

American Jews Mobilize to Save Israel October, 1973

Compiled from articles by the JTA and JPS, and the author's personal recollections:

Kol Nidre, 1973, was on Friday night, October 5. I vaguely recall our early Shabbat dinner and services, and everything seemed to be as it should. But in the morning, when we arrived at Schul, there were a few anxious people gathered outside the sanctuary. Someone had heard a morning news broadcast with early reports that war had broken out in the Middle East. As the morning wore on, the noise inside and outside the sanctuary began to overtake the Davening as the bad news spread. Eventually, the rabbi announced from the Bima that Israel had been attacked and invaded by Egypt and Syria early Yom Kippur morning, while nearly every Israeli was in synagogue.

In 1973, with no internet and no 24-hour television news cycle, it took a full day for the enormity of the crisis to become clear. By break-the-fast, the Arabs had won many early victories and gained territory in the Golan, Galil and Sinai. The Israel Defense Forces threw everything they had at the enemy to repel the invasion, which meant that ammunition, bombs, jet fuel and supplies were quickly running low. President Nixon hesitated when resupply became essential, and some say newly appointed Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, advised Nixon to let Israel twist a bit in the wind before any resupply was undertaken.

On October 7, synagogues and Jewish organizations all over America mobilized to pressure the administration to resupply Israel. Time was of the essence, and everyone was urged to come immediately to Washington to march on the White House to demand the resupply. I recall attending that rally, walking down 16th Street to Lafayette Park. Hundreds of busses came from all over the East Coast, delivering thousand of protesters to the doors of the White House. We surrounded the White House grounds and listened to a succession of speakers address their remarks to Nixon and Kissinger.

On October 9, American Jewish leaders met in Washington and decided to appeal directly to President Nixon to resupply the IDF, which was totally dependant on American weapons after France withdrew its support in 1967. Nixon signaled his general agreement to the resupply, but did not move quickly. Late that night, Nixon learned that Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir feared Israel would run out of ammunition, be defeated and that the massacre of Jews promised by the Arabs would complete the work of Adolf Hitler. She made it clear that, to prevent another Holocaust, Israel's secret stock of atomic and nuclear bombs were already airborne and armed on the bombers, and that the nuclear-tipped Jericho missiles were fueled and ready to fly. The situation was so desperate that these preparations were made openly as a warning to Damascus, Cairo and Moscow.

About that time, Russia threatened Nixon that they would defend Damascus and Cairo. Nixon and Kissinger began to fear the outbreak of nuclear war in the Middle East and the

possibility of a nuclear exchange between USA and Russian forces. To avoid that outcome, on the morning of October 10, Washington began an enormous resupply airlift to Israel, and the tide of war began to change. Israel's conventional forces were sufficient, and the threat of nuclear holocaust abated.

On Simchat Torah, American Jews all over the country rallied in support of Israel, and the American airlift grew in scope. An enraged Soviet Union mounted its own resupply of Arab Forces and put its first-to-fight divisions on alert to defend Damascus from the approaching IDF troops. Kissinger warned the Russians that, if they introduced Soviet troops to the struggle, American would enter the fray. As in the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, Russia blinked first. The fighting ended a few days later, with Israel having recaptured all lost territory, as well as invading Syria up to the gates of Damascus, surrounding and capturing an entire Egyptian Army and the Suez Canal, and invading Egypt to within a day's march of Cairo. Nuclear war was avoided, the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of Jews was prevented, and the stage was set for Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to make peace with Israel in 1977. All this in October, 1973.