomacy, cease-fires, and the diplomatic showdown with the USSR. This support applied throughout the course of the war, as this Middle East crisis escalated to US-Soviet confrontation.

Colby set up special working groups that kept the White House abreast of fast-breaking events and provided Kissinger numerous short-term outlook studies and think pieces. Meanwhile, on a Community-wide basis, Colby's working groups integrated a rather large amount of special, compartmented intelligence, which gave Kissinger many particulars concerning battlefield developments and the various armies' logistic situations. They also provided him prompt cartographic support, essential to the negotiations that eventually reduced the Middle East crisis fever.³⁰

²⁷Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, p. 460.

²⁸CIA: *The Pike Report*, p. 142.

²⁹Robert Morris, *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 253.

³⁰Harold Saunders, former NSC Staff officer, interview by Harold P. Ford, summary notes, Washington, DC, 4 May 1987 (hereafter cited as Saunders interview by Ford, 4 May 1987) (~~Confidential~~); Quandt interview by Ford, 4 May 1987; see also Top Secret documentation in Nixon materials, box 123, NSC files/HAK office files; boxes 209 and 265, NSC files/Agency files; and boxes 664 and 665, NSC files/country files/ME.

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Of particular service to US policymakers were the technical services performed by CIA specialists [redacted]. These experts clarified complicated geographic boundaries in the Sinai, furnished detailed data on certain cities where the cease-fires under negotiation were designed to give the local disputants equal portions of land, and pointed out the differences between actual and claimed battlefield tank losses. In all, the intelligence particulars furnished by Colby's working groups enabled Secretary of State Kissinger to call certain bluffs or attempted deceptions on the part of the Arab and Israeli disputants and thus strengthened his negotiating leverage as the mediator of the crisis.³¹

Though surrounded by many other demands at the time, Colby personally played an active role in lending crisis management support to the Secretary of State. Meeting daily with Kissinger's Washington Special Action Group, the DCI not only was the best prepared source of intelligence details, but also the official to whom Kissinger turned for ordering specific intelligence needs concerning collection, clarification, and analysis. Within CIA, Colby held daily informal meetings on the crisis with the DDI, the DDO, and the nascent NIO officers, where they discussed the day's all-source take and shared their evaluations. These meetings kept the assessments sent to the White House as current and accurate as possible, ensured the personal input of the DCI, and prepared Colby for his many meetings with Kissinger and other top policymakers during the crisis.³² Colby also commissioned the candid postmortem report on the performance of US intelligence before the outbreak of the war.³³

The DefCon III Affair

The war crisis reached its apex, as far as US security interests were concerned, on the night of 24-25 October, in the now famous White House decision—made without President Nixon present—to bring US military forces to a higher alert status (DefCon III) worldwide.

From an intelligence point of view, a number of developments had occurred by 24 October to justify top US policymakers careful scrutiny of the broader US-Soviet situation. A crisis had developed as the tide of the war definitely turned in Israel's favor. Cease-fires unraveled, Israeli forces

³¹*Ibid.*

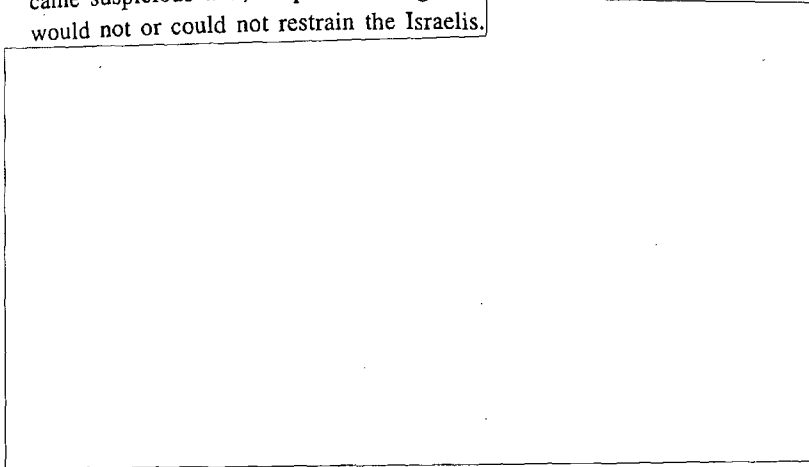
³²DCI Morning Meeting Notes of 19, 23, 29 October, and 2 November 1973. CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 1, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~).

³³Intelligence Community postmortem. Henry Kissinger sent Colby a "Dear Bill" note, 25 February 1974, thanking him for this postmortem. Kissinger called that study "an outstanding analysis of the Intelligence Community's reaction and performance during a major world crisis. It was both dispassionately candid and broad in coverage and should prove to be a valuable management tool throughout the Community" (Nixon materials, box 210, NSC files/Agency files/CIA, Vol. VII).

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threatened to annihilate Egypt's 3rd Army in the Sinai, and Moscow became suspicious that, despite Washington's assurances, the United States would not or could not restrain the Israelis.



Atop these alarming reports came an extremely tough note to President Nixon from Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev threatening to dispatch Soviet troops to the Middle East unilaterally. Kissinger, Defense Secretary Schlesinger, JCS Chairman Admiral Moorer, White House Chief of Staff Alexander Haig, General Brent Scowcroft (Kissinger's NSC deputy), and DCI Colby were the officers who participated in the rump session of the WSAG during the night of 24-25 October that resulted in the remarkable decision for a Defense Condition III (DefCon III) alert. While they met, Nixon remained upstairs in the White House, although Kissinger conferred with him by phone before the group's decision.

The 5 November issue of *Aviation Week* stated flatly that the Soviets had sent two brigades of nuclear-armed SCUD missiles to Egypt and that the US Government had satellite pictures to prove it.

A parallel study conducted within the NSC carried an even more alarmist tone (compartmented intelligence, Nixon materials, box 132, NSC files/HAK office files).

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Many questioned, then and later, whether the decision for DefCon III was based on legitimate alarms or whether it was an overreaction. There has also been speculation that the decision may have been politically motivated, at least in part, by the needs of a Watergate-beleaguered White House.³⁵ Colby considered that the DefCon III decision had been justified and, four days after that WSAG meeting, so informed Secretary Kissinger.³⁶ In his memoirs Colby explicitly supported Kissinger's decision for the DefCon III alert. Writing in 1978, Colby believed that Kissinger had not overreacted, inasmuch as Defense Condition III was the lowest level of US military alert, and the Strategic Air Command and a good portion of the Pacific Command were already at that level.³⁷ Ray Cline's view of Kissinger's role in the DefCon III affair is less generous. "I have always looked on this as a kind of shell game, a superficial exercise," he later stated. "That is, Kissinger knew what he wanted to do all along, had already decided to do it." In Cline's view, Kissinger only summoned Secretary of Defense Schlesinger and the others to give the decision the semblance of official action. "I've heard that President Nixon was upstairs drunk that night." Cline observed, "I don't know that that's a fact, but it is clear—and we didn't know it at the time—how far Nixon was out of things in those days."³⁸

In retrospect, Colby held that the October Middle East War afforded a number of intelligence lessons. In his view, the experience demonstrated that the Intelligence Community's collection machinery could be superb when focused as it had been in the latter days of the crisis, but that the real challenge for the future would be to make the analytic process function with the same degree of excellence. To accomplish this, Colby believed that more automatic challenge or variations to the consensus must be built into the analytical process. In addition, Colby pointed out, US intelligence before the war had suffered from a dearth of independent coverage and

[redacted] The intelligence

³⁵ Among the skeptics at the time was Australia's Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, who, when asked at a press club luncheon (8 November) whether US bases in Australia had been put on more than normal alert, answered: "I don't know if they were put on alert. I wasn't told. I believe the announcement was for domestic American consumption." His remarks were noted, with anger, in the White House (see Top Secret documentation in Nixon materials, box 2, White House special files/staff and office files). This DefCon III nighttime episode took place just four days after Mr. Nixon's Halloween Massacre: the departure of Messrs. Cox, Richardson, and Ruckelshaus. One interpretation at the time was that the Washington Special Action Group's decision had been made at least in part to undercut any thought in the Kremlin that the White House was too paralyzed by Watergate to take decisive action on a crisis situation abroad.

³⁶ Colby, Memorandum for Kissinger, "Critique of Middle East Crisis," 27 October 1973.

³⁷ Colby, *Honorable Men*, p. 367.

³⁸ Cline, interview by Ford, 31 March 1988.

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provided the White House had been too much a CIA product. In the future, he concluded, the White House must more fully share privileged data with the DCI, while the full analytical weight of the entire Intelligence Community must be brought more directly to bear on policymaking considerations.³⁹

Colby subsequently made some progress in correcting these weaknesses. He stimulated more competitive analysis and greater analytic contribution by agencies of the Community other than the CIA. He also encouraged advances in coverage by special technical systems, as well as the acquisition of [redacted]

[redacted] He broadened the responsibilities of the Intelligence Community's watch function, to prevent a repeat of the situation that existed at the time of the October War's outbreak—when the National Indications Center had had no explicit requirement to warn, only to watch, and the USIB's Watch Committee had "degenerated into participation only by action officers rather than serious analysts or high officials."⁴⁰ Colby also set in motion new initiatives that led ultimately to the creation of a Special Assistant to the DCI for Strategic Warning.

Colby was not successful, however, in changing Henry Kissinger's proclivity for keeping sensitive information to himself. Despite the excellent crisis management support that Colby and the Intelligence Community contributed after the hostilities began, their failure to foresee the war's outbreak hardened Nixon's and Kissinger's conviction that US intelligence was deficient on many scores and further damaged Colby's standing at this, the very outset of his tenure as DCI. His role thereafter remained that of a senior staff specialist to whom the White House looked for intelligence data and support, but not for interpretations of broader issues, to say nothing of policy recommendations. On most issues Colby had to deal with Kissinger's deputy, Brent Scowcroft, and NSC staffers and was shut out from any meaningful, continuing access to the major policy players.

³⁹Colby, Memorandum for Kissinger, "Critique of Middle East Crisis," 27 October 1973.

⁴⁰*The DCI's Duty and Authority to Warn*, p. 12, CIA History Staff records, job 90B00336R, box 2, folder 16, CIA Archives and Records Center (~~Secret~~).

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