

CRAIG DAIGLE, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, The Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012). Pp. 448. \$55.00 cloth.

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In this revelatory study of Cold War politics in the Middle East between 1969 and 1973, Craig Daigle examines how détente between the United States and the Soviet Union exacerbated the Arab-Israeli conflict. While the rapprochement between the governments of Richard Nixon and Leonid Brezhnev relaxed tensions globally, *The Limits of Détente* argues that Soviet-American relations actually increased the prospect of regional violence and led to the outbreak of the October 1973 War. As the book demonstrates, Anwar el-Sadat's decision to launch a military invasion to reclaim the Sinai Peninsula from Israel was a direct consequence of détente. Daigle, who edited the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volume dealing with the Arab-Israeli conflict in this period, utilizes a trove of newly declassified US and Soviet documents, as well as British and Israeli records, interviews with key officials, and transcripts of the Nixon White House tapes. Building on William Quandt's leading study of the conflict, Daigle links the early 1970s with the emergence of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and the hardening of the Palestinian issue later in the decade. For scholars of the Arab-Israeli conflict and modern Middle Eastern history, *The Limits of Détente* forces a reassessment of Egypt's war aims, the startled Israeli response, and the long-term impact of American ascendancy in the region.

After Israel's victory in the 1967 War, the Arab-Israeli conflict moved to the center of Cold War diplomacy. The Soviet Union rebuilt the shattered Arab armies, dispatching five thousand military advisers to Gamal Abdel Nasser's Egypt. Daigle situates local events as a

proxy of superpower rivalry, highlighting how unrest in the Middle East was a central test of US-Soviet relations over Vietnam and arms reduction. Moscow wanted a political settlement to avoid further military confrontation in the Middle East. Richard Nixon's 1968 election paved the way for potential change, as the new president was suspicious of Washington's tilt towards Israel and equally apprehensive that missteps in the Arab world had undermined US strategic interests in the region. Soon after he entered office, Nixon told William Rogers, his Secretary of State, that he sought an "even-handed policy" (p. 17) to reach an Arab-Israeli settlement, including Israel's return of the territories occupied in 1967.

Nixon focused on strategic Cold War priorities and pursued direct negotiations with the Soviet Union as a means of enhancing his commitment to détente, but never followed through with the details of a peace agreement. As successive rounds of negotiations unfolded, from the "Two Power" talks to the Rogers Plan, the prospect of further regional escalation grew. Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, viscerally affected by the "trauma" (p. 54) of forced withdrawals from the Sinai and Gaza Strip under US and Soviet pressure in 1957, resisted the imposition of an Arab-Israeli settlement. The Israeli Prime Minister undercut the efforts of Secretary Rogers, who stressed the principal of UN Security Council Resolution 242 and advocated for a "just settlement" (p. 48) to the Palestinian refugee question. Although Rogers was formally in charge of Arab-Israeli issues, Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, outmaneuvered him. Responding to the idea of forced Israeli withdrawal, Kissinger remarked "the longer Israel holds its conquered Arab territory, the longer the Soviets cannot deliver what the Arabs want" (p. 72). The struggle between these two statesmen, which Daigle charts throughout the book, represented competing notions of US internationalism in the late Cold War—Roger's regional focus on conflict management and Kissinger's emphasis on the exercise of global power.

Daigle provides extensive treatment of Soviet diplomacy, particularly around the decision to intervene on behalf of Egypt in the War of Attrition. Nasser's death in 1970 and the rise of Anwar el-Sadat signaled an important shift, with an Egyptian pivot to the US reshaping the balance of power in the region. Sadat feared détente would leave his country in a "perpetual stalemate with Israel" (p. 196), a well-founded worry given US and Israeli satisfaction with the status quo. By 1972, both superpowers had rebuffed Sadat's diplomatic efforts, and it became clear to the Egyptian leader that neither the US nor the Soviet Union was interested in settling the Arab-Israeli conflict. Sadat told a reporter a few months before launching the surprise October 1973 invasion that "the time has come for a shock... Everyone has fallen asleep over the Mideast crisis" (p. 260). Daigle convincingly argues that war had become Sadat's most viable option, "not to defeat Israel militarily, which he knew he could not do, but rather to reignite the stalled political process by creating a 'crisis of détente'" (p. 8).

The book's ninth and final chapter looks at the course of the war and Kissinger's brokering of a cease-fire. Daigle conveys a sense of deep internal divisions over the massive US airlift of tanks and airplanes to reverse Israel's fortunes against the two-front Egyptian and Syrian attack, as well as mounting concerns from US allies over a potential Arab oil embargo. With Nixon consumed by the Watergate scandal, Kissinger travelled to Moscow and met with Brezhnev to successfully negotiate an end to the war. The terms of the agreement, passed as UN Security Council Resolution 338, signified a return to the 1967 boundaries. Nixon's envoy was received bitterly by Prime Minister Meir, who opposed the invocation of UN Resolution 242 and the conditions of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. Kissinger assured her the wording of 242 was a "joke" (p. 317) and proceeded to give the Israelis a green light to ignore the cease-fire while he flew back to Washington. The furious Soviet response to Israel's

subsequent military advancements nearly precipitated a superpower crisis, but Brezhnev backed down from his threat of unilateral action.

Although Sadat suffered a military defeat in the war, he managed to move the Arab-Israeli crisis “to the forefront of American foreign policy” (p. 331) and began the process of securing Sinai’s return to Egyptian hands. For the Egyptian leader, the war “was an unparalleled success” (p. 336), but as Daigle asks in his conclusion, “at what cost?” (p. 344). It is a question that requires further attention. As Soviet influence waned, the Cold War rivalry in the Arab-Israeli arena gave way to a burgeoning US alliance with Egypt and intensified relationship with Israel. The onset of Kissinger’s “Shuttle Diplomacy” in the aftermath of 1973 eased tensions between Israel, Egypt and Syria, but undermined the possibility of a peace deal that would include the Palestinians. While President Jimmy Carter’s expansive aims in 1977 included an invitation to the Soviet Union to help broker a comprehensive settlement, Sadat moved to a separate peace at Camp David. This decision abandoned Egypt’s Arab allies and left the Palestinian issue languishing in failed autonomy negotiations. Returning the Sinai was Israel’s price for retaining the West Bank. The consequences of the 1973 War are therefore not only significant as a test of superpower détente, but also in prolonging regional conflict indefinitely.

Daigle’s writing style is clear and engaging, with close attention paid to the relationship between Nixon and Kissinger and their colorful views of how to manage Arab-Israeli affairs. [For example, here is the President on Prime Minister Golda Meir: “Henry, the time has now come that we’ve got to squeeze the old woman” (p. 245).] The book is filled with photographs and helpful maps, although the lack of a separate bibliography is unfortunate. While primarily focused on the US and Soviet role in the Middle East, *The Limits of Détente* also provides fresh

insight into Israeli thinking, the rise of Sadat, and broader regional ramifications. In a field attuned to the intricacies of local dynamics, this wider international lens is a welcome addition.