

**The Kilometer 101 Talks Between the October War  
and the Middle East Peace Conference <sup>1</sup>**  
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**Introduction**

On October 27, 1973, a German-born career foreign service officer, Omar Sirry, who served as Deputy Chief of Operations in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, was called by Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy. This was exactly three weeks after the outbreak of the October 1973 War, ten days after Israel launched a counter-attack against the Egyptian Army in Sinai and eventually surrounded the 15,000 man Egyptian Third Army, one week after American Secretary of State Henry Kissinger negotiated in Moscow with Soviet Chairman Brezhnev the contents of what came to be United Nations Security Council Resolution 338. That was just a day after the United States and the Soviet Union stepped back from possible military confrontation over the intervention of Soviet troops into the canal area.

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<sup>1</sup>Portions of this article are taken from a chapter in my book, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace*, (Routledge), 1999. Central sources for this book were a series of in-depth interviews which I undertook from 1977 to 1998 with those who participated in Arab-Israeli diplomacy of the period.

Just twenty-one days after Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on October 6th in a coordinated military effort to liberate territories Israel had secured in the June 1967 War, Egypt's acting foreign minister told Sirry to "get a toothbrush and a pajama and be ready " to talk with Israelis. The primary Egyptian reason for engaging in such talks was to find immediate relief for the Egyptian Third Army surrounded by Israeli forces. The destruction of the Third Army had the potential of destroying Sadat's presidency, not to mention jeopardizing Sadat's newly-expanded opening to the United States. By contrast, Israel's absolute priority was effecting a swift exchange of war prisoners and arranging the return of the soldiers who had been killed during the war. Fahmy told Sirry that he had to be prepared to go to Suez. Fahmy had a large ego; he did not like playing the role of Egyptian President Sadat's messenger. Moreover, he was not fully informed about Sadat's objectives, and was philosophically uncomfortable about having any discussions with the Israelis. Said Sirry, "Indicative of the psychological attitude that was prevailing at the time in Egypt, after so many years of fighting and opposing the Israelis, Fahmy found it very difficult to tell me that I was going to talk to them."<sup>2</sup> After a pause, Fahmy told Sirry that he was to go to military headquarters, meet General el-Gamasy, and become el-Gamasy's political adviser. Sirry attended the first meeting at Kilometer 101. He was accompanied by two or three other Egyptian Foreign Ministry and military officials in the approximately eighteen negotiating sessions that took place between Egyptian and Israeli representatives after the October War and last until the end of November 1973.

General Mohammed al-Ghani el-Gamasy led the Egyptian negotiating team at the

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1. Interview with Omar Sirry, January 5, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

Kilometer 101 Talks. He was a career Egyptian military officer. Before the October 1973 War, he was Chief of Operations of the Egyptian Armed Forces; during the war, he was appointed Chief of Staff after a shake up in the Egyptian military. At the request of Sadat, el-Gamasy collusively planned with Syrian counterparts the war plans which resulted in the October War. A fierce Egyptian nationalist and professional soldier, el-Gamasy was strongly motivated to restore the dignity and prowess of the Egyptian Army which was so demoralized by the Arab defeat in the June 1967 War. Moreover, for el-Gamasy and other high ranking Egyptian officials, going to war in 1973 was a measure of personal revenge against Moshe Dayan, whom they thought was the “dark side” of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

On the same day, Israeli General Aharon Yariv, recently retired as head of Israeli military intelligence, was summoned by Prime Minister Golda Meir to Tel Aviv. During the October War, Yariv had not held an official military position but had instead undertaken several ad-hoc assignments for Israel’s Chief of Staff David Elazar. Meir told Yariv that he would be negotiating with an Egyptian counterpart at Kilometer 101. Yariv was chosen because he was knowledgeable about military matters, had observed the war closely, and was considered politically independent of any particular Israeli Cabinet Minister. Dayan was not thrilled that military talks were about to take place and he was not in charge; Yariv would be reporting to Meir and her close confidants in the Cabinet. From Israel Galili, a very close confidant of Meir and minister without portfolio in

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<sup>3</sup>. Interview with Ahmed Maher, an Egyptian Foreign Ministry official at the time, July 29, 1993, Washington, D.C.

her Cabinet, Yariv received his instructions. Galili made sure that Yariv did not give anything, say anything, propose anything, or affirm anything without prior approval and knowledge of the government, which included the Prime Minister, Defense Minister, Committee of Ministers on Defense Issues, and even the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the Knesset.<sup>4</sup> Galili told Yariv that Israel wanted a firm cease-fire, an exchange of prisoners-of-war, and a lifting of the Egyptian naval blockade of Israeli shipping at the Bab al-Mandab Straits.

With Israel reeling in agony from the trauma of death caused by war, the Moscow-Washington confrontation recently avoided, and the Israeli political system engaged in the run-up to parliamentary elections, only Galili, Mordechai Gazit, the Director General of the Israeli Prime Minister's office, and a few others realized that direct Egyptian-Israeli military talks were truly unprecedented. Likewise, said Sirry, on the Egyptian side, "No one understood the political significance of what we were doing."<sup>5</sup> Kissinger realized that the Third Army needed to be saved; that was the most pressing political requirement. He therefore consented to use U.S. government channels to connect Egyptian and Israeli negotiators.

The pending Egyptian-Israeli talks were unique in their countries' respective belligerent relationship: Egyptian and Israeli military officials were about to negotiate the separation of their

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4. Interview with Aharon Yariv, March 26, 1992, Ramat Aviv, Israel; and Aharon Yariv, "On the Way to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace at Kilometer 101," transcript of a lecture presented at The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, March 30, 1992, (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center), 1992, p. 7.

5. Interview with Omar Sirry, January 5, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

forces without the United States or other party in a mediation role and with the United Nations relegated to a mere gopher status. They would go further and negotiate the details of what became the framework for the January 1974 Israeli-Egyptian Disengagement Agreement. Though Kissinger is credited with shaping that agreement, it was pre-negotiated by Sadat and Meir through their military representatives at Kilometer 101.

### **The Meetings: Sadat's Outline and Meir's Reply were not a Kissinger original**

On the bitter cold morning of Sunday, October 28, shortly after 1 a.m., the initial Egyptian-Israeli negotiating session took place at a wooden table under a camouflage canopy stretched between four Israeli tanks. Very dim lights were provided by a portable generator, but apparently were sufficient for taking notes. The meeting took place in Israeli-controlled territory, which later came to be known as "No-Man's Land." Each general made short introductory remarks, noting that both Armies had fought well and honorably and that both sides should now perform admirably in making peace. The content and tone of Yariv's comments alleviated the apprehension among the Egyptians that the Israelis would be arrogant. Sirry described Yariv as "sophisticated and calm. He did not shove anything down our throats. Had he been otherwise, the Egyptian delegation would not have accepted it."<sup>6</sup> El-Gamasy considered Yariv "a very fine man who knew his work very well."<sup>7</sup> Yariv believed el-Gamasy to be "a pedantic man, but a proud

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<sup>6</sup>. Interview with Omar Sirry, January 5, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

<sup>7</sup>. Interview with Abd al-Ghani el-Gamasy, November 10, 1992, Heliopolis, Egypt.

officer, Egyptian, and Arab.”<sup>8</sup> Even while the separation of forces discussions took place, elements of the two Armies remained engaged. As the talks continued that first night until approximately four o'clock in the morning, there were intermittent intrusions of gun fire, rockets, and flares. For weeks after the commencement of the Kilometer 101 negotiations, the cease-fire agreed on October 23, was periodically broken. El-Gamasy acknowledged that most of the violations came from the Egyptian side.<sup>9</sup>

Replying to Yariv, el-Gamasy refrained from answering most questions, saying a response had to await instructions from Cairo. El-Gamasy customarily reported back directly to President Sadat. These were both verbal and written assessments by el-Gamasy of Israeli views on a variety of issues under negotiation and the direction in which he thought they were heading. Likewise, Yariv repeatedly excused himself to phone his superiors in order to report information and to receive further instructions.<sup>10</sup> While military men were negotiating, their civilian superiors were essentially making the decisions about the content of the talks, which obviously contained political implications, including their present and future respective relationships with Washington. After the end of the first negotiating session, Sirry and Fawzi al-Ibrashi, a legal specialist in the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, finished their report around six o'clock that morning and apparently hand-delivered it to President Sadat. Sadat informed Fahmy that he would immediately go to Washington to meet with Kissinger and told Fahmy exactly what he wanted

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8. Interview with Aharon Yariv, March 26, 1992, Ramat Aviv, Israel.

9. Interview with Abd al-Ghani el-Gamasy, November 10, 1992, Heliopolis, Egypt.

10. Interview with Omar Sirry, January 5, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

from the trip.

In his memoirs, Fahmy claimed that he conceived the ideas which became the operational outline for the tactics and strategy of Egyptian negotiating policy. But Sirry, who took the notes in this October 28 meeting, said that Sadat provided the original detailed framework for the agreement he was seeking with the Israelis. Normally, Sadat's preference was not to focus on negotiating details, but in this case he paid unique attention to the diplomatic framework he needed to save the Third Army and catalyze Kissinger's diplomatic engagement. Apparently, not until that meeting did Sadat have a written text of what he wanted to accomplish at the Kilometer 101 Talks, afterwards, or how Kissinger would take control of the unfolding diplomacy.

The framework, which Sadat dictated and Fahmy took to Washington, included the following: "Israel would withdraw to the October 22 lines; all prisoners-of-war would be released; Israel would withdraw to a line inside Sinai east of the [strategic] passes, while Egypt's forces remained in place; U.N. forces would be deployed between the Egyptian and Israeli forces; after Israel started withdrawing to the disengagement line, Egypt would lift the blockade of the Straits of Bab el-Mandeb; once the disengagement was completed, Egypt would start clearing the Suez Canal; within an agreed time, Israel would withdraw to the international frontier; at this point, belligerency would end."<sup>11</sup> Also included in the framework was an outline

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<sup>11</sup>. Interview with Omar Sirry, January 5, 1993, Cairo, Egypt; Mahmoud Riad, The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East, (London: Quartet Books), 1981, p. 256. Ismail Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1983, p. 36.

of steps to be taken to convene an international conference, and to restore diplomatic relations between Egypt and the United States. From the outset of Egypt's diplomatic effort, Sadat wanted all substantive issues agreed upon privately before ratification at a public conference.

By the time Kissinger met with Sadat for the first time in Cairo on November 7, 1973, Fahmy had already brought Sadat's ideas to Washington and had given them to Kissinger. Simultaneously at the Kilometer 101 Talks, Sadat had el-Gamasy tell his Israeli interlocutors that he would agree to separate military forces in phased periods of time, establish a UN monitored buffer zone between the opposing Armies, and allow the repopulation of the cities along the Suez Canal. In their two-and-one-half-hour meeting on November 7, Kissinger "persuaded" a pre-disposed Sadat not to settle just for a separation of forces agreement reflective of the October 22 cease-fire lines, but for a larger disengagement agreement with considerable more significance.<sup>12</sup> This November 7 visit was pivotal in solidifying the concept of step-by-step diplomacy because "Sadat and Kissinger began to devise a strategy which became ultimately a strategy of interim steps...under the mantle of a conference to bless the interim steps."<sup>13</sup> Activation of the interim approach came about because Sadat assented to Kissinger's wish for patience and for an

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<sup>12</sup>. Interviews with Harold Saunders, May 12, 1992, Washington, D.C., and Peter Rodman, an adviser to Henry Kissinger, June 10, 1992, Washington, D.C. Saunders and Rodman have almost identical recollections of this Kissinger pleading to Sadat.

<sup>13</sup>. Interviews with Harold Saunders, May 12, 1992, Washington, D.C., and Hafez Ismail, January 7, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

agreement with the Israelis more substantive than just military disengagement. For his part, Sadat did not need to be convinced of the merit of the step-by-step approach; the notion of liberating Sinai through stages or phases was inherent in the Sadat-Dayan exchange via Washington eighteen months earlier. As compared to eighteen months earlier, the significant differences for Sadat's acceptance of an interim agreement after the 1973 War was his willingness to pursue such an agreement **without** guarantees for full Israeli withdrawal from all Arab territories, and that he was willing to “throw himself into the arms of the United States to tell him how to do it.”<sup>14</sup> Sadat had gone to war in part to obtain Kissinger’s attention. Now that he had it, he bestowed on Kissinger opportunistic prerogatives which Washington could only relish: diminish Soviet influence, tighten Sadat’s connections to the U.S., catalyze an Israeli-Egyptian agreement, and find a way to end the newly imposed Arab oil embargo. The prestige Sadat’s army garnered from its limited successes during the war, his own priority for “Egypt first” and the faith he put in Kissinger allowed for the “interim agreement disguised as disengagement.”<sup>15</sup> The details would all be pre-packaged for an international conference where Sadat and Kissinger would use the other Arab delegations as cover for Sadat’s separate agreement with Israel. During this November meeting with Sadat, it also became clear that the military and political issues could be separated, with the former being easier to discuss and implement. Kissinger also discussed with Sadat elements of the six-point plan which he had reviewed with Meir in Washington, which would be signed a week later in Sinai at Kilometer

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<sup>14</sup>. Interview with Peter Rodman, June 10, 1992, Washington, D.C.

<sup>15</sup>. Interview with Peter Rodman, June 10, 1992, Washington, D.C.

101. Kissinger was apparently surprised that Sadat accepted the six-point plan so quickly.<sup>16</sup> Officially, Sadat told Kissinger that this plan would be communicated to el-Gamasy for discussion with Yariv at Kilometer 101. El-Gamasy claimed, as Sirry had earlier that it was “Sadat who presented to Kissinger [at this November meeting] a strategic plan for how to solve the [Arab-Israeli] problem as a whole.”<sup>17</sup> Core parts of what became the January 1974 Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement were brought to Washington at the end of October by Fahmy, at the same time that el-Gamasy offered them to Yariv at Kilometer 101. Kissinger had heard of Israel's acceptance of a force separation agreement via phases just days earlier from Mordechai Gazit in discussions at Blair House.<sup>18</sup> The six-point plan agreed on November 11 and the subsequent Yariv-el-Gamasy understandings at Kilometer 101 were not Kissinger originals; they were hybrids, parented by Sadat and Meir.

The disengagement agreement drafted by Generals Yariv and el-Gamasy on November 11, 1973, contained the following general six points:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>. Mohammed Heikal, Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat, (New York: Random House), 1983, p. 68.

<sup>17</sup>. Interview with Abd al-Ghani el-Gamasy, November 10, 1992, Heliopolis, Egypt.

<sup>18</sup>. Interview with Mordechai Gazit, March 22, 1992, Jerusalem, Israel.

<sup>19</sup>. Kissinger's enumeration of the six points was in a very different order and less explicit than one of the several Israeli drafts of the six points, see Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1982, p. 641; and Aharon Yariv, “On the Way to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace at Kilometer 101,” transcript of a lecture presented at The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, March 30, 1992, (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center), 1992, pp. 11-2. The six-point agreement was a consensus-made document in which Israelis, Egyptians, and Americans participated in drafting.

1. Egypt and Israel agree to observe scrupulously the cease-fire called for by the UN Security Council.
2. Both sides agree that discussion between them will begin immediately to settle the question of the return to the October 22 positions in the framework of agreement on the disengagement and separation of forces under the auspices of the United Nations.
3. The town of Suez will receive daily supplies of food, water, and medicine. All wounded civilians in the town of Suez will be evacuated.
4. There will be no impediment to the movement of non-military supplies to the east bank [of the Suez Canal where the Third Army was surrounded].
5. The Israeli check-points on the Cairo-Suez road will be replaced by UN check-points. At the Suez end of the road, Israeli officers can participate with the UN to supervise the non-military nature of the cargo at the bank of the canal.
6. As soon as the UN check-points are established on the Cairo-Suez road, there will be an exchange of all prisoners-of-war, including wounded.

In the moments after the signing ceremony was completed on November 11, 1973, at Kilometer 101, and while the international media were taking pictures, the dialogue between Yariv and el-Gamasy went approximately as follows: “My dear General, what do you mean by disengagement agreement? It is listed in the six-point agreement, that phrase.” El-Gamasy replied, “I said it means to place the troops away from one another.” Yariv replied, “No... It is a Harvard expression and it is Kissinger who will put the explanation for it, and you and I will not

be able to do anything about it until Kissinger says what he means by it.”<sup>20</sup> El-Gamasy acknowledged the relevance of Yariv's assessment. Both Generals understood that the diplomatic negotiations involving political discussions would be ultimately transferred to Kissinger's control, but neither knew when or how that would happen. Neither General was yet prepared to deliver the negotiating prerogative to him.

After the signing ceremony on November 11, 1973, Yariv and el-Gamasy moved effortlessly into negotiating the details of a disengagement agreement. The el-Gamasy-Yariv meetings took place at least every two or three days, each for several hours or more. Progressively, discussions became more and more detailed. As meetings became increasingly friendly, Yariv replied with even more specifics.<sup>21</sup> Both generals strayed beyond the scope imposed upon them by their political superiors. The Egyptians through el-Gamasy suggested an Israeli withdrawal of thirty-five kilometers deep into Sinai, with UN observers separating the belligerent forces, and a zone for the drawn-down forces of both Armies. The Egyptians worked out time schedules for a full Israeli withdrawal accompanied by one for Suez Canal repair. They included give and take about force levels in main and thinned-out buffer zones, the number of buffer zones and their sizes, the number of UN personnel and where they would be stationed,

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<sup>20</sup>. Interviews with Aharon Yariv, March 26, 1992, Ramat Aviv, Israel, and Abd al-Ghani el-Gamasy, November 10, 1992, Heliopolis, Egypt.

<sup>21</sup>. Aharon Yariv, “On the Way to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace at Kilometer 101,” transcript of a lecture presented at The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, March 30, 1992, (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center), 1992, pp. 14-6.

what authority the UN would enjoy in relationship to Israeli forces, when Egyptian civilians would return to the Canal Zone, etc. El-Gamasy and Yariv went further. Considerable detail about the size of the buffer zones to be established was made public in a television interview given by Meir on November 16 and repeated by Dayan to a U.S. Congressional delegation on November 19. Three days later, Yariv and el-Gamasy agreed that “disengagement and separation of forces should be held for 3-6 months followed by successive Israeli withdrawals until a line agreed upon in peace negotiations is reached.”<sup>22</sup> At the same meeting, Yariv dropped Israel’s insistence that the Egyptian Armies on the east bank of the Canal return to the pre-war lines. El-Gamasy and Yariv agreed that the main Israeli force should be somewhere between 35 and 45 kilometers east of the Canal, disengagement and separation of forces should take place within six months with Egypt wanting the first disengagement completed by January 15, 1974, and the United Nations should man the different buffer zones to be set up between their respective Armies. At their November 26 meeting, Yariv and el-Gamasy had concluded several options pertaining to the content and implementation of the disengagement agreement. There were five or six different proposals for the depth of Israeli withdrawal in Sinai. Yariv stated that Israel was ready to withdraw even beyond the strategic passes if Egypt would minimize its number of troops, tanks, and artillery on the western bank of the canal. Maps were exchanged at virtually every meeting in efforts to reach implementable compromises. From the pace of negotiations and the details discussed at meetings between November 19 and November 26, some key

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22. United States Department of State, Egyptian and Israeli Proposals on Disengagement, Meeting Summaries, “E29A,” November 19, 22, 23 and 26, 1977, December 6, 1973.

disagreements remained over the number of forces each side would have in the different buffer zones, and the number, range capability, and kinds of weapons each could have in those zones.

### **The End of the Kilometer 101 Talks: Kissinger Pulls Out**

On November 28, 1993, quite abruptly, Yariv told el-Gamasy that he could no longer discuss matters pertaining to the separation of forces. Siilasvuo was bewildered and el-Gamasy was upset, both were perplexed. El-Gamasy asked Yariv, “Why can't you discuss the separation of forces issue? We have spoken about ten principles on which we have agreed.”<sup>23</sup> When Yariv departed the Kilometer 101 Talks, he too was disappointed that he suddenly had to break off his personal contacts with el-Gamasy. On the same day, Sadat publicly claimed that he was discontinuing them because the agreements were “not to his liking, led nowhere, and were characterized by Israeli schemes and intrigues.”<sup>24</sup> Many Egyptian officials, including Foreign Minister Fahmy and General el-Gamasy, saw the sudden Israeli withdrawal from the Kilometer 101 Talks as a case of Israeli duplicity -- making agreements one day and suspending their

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<sup>23</sup>. Aharon Yariv, “On the Way to the Israeli-Egyptian Peace at Kilometer 101,” transcript of a lecture presented at The Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies at Tel Aviv University, March 30, 1992, (Tel Aviv: The Dayan Center), 1992, pp. 14-6.

<sup>24</sup>. Remarks by Anwar Sadat, November 28, 1973, April 18, 1974, and September 15, 1975, as quoted in Raphael Israeli, The Public Diary of President Sadat: The Road to Diplomacy, The Continuation of War by Other Means (November 1973 - May 1975), Part Two, (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1979, pp. 444, 474; and Raphael Israeli, The Public Diary of President Sadat: The Road of Pragmatism (June 1975-October 1976), Part Three, (Leiden: E.J. Brill), 1979, p. 1044.

meaning the next.<sup>25</sup> El-Gamasy had no idea that Kissinger had asked Meir to stop the negotiations. At the conclusion of the talks, Sadat's advisers, historically predisposed to antagonistic attitudes toward Israel, saw the breakdown of the talks as another indication of the lack of Israeli sincerity and trustworthiness. However, when they ended on November 29, 1973, virtually all the details for a full disengagement agreement were discussed and made public.

The Kilometer 101 Talks ended because Kissinger wanted them ended. In his memoirs, Kissinger noted that he was “not eager for a breakthrough at Kilometer 101 before the Geneva Conference...[it] tested our patience...We never knew exactly what was happening at Kilometer 101...If disengagement disappeared from the agenda, we would be forced into endless skirmishing over broader issues on which I knew we would not be able to deliver quickly. As I cautioned [Israeli Ambassador to the U.S.]Dinitz on December 3: Suppose Yariv comes out a great hero on disengagement, what do you discuss [at Geneva]?”<sup>26</sup> Dinitz added that “Kissinger did not value direct discussions at [Kilometer] 101 because he believed that they would be making [political] concessions there to each other without actually eliciting the full price” which he could have obtained had he been choreographing the negotiations.<sup>27</sup> Kissinger told Eban, “For God's sake, stop the Yariv-el-Gamasy thing -- put it on the Geneva level. Otherwise, we don't

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<sup>25</sup>. Interview with Hermann F. Eilts, April 11, 1991, Boston, Massachusetts.

<sup>26</sup>. Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1982, pp. 751-2.

<sup>27</sup>. Interview with Simcha Dinitz, March 20, 1992, Jerusalem, Israel.

have an agenda in Geneva.”<sup>28</sup> Kissinger asked Fahmy later in Washington, “What are you doing? Why did you present this [disengagement plan] to the Israelis [at Kilometer 101]?”<sup>29</sup> Kissinger at one point told Meir, “You don't seem to understand that they are making mistakes [at Kilometer 101]. Let me do it.”<sup>30</sup> According to the newly-appointed U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Hermann Eilts, political discussions had to be avoided because they “would potentially incapacitate [Kissinger's] direct and incipient intervention;” “he wanted all the reigns in his own hands, and was uneasy about all this progress being made and the military working group where he wasn't present.”<sup>31</sup> The Israelis and the United States agreed to pull out of Kilometer 101. The cease-fire remained in effect, but all of the details -- withdrawal, how far, and who did what to whom -- were to be the subject of the Geneva Conference. “We knew,” said Nick Veliotis, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Tel Aviv, that “Geneva would be window dressing for what had already been achieved in the Kilometer 101 negotiations.”<sup>32</sup> Yariv remembered it this way: “Kissinger said, ‘What is he [Yariv] doing there at Kilometer 101? He is proposing disengagement. I need a disengagement agreement at Geneva.’ Kissinger told the whole Israeli

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28. Interview with Abba Eban, March 24, 1992, Herzelia, Israel.

29. Interview with Hafez Ismail, January 7, 1993, Cairo, Egypt.

30. Interview with Mordechai Gazit, March 22, 1992, Jerusalem, Israel.

31. Interviews with Hermann F. Eilts, April 11, 1991, Boston, Massachusetts; Hafez Ismail, January 7, 1993, Cairo, Egypt; and Brian Urquhart, February 28, 1991, New York, New York. Urquhart was a close aid to Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim during the period of the planning and convocation of the December 1973 Geneva Conference. See also, Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1982, p. 752.

32. Interview with Nicholis A. Veliotis, September 7, 1995, Washington, D.C.

government, 'I do not want a disengagement agreement now.' And [I] got instructions to say good-bye to el-Gamasy. Kissinger pressured us to be sure that we arrived at an impasse."<sup>33</sup>

## **Conclusions**

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<sup>33</sup>. Interview with Aharon Yariv, March 26, 1992, Ramat Aviv, Israel.

By the end of November 1973, Egyptian President Sadat's main concern was keeping Kissinger focused on the planned December 1973 Geneva Conference. Fostering either an accommodation for the Palestinians or Jordanians or laying the ground work for a Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement on the Golan Heights were not Sadat's pre- or post-war priorities. Kissinger sought to use Sadat's embrace of American diplomacy as a means to limit Moscow's role in any emerging post-war diplomacy.

The Kilometer 101 were the first public and direct talks conducted by Egypt and Israel since Israel's establishment in May 1948. They lasted for a month. Though the talks ended abruptly without a formal disengagement agreement signed, they accomplished several goals. First, Yariv and el-Gamasy concurred on the component elements and framework for the Egyptian-Israeli Disengagement Agreement [Sinai I], finally signed on January 18, 1974. The maps and the future role of the United Nations were outlined and implemented at the Kilometer 101 Talks. When Kissinger's advisers started drafting the details of Sinai I in early January 1974, the negotiated el-Gamasy-Yariv component elements had already been transmitted by Defense Minister Dayan to Kissinger by January 4, 1974. Detailed direct Egyptian-Israeli discussions were held about limited force zones, buffer zones, manpower numbers, kinds of weapons, tanks, and artillery pieces that would be permitted to remain in the possession of each army.

Second, Israeli and Egyptian political leaders established a precedence of working in collusion with Secretary Kissinger. After the Kilometer 101 Talks showed that an Egyptian-Israeli agreement was possible, both Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Meir agreed that the

upcoming Geneva Middle East Peace Conference would serve only as a public relations function with the 'real' negotiation of significant details to be handled by Kissinger. Both Meir and Sadat wanted to control the ensuing negotiations, not leave decisions to either their Generals or to their respective foreign or defense ministers. The precedent was set for Arab-Israeli talks to be Egyptian-Israeli driven, but American engineered and fueled. For Washington, strong relations with Jerusalem and building ties to Cairo were much more important than driving a negotiation between Israel and either Syrian or Jordan. From the end of November until the convocation of the Geneva talks on December 21, there were no official Egyptian-Israeli disengagement negotiations under UN auspices -- merely liaison talks where procedures were adopted to implement the cease-fire agreement, exchange prisoners, and provide supplies for the Third Army. Kissinger wanted Sadat to sign the disengagement agreement only **after** the Geneva Conference convened.<sup>34</sup> Knowing that a disengagement agreement was "in the can" provided Kissinger with additional incentive to dominate the Arab-Israeli negotiating theater and leave Moscow and the Europeans with only ceremonial roles to play. For Egypt and Israel, Washington was the trusted intermediary for both sides. Meir and Sadat wanted Kissinger to parachute into their talks. Moscow had no leverage on Israel; it had to rely on Kissinger's 'good will' which meant letting the fox determine detente in the hen house.

And third, it was more than Kissinger's sense of exclusion from the Kilometer 101 Talks that saw the end of direct Egyptian-Israeli talks. There was a potential downside to the

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<sup>34</sup>. Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), 1982, p. 751.

suspension of these cordial and productive talks: Egyptian and Israeli leaders did forfeit a significant opportunity to understand through direct talks each other's aspirations by negotiators who held each other in considerable esteem. Parallel military and political discussions could have been usefully conducted even after Sinai I was concluded. Such communications did ensue and were useful after Sadat's historic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977. But in 1974, neither Meir nor Sadat were willing to probe each other's willingness to extend the negotiating parameters to broader political issues; the domestic constituencies in both Egypt and Israel were not yet ready for a political understanding. Moreover, Meir's focus aimed at returning her prisoners-of-war and healing a country still traumatized by the war. Sadat was concerned about saving the Third Army and getting ahead of his Arab political contemporaries in dealing with Israel. Yariv and el-Gamasy acknowledged in my interviews with them, that if left to their own working personal chemistry and the immediacy of the unacceptable status quo, they would have successfully concluded agreements on separation of forces and a longer disengagement, with perhaps political content and implications therein. The problem with the collective and estimable logic of both generals was that their political handlers were more interested in their relationship with the United States than they were with each other. The content and the manner in which the Kilometer 101 Talks were conducted were significant for future Arab-Israeli negotiations, phased Israeli withdrawals, (land for security) buffer zones, third-party monitoring, and central American mediation.

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**ENDNOTES**