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Strategising Peace Through Power: Henry Kissinger's *Realpolitik* and Shuttle Diplomacy in the Early 1970s Middle East

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Abstract: Henry Kissinger, one of the most influential and controversial diplomats of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, played a pivotal role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East through his shuttle diplomacy following the Yom Kippur War. This article explores the multidimensional and layered nature of Kissinger's strategy, grounded in the geostrategic concepts of Saul Bernard Cohen. While Kissinger's mission aimed to end hostilities between Israel and its Arab neighbours, it also sought to counterbalance the expanding Soviet influence in the region, a critical aspect often overlooked in the existing scholarly work. By examining the geopolitics of oil, power, and influence through the lens of the Carter Doctrine, this study illustrates how Kissinger's *realpolitik* not only influenced the Arab-Israeli peace negotiations but also altered the dynamics of the Cold War, thereby reshaping the course of history.

Keywords: Henry Kissinger, mediated communication, Soviet Union, Yom Kippur War, geopolitics, oil.

Introduction

Henry Kissinger, a prominent figure in international politics, was an influential US diplomat during the Cold War era. His extensive career in geopolitics, diplomacy, and foreign policy left an indelible mark on global affairs from the latter half of the 20th century into the early 21st century. He passed on November 29, 2023, leaving

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a legacy of profound achievements and contentious debates regarding his methods and outcomes (Lazarowitz 2014). Kissinger's role was pivotal in shaping US foreign policy, whereas no other politician has seemingly had such a long-lasting impact. John Kirby, a national security spokesperson under President Biden, reflected on Kissinger's influence: "there's no question that he shaped foreign policy decisions for decades, and he certainly had an impact on America's role in the world" (Jones 2023, 1). His tenure was marked by a unique blend of intellectual rigour and strategic foresight, contributing to significant shifts in international relations.

Significantly, Kissinger's approach to diplomacy was characterised by his adept handling of complex global issues and his ability to navigate the multifaceted powers of a superpower—politically, economically, militarily, technologically, and culturally. David Sanger (2023, 14), a contemporary historian, notes, "Henry Kissinger conducted American foreign policy with a distinctive assurance and panache that gave dramatic force to his tenure as secretary of state, transforming almost every global relationship he touched". Among his notable achievements, Kissinger facilitated a historical rapprochement with China and eased tensions with the Soviet Union through *détente*, which led to pivotal agreements on nuclear weapons control. Additionally, his efforts significantly improved relations between Israel and its Arab neighbours, culminating in the 1978 Camp David Agreement. Furthermore, his role in the Paris Peace Agreement helped conclude US involvement in Vietnam. These contributions were globally recognised when he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1973 (Isaacson 2005). Kissinger's diplomatic career, characterised by strategic mastery and controversial decisions, remains a significant chapter in the annals of US foreign policy, highlighting the complex interplay of power, diplomacy, and global strategy. His legacy continues to provoke discussion and analysis among scholars and policymakers, underscoring his profound impact on international relations.

At the same time, Henry Kissinger remains one of the most divisive figures in modern political history. His pragmatic approach to geopolitics, often described as ruthless and Machiavellian, involved actions that overlooked human rights abuses to further US national interests. His policies, especially toward smaller states, which he allegedly considered merely pawns in a global chess game, have sparked significant controversy (Holland and Arshad 2023). While his strategic manoeuvres on the global stage are undeniable, his legacy is marred by the heavy human cost associated with his decisions.

Critics argue that Kissinger's actions led to catastrophic consequences for populations across South America and Southeast Asia, with over three million lives lost—an accusation that cements his status as a polarising figure. The renowned British author and critic Christopher Hitchens vehemently opposed Kissinger,

suggesting he should be “shamed, ostracised, and excluded” for his actions (2001, 3). His indifference towards the genocide in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, and the approval of Indonesia’s secret invasion of East Timor, which resulted in the deaths of over 100,000 people, highlight his controversial application of *realpolitik*. Kissinger’s own words, “The illegal we do immediately, the unconstitutional takes a little longer”, capture the audacity of his approach to international policy (Isaacson 2005). David Sanger (2023, 2) encapsulates Kissinger’s complex personality: “He was vain, conspiratorial, arrogant, and short-tempered, a man capable of praising a top aide as indispensable while ordering the F.B.I. to illegally tap his home phones to see if he was leaking to the press”. These critiques underscore the duality of Kissinger’s legacy as both a master strategist and a figure whose methods and outcomes have been questioned for their ethical implications.

Either way, Henry Kissinger will be remembered for his distinctive approach to international relations, prioritising national interests and the balance of power while often disregarding ideological, ethical, and moral considerations. His strategy, firmly anchored in *realpolitik*, significantly shaped US foreign policy from the conclusion of the Second World War to the present day (Grandin 2015). Beyond his diplomatic endeavours, Kissinger’s academic contributions, comprising numerous books and scholarly articles, have left an indelible mark on the intellectual landscape. His theories on strategy and diplomacy continue to influence new generations of scholars and practitioners, whether they view his actions favourably or critically. Admirers praise Kissinger for his foresight and boldness, lauding him as a visionary strategist and a master of diplomacy with a profound understanding of global dynamics. In contrast, critics focus on the ethical and moral shortcomings of his policies, pointing to the adverse consequences of his pragmatic approach to global politics. Such divergent perspectives underscore the complexity of Kissinger’s legacy (Anter Hamdi 2018). This duality in Kissinger’s career is exemplified in his application of shuttle diplomacy during the Arab-Israeli conflict in the early 1970s. His efforts in the Middle East, characterised by a realistic approach to negotiation and conflict resolution, have drawn both acclaim and criticism, highlighting the enduring debate over the balance between ethical considerations and strategic interests in foreign policy. This aspect of Kissinger’s work forms the core of the present research, exploring the nuances and outcomes of his strategies within this fraught geopolitical context (Sheehan 1976).

A comprehensive analysis of Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy, framed within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics and US strategic interests, was achieved through a combination of scientific methods. The research began with a historical and content analysis of relevant documents, records, diplomatic communications, and scholarly work to establish a clear understanding of the wider context.

Geopolitical theory analysis, particularly the concepts of Saul Bernard Cohen, was applied to examine the role of geography, power, and national interests in shaping Kissinger's diplomatic decisions. Central to the analysis is the question: How did these factors influence Kissinger's choices, with implications extending beyond the Middle East? Focusing on the Yom Kippur War and the subsequent peace negotiations between Israel, Egypt, and other Arab nations, the study employs a case study approach to illustrate the practical application of Kissinger's *Realpolitik*. Finally, a thorough analysis of the US policies and strategies in the Middle East, including the Carter Doctrine, is conducted within a larger geopolitical framework centred on the Soviet Union.

The research supports the main argument that Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy was a complex strategic manoeuvre deeply rooted in *realpolitik* within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics. Although presented in the context of peace negotiations, Kissinger's efforts in the early 1970s were ultimately aimed at curbing Soviet influence and maintaining the global balance of power during the Cold War. The research is structured logically, beginning with an introduction that provides the historical context and an overview of shuttle diplomacy. It progresses with the theoretical framework, followed by a detailed analysis of Kissinger's strategy and shuttle diplomacy in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. The study further explores strategic objectives, global implications, and the enduring legacy of these diplomatic efforts.

Revolutionising diplomacy: Henry Kissinger and the strategic evolution of shuttle diplomacy

Building upon the foundational context of Henry Kissinger's diplomatic tenure, the concept of shuttle diplomacy, particularly his strategies during the early 1970s around the Yom Kippur War, merits closer examination. Shuttle diplomacy is often traced back to Kissinger and is typified by the efforts of a mediator, who acts as a communication conduit between the parties in conflict. This form of diplomacy involves a mediator—typically a seasoned diplomat or a notable political figure—travelling extensive distances to negotiate between two or more parties unwilling or unable to engage directly at the negotiation table due to a variety of diplomatic, political, military, or other barriers (Beisner 1990; Burke and Matisek 2020).

The technique of shuttle diplomacy or mediated communication is characterised by its reliance on private caucus sessions. These sessions, where the mediator holds separate meetings with each party involved in the conflict, are

crucial for discussing issues and advancing negotiations. Dwight Golann, a respected scholar and mediator, highlights the significance of these sessions in his work, “Mediating Legal Disputes: Effective Strategies for Lawyers and Mediators”. He describes private caucuses as “the distinguishing feature of mediation and the context in which most of the essential work is done” (Golann 1996, 32). This approach allows the mediator to navigate complex diplomatic waters effectively, ensuring that all voices are heard while maintaining the confidentiality necessary for candid discussions. Through this method, Kissinger was able to facilitate a meaningful dialogue between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states, subtly manoeuvring through the intricacies of Middle Eastern politics. This strategy not only underscores the practical application of shuttle diplomacy but also illustrates its pivotal role in resolving disputes that seemed insurmountable by conventional diplomatic means (Suri 2009).

The overarching goal of shuttle diplomacy is to mediate differences and facilitate a resolution to entrenched conflicts by bringing divergent positions closer together. This form of diplomacy is exceptionally personal and involves high-pressure negotiations where the mediator conveys messages, ideas, proposals, and terms from one side to another, aiming to bridge gaps and craft a mutually acceptable agreement. The complexity of this process cannot be overstated; it demands not only the ability to negotiate each side’s demands but also a nuanced understanding of the historical grievances, cultural differences, and political realities underpinning the dispute. The effectiveness of shuttle diplomacy hinges significantly on the mediator’s negotiation skills and reputation (Hoffman 2011). According to Fey and Ramsay (2010), success also depends on the mediator’s profound knowledge of the local context and the complex factors that have led to the conflict, as well as his ability to build trust between the parties and propose creative, innovative solutions that all stakeholders can accept. In the evolving landscape of global politics, shuttle diplomacy has expanded beyond mere conflict resolution to facilitate complex international agreements on a range of political, economic, and security issues. The distinctiveness of shuttle diplomacy lies in its capacity to be particularly effective in the early stages of conflict resolution, where direct open contacts between disputing parties are unlikely to yield successful outcomes. This method requires a mediator endowed with a unique set of skills, including patience, empathy, understanding, discretion, and impartiality (Crapol 1991; Gichoya 2016). These qualities enable the mediator to navigate the delicate intricacies of international relations and contribute to the resolution of conflicts that appear intractable by conventional diplomatic means.

Kissinger’s application of shuttle diplomacy during the early 1970s marked a revolutionary shift in international relations. This approach was novel at the time

and subsequently became a significant addition to the lexicon of diplomacy. It is fair to assert that Kissinger's use of shuttle diplomacy altered the course of diplomatic history. Before its formal recognition and naming, the method was employed, albeit sporadically and with varying degrees of success. For instance, during the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, Italy temporarily withdrew in protest against the denial of its irredentist claims, which were supposed to be recognised under the 1915 Treaty of London. In response, Colonel Edward House of the United States delegation attempted to mediate between Italy and Yugoslavia by holding separate talks with each delegation. Despite his efforts, House's mediation did not yield a successful resolution, ultimately contributing to the downfall of Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando's government and leading to the unilateral occupation of Fiume by Gabriele D'Annunzio (Grandin 2015; Stewart 2015). Similarly, in 1982, General Alexander Haig's efforts to mediate between Argentina and Britain during the Falklands War further illustrate that shuttle diplomacy, while innovative, does not guarantee success.

However, what distinguished Kissinger's approach was his relentless pursuit of strategic outcomes, introducing a dynamic component to diplomatic negotiations that emphasised results over process. This strategic innovation by Kissinger not only showcased the potential of shuttle diplomacy to resolve complex international issues but also highlighted the inherent risks and challenges associated with its practice. His efforts demonstrated that while the approach might not always lead to success, its effective application could indeed change the trajectory of international relations, paving the way for more nuanced and flexible diplomatic engagements in the future (Hoffman 2011).

From theory to practice: tracing the influence of Cohen's shatter belts on Kissinger's geopolitical strategy

Shuttle diplomacy, a pivotal element of Henry Kissinger's foreign policy strategy, is deeply rooted in the geostrategic theories of geographer Saul Bernard Cohen. Cohen's influence on Kissinger's approach and broader US foreign policy during the 1970s is well documented. In his seminal work, "Geography and Politics in a World Divided", Cohen provides a nuanced analysis of the global geopolitical landscape, considering geographical settings, regional developments, and the distribution of global power. He builds upon the classical geopolitical theories of Sir Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman, adapting these ideas to reflect the complexities of the Cold War era (Cohen 1973).

To fully appreciate Cohen's contributions to geopolitical thought, it is essential to revisit the foundational principles of geopolitics. The discipline posits that geography plays a critical role in shaping political power dynamics, fundamentally analysing "the connections and causal relationships between political power and geographic space" (Defarges 2006, 14). Michael T. Klare (2004a, 71) further defines geopolitics as the "competition among great powers and those aspiring to great power status for control over territory, resources, and strategically significant locations such as ports, canals, rivers, and other key points of economic and military interest". This competition for territorial dominance and resource control has been a central driver of foreign policy and a primary cause of global conflicts, particularly since the onset of the First World War. Geopolitics, therefore, is not merely a study of geographical features but an exploration of how major powers project their influence and engage in rivalries within specific geographic contexts (Kaldor *et al.* 2007).

The integration of Cohen's expanded geostrategic concepts into Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy illustrates how these theoretical frameworks influenced practical foreign policy decisions, shaping the dynamics of international relations during a turbulent period. The fundamental concept of geopolitics centres on the strategic ability to control and manipulate geographic areas to fulfil national interests. This dynamic often leads to significant tensions among major powers, manifesting in forms such as homogenisation and even imperialism, where political, military, and economic power is wielded to reorganise spaces—or the world itself—to suit specific national agendas. The pursuit of such control can have profound implications on international relations, often exacerbating conflicts and fostering competition over strategic territories and resources (Grygiel 2006).

The period under investigation in this research is particularly notable for the rise of non-state actors, especially multinational corporations, which have profoundly influenced global economic, political, and security dynamics. This era marks a significant shift in the landscape of geopolitics, expanding its focus from solely state-centric to a broader spectrum that includes these powerful entities. According to Mary Kaldor (2018, 44), geopolitics has evolved into "a multidimensional process which analyses conflicting strategies of different competitors (state and non-state actors) for the control of a certain area". The expanded view reflects the increasing complexity of global affairs, where various actors, each with their own agendas and capabilities, vie for influence and control.

Further complicating this geopolitical landscape is the rapid development of new technologies, particularly in the fields of communications and transport. These advancements have dramatically reshaped the way geographic attributes influence international relations. Contemporary geopoliticians are increasingly

focused on understanding how these technological developments, coupled with traditional geographic considerations, shape the dynamics within the international system (Jones 2023). This nuanced understanding underscores the intricate interplay between physical space and the technologically mediated capabilities of global actors, highlighting the evolving nature of geopolitical strategy in the modern era.

The discourse on geopolitics often traces its origins to Alfred Thayer Mahan's seminal analysis of the British Empire's expansion in the 16th and 17th centuries. Mahan posited that control over the seas and maritime routes was crucial for achieving imperialistic, and even hegemonic, dominance. This thesis underscored the superior speed and mobility of maritime vessels compared to land-based, animal-powered transportation methods during that era (Kellogg 2003; Venier 2004). The technological advancements that followed, particularly the invention of the railway, shifted the strategic balance, prompting Sir Halford Mackinder to advocate for the supremacy of land forces over naval capabilities. As the 20th century dawned and brought with it the advent of air travel, geopoliticians like Giulio Douhet began to emphasise the strategic importance of air superiority over sea and land forces. This period highlighted geopolitics as a central element in the strategic imperialist thinking of the great powers, often serving as a justification for colonial conquests and playing a significant role in the outbreak of the First World War (Defarges 2006).

The application of geopolitical theory continued to evolve, notably shaping the foundation of the US Cold War strategy aimed at containing the Soviet Union. This broadened the scope of geopolitics to encompass economic and military factors as well. The US drive to control vital resources—Middle Eastern oil, African minerals, and resources in the Pacific Rim, underscored by the Korean and Vietnam Wars—was heavily influenced by the geopolitical strategies of both military and civilian US strategists (Kaldor 2018). This historical reflection highlights the enduring relevance and adaptability of geopolitical thought in shaping international relations and strategic decisions across different eras and technological landscapes.

Today, geopolitics remains a central doctrine in US geostrategic planning, particularly in its engagement with regions abundant in natural resources, such as the Middle East, Central Asia, and Africa. Understanding the logic and reasoning behind US involvement in these areas necessitates a geopolitical perspective, where the control of resources is synonymous with wealth, power, and dominance. This approach aligns significantly with the theories of Sir Halford Mackinder and Nicholas Spykman, whose concepts of the Heartland and Rimland continue to influence perceptions of global strategic competition, especially in the critical areas of Eurasia and the Middle East where geopolitical tensions and conflicts are pronounced (Ashton 2017).

Saul Bernard Cohen further refines this geopolitical understanding by adapting traditional premises about the influence of geography on foreign policy and strategic decision-making. In his reinterpretation, Cohen introduces the concept of geopolitical “shatter belts”, regions uniquely significant due to their strategic vulnerabilities and roles in global power dynamics. He categorises the world into three primary geostrategic regions: the Maritime World, the Eurasian Continental World, and the Peripheral World. According to Cohen, each region possesses a distinct geopolitical character and faces specific challenges that are pivotal in shaping the broader contours of international relations (Cohen 1973, 11). This nuanced understanding of geopolitical divisions highlights the complex interplay of geographic, economic, and strategic factors that define global politics today. As defined by Cohen, the Maritime World includes the United States, its Western European allies, and the Pacific Rim nations, characterised by their liberal political democracies and free-market economies, all of which emphasise maritime security. The binding factor among these countries is the paramount importance they place on maritime trade and the strategic sea lanes, advocating for unimpeded passage through international waters and critical choke points. This collective stance underscores the significance of maintaining open and secure maritime routes essential for global trade and economic stability (Cohen 1973, 11).

Conversely, the Eurasian Continental World comprises major continental powers like Russia and China. Historically, these nations have consistently aimed to challenge the maritime powers and assert their global influence. Their strategic focus lies in the protection and control of vast landmasses and the establishment of buffer zones, which serve as barriers against potential threats and as instruments of political and military leverage. In the context of Cohen’s geostrategic model, the Peripheral World consists of developing countries in South America, Africa, the Middle East, and parts of Asia. These regions become arenas of intense geopolitical competition among the great powers from the Maritime and Eurasian Continental Worlds due to their rich natural resources and strategic geographical positions. Cohen’s introduction of “geostrategic rims,” which encircle the primary geostrategic regions, highlights the importance of stability and security in these peripheral areas as crucial elements in securing the geopolitical interests of the core regions (Venier 2004).

A novel aspect of Cohen’s theory is the dynamic nature of geostrategic rims and shatter belts. He suggests that shifts in economic, political, and military power balances can lead to changes in borders and alter the strategic significance of certain countries and regions. This fluidity is vital for understanding regional dynamics and the interplay between and within geostrategic rims and shatter belts. It plays a significant role in global security developments and strategic

planning. Overall, Cohen's geostrategic concepts provide a comprehensive theoretical framework that integrates geography with strategic analysis. This approach offers insightful perspectives on the complex relationships between great powers, strategic regions, and the ongoing geopolitical challenges that shape contemporary international relations and future global strategies (Tagliapietra 2012).

Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy and the geopolitical struggle with the Soviet Union in the early 1970s Middle East

Building on the foundational concepts outlined by Cohen, Henry Kissinger's interpretation of geopolitics is prominently reflected in his strategic, conservative doctrine, which emphasises the defence, preservation, and protection of national interests. That is achieved through skilful manipulation and maintenance of the volatile international balance of power (Suri 2009). Kissinger views the balance of power as a multi-layered concept encompassing political, economic, and military aspects. At the core of Kissinger's geopolitical analysis is the prioritisation of power over law in all forms and the preference for peace over justice. This perspective aligns closely with *realpolitik* principles, positing that stable world order can only be achieved through reliance on military power, underscoring his realist approach to international relations. As Ćurak (2011, 54) notes, "Strife is inherent in the geopolitical world", which is a sentiment echoed by many realists, including Kissinger.

Another critical aspect of Kissinger's focus on geopolitics is the concept of control, especially over nuclear weapons, which he considers essential for international stability and asserting leadership in foreign policy. His views on the Middle East are particularly influenced by historical parallels; he likened the region's tumultuous dynamics to those of seventeenth-century Europe during the Thirty Years' War, which began as a religious conflict. This comparison highlights the significant role of religion and ideology in the geopolitical landscape of the Israeli-Arab conflict, illustrating how deeply historical and cultural elements are embedded in Kissinger's analysis of global strife (Beisner 1990). This connection between past and present conflicts underscores the complexity of geopolitical challenges and the necessity of understanding the multifaceted nature of international relations.

During the peace negotiations following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Henry Kissinger, employing his then-avant-garde shuttle diplomacy, was deeply cognisant

of the complex realities influencing the conflict. Israel sought “recognition for a homeland based on a Biblical claim and a symbolic end to the persecutions that have haunted the Jewish people for two millennia, capped by the Holocaust” (Sheehan 1976, 19). Conversely, for the Arabs and particularly the Palestinians, Israel’s objectives were perceived as demands for acquiescence to the loss of their cultural, religious, and territorial heritage. Kissinger understood that conflicts framed in such terms are “unlikely to be settled definitively by an agreement, even if one were to be drafted, through precise verbal agreements or explicit consent” (Sheehan 1976, 20). Kissinger believed that the optimal resolution would involve “peaceful coexistence,” which could be fostered by shaping the strategic and political environment rather than through legal or formal compromises. From his realist viewpoint, the most effective way to approach these types of conflicts was not through seeking compromise but rather through the physical and psychological exhaustion of the parties involved. This approach underscores the profound challenges inherent in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a struggle that has persisted despite decades of US involvement. Kissinger’s insights reveal the inherent limitations of diplomatic efforts in conflicts deeply rooted in historical, cultural, and religious identities, highlighting the intricate and enduring nature of geopolitical disputes (Stewart 2015).

In terms of Saul Cohen’s conceptual framework of the shatter belt regions, the US geostrategic priorities can be broadly summarised as follows: strengthening partnerships with South America and Europe, maintaining equilibrium with Asia, ensuring peace and securing energy resources in the Middle East, and providing humanitarian assistance to African nations. This encapsulation effectively distils the essence of US geopolitics on a global scale. Within the complex geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, oil emerges as a critical factor, serving as a primary catalyst for the prolonged US involvement in the region. The significance of oil, both as a strategic resource and a driving force behind various geopolitical manoeuvres, will be explored in greater detail subsequently (Hamdi 2018). This broad overview sets the stage for a deeper examination of the intricate interplay between natural resources and international relations, particularly as they pertain to US foreign policy in the key geopolitical shatter belts.

Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy emerged in the turbulent wake of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973, a conflict initiated by Egyptian and Syrian forces against Israel with the aim of reclaiming territories lost during the 1967 Six-Day War—namely, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. From January to May 1974, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, whose efforts gave rise to the term “shuttle diplomacy”, coined by a reporter observing his numerous flights between Middle Eastern capitals, embarked on a strenuous diplomatic

mission to broker peace and secure a disengagement agreement.³ During this period, Kissinger tirelessly travelled between the capitals of Riyadh, Amman, Damascus, Cairo, and Jerusalem, dedicating an unprecedented amount of time and effort to mediating between the Arab states and Israel. The complexity and intensity of these negotiations were not only a challenge for the participants but also for the observers, marking a seminal phase in US foreign policy wherein it actively sought to sculpt a comprehensive post-war strategy for the Arab-Israeli conflict. The US diplomatic commitment to resolving this longstanding dispute was palpable, illustrated by extensive travels and exhaustive negotiations undertaken by Kissinger (Isaacson 2005; Suri 2009).

This intensive diplomatic engagement ultimately culminated in a historic agreement. The protracted and demanding nature of the negotiations, involving hundreds of thousands of kilometres travelled and thousands of hours of dialogue, highlights the commitment and strategic acumen that defined Kissinger's approach to international relations. The results of these efforts, while not immediate, were significant, shaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and establishing a precedent for future US involvement in the region (Suri 2009; Young 2022; Zubarenko 2020). This episode serves as a pivotal example of how tenacious diplomacy and a deep understanding of regional dynamics can lead to meaningful progress in seemingly intractable conflicts. On a revealing occasion, Kissinger said to a friend, "I never treat crises when they are cold, only when they are hot" (Sheehan 1976, 41), illustrating his strategic preference for engaging in negotiations at moments of heightened tension. This approach allowed him to leverage the urgency of "hot" crises, manipulating situations to pivot the involved parties against one another, often navigating them through conflicts he had a hand in exacerbating. Such tactics are indicative of Kissinger's complex and often controversial methods of diplomacy.

Viewing Israel as the pivotal US ally in the Middle East, Kissinger adhered to the strategic doctrine of the Nixon administration, which posited that in the event

³ Following Henry Kissinger's diplomatic efforts in the Middle East after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, which involved frequent trips—"shuttling"—between Israel, Egypt, Syria, and other involved parties to conduct direct bilateral negotiations, a journalist coined the term "shuttle diplomacy". This term captures the essence of a diplomatic method designed to facilitate peace agreements that might not be achievable through traditional, stationary diplomatic channels. The journalist intended to describe a new, innovative, and dynamic approach to diplomacy, reflecting the unique and complex political landscape of the Middle East at the time. Although the identity of the journalist who coined the term "shuttle diplomacy" remains unknown, the phrase quickly gained widespread popularity and has since become a standard term in diplomatic discourse. For further information, see Isaacson (2005) and Suri (2009).

of failed negotiations, a militarily and economically robust Israel would be the most effective deterrent against war and serve US strategic interests in the region (Tagliapietra 2012). However, the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East during this period was also significantly influenced by the Soviet Union, which provided substantial military support to Egypt and other Arab nations. Determined not to let Egypt's military capabilities surpass Israel's, Kissinger focused on diminishing Soviet influence in Egypt—a goal he eventually achieved. Following the initial military successes of Syria and Egypt on October 8 and 9, Kissinger was among the first to recognise that the balance of power was not in their favour. Nevertheless, he chose not to immediately rectify this imbalance. Instead, he strategically delayed intervention to prevent any side from achieving a decisive victory, thereby using the results of these early confrontations as leverage to initiate negotiations (Gichoya 2016; Zeleneva 2013).

This approach exemplifies Kissinger's intricate balance of power strategy, where his actions were guided by the dual objectives of maintaining regional stability and securing US geopolitical interests through calculated manipulation and diplomatic finesse. Kissinger believed that Israel should not make concessions to the Arab states until it had attained sufficient self-confidence, which he argued could best be achieved by ensuring its military superiority over individual Arab nations. Over time, he addressed demands for the restoration of territories by supplying Arab countries with advanced technology and weapons, facilitating modernisation processes to position the United States as the primary arms supplier in the region, and supplanting the Soviet Union (Burke and Matisek 2020). By compelling Syria and Egypt to engage in negotiations, Kissinger conveyed that although they could initiate conflict using Soviet-provided arms, they could not regain territories without diplomatic engagements. His strategy highlighted the ineffectiveness of Soviet support, emphasising that true negotiations that could alter the status quo would see the United States and Israel playing pivotal roles. Essentially, Kissinger aimed to demonstrate to key Arab nations, particularly Egypt, that peace in the Middle East was unattainable without US involvement.

The trajectory was fundamentally designed to curtail Soviet influence in the Middle East. During the late sixties and early seventies, the Soviet Union had significantly expanded its presence in the Mediterranean, posing a direct challenge to US national interests. After their defeat in the Six-Day War, Egypt and Syria sought Soviet assistance to rebuild their military capabilities, which led to an increased Soviet naval presence in Mediterranean ports. Kissinger's primary objective was to prevent any Arab military action against Israel that could potentially escalate into a conflict involving the world's two superpowers, especially during a period when he was actively pursuing *détente* with the Soviet Union (Robb

2013; Yergin 2020). Concurrently, a strategic US goal was to inhibit the Soviets from achieving a dominant position in the region. To this end, Kissinger focused on strengthening the ties between Israel and Egypt, thereby ensuring that the US remained a central figure in Middle Eastern geopolitics. This strategy not only aimed to secure a balance of power but also to foster regional stability by integrating US diplomacy as a key element in resolving Middle Eastern disputes (Pevgi and Nakul 2012).

The first significant opportunity for Kissinger's diplomatic strategy arose following the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1970 and the subsequent rise of Anwar al-Sadat to power. In a private meeting with Kissinger, Sadat expressed a desire for the implementation of UN Resolution 242, which called for Israel's withdrawal from the Sinai Peninsula. However, Kissinger cautioned that, given the extreme nature of such demands, Israel was unlikely to make any concessions, suggesting instead that the border should be determined through mutual agreement. Recognising the need to balance Egypt's demand for sovereignty with Israel's security concerns, Kissinger advised a gradual approach, proposing that a peace conference would be the most viable means to reach a mutually acceptable solution—a suggestion that Sadat ultimately accepted (Lazarowitz 2014). Kissinger was clear in his stance that while the United States would never abandon Israel, it would also work to ensure that Arab rights were respected. With the promise of extensive benefits and various forms of US assistance, Sadat emerged as a central figure in Kissinger's Middle East policy, which involved close consultation with him on all regional initiatives. Demonstrating his commitment to this new alignment, Sadat took decisive steps to distance Egypt from Soviet influence. In 1971, he dismissed his deputy, Ali Sabri, who was leading the pro-Soviet faction within the government. By the summer of 1972, Sadat had expelled 20,000 Soviet technicians and military advisors from Egypt (Hoffman 2011).

Under Sadat's leadership, Egypt became the first Arab nation to break from the pan-Arab movement that opposed Israel's existence and the first to officially recognise the state of Israel. This shift marked a significant realignment in Middle Eastern politics, underscoring the effectiveness of Kissinger's diplomatic efforts in reshaping the region's geopolitical landscape by fostering a new relationship between Egypt and the United States, one that would play a pivotal role in the peace process (Kaldor 2012; Lazarowitz 2014). Kissinger believed that resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict would not substantially diminish Soviet influence in the Middle East. Consequently, he strategically downplayed the significance of this conflict, skilfully sidestepping the Palestinian issue despite its centrality to the broader Arab-Israeli dispute. As Howard Korn (1990, 17) observed, "for Kissinger, the Middle East

was a huge chessboard where the United States had to play a diplomatic match against the Soviet Union”.

Kissinger’s strategy involved keeping the United Nations at a distance while avoiding conflict escalation that could draw in both superpowers. He recognised that the territories Egypt lost in the 1967 war could not be regained through military means. For negotiations to proceed, it was crucial that Israel was not decisively defeated or the Arab nations humiliated (Goldstein and Makovsky 2010). This delicate balancing act was emblematic of Kissinger’s broader strategy: preserving détente with the Soviet Union while simultaneously curbing its influence in the Middle East. By positioning the United States as an indispensable mediator, he gradually shifted the key Middle Eastern countries away from Soviet alignment. An important turning point came when the prospect of including the Golan Heights in negotiations incentivised Arab nations to lift their oil embargo, further solidifying the US’s pivotal role in the region (Zubarenko 2020). Through these manoeuvres, Kissinger not only managed to prevent a superpower confrontation but also established the US as a dominant force in Middle Eastern diplomacy, effectively weakening Soviet influence and reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the region.

The Carter doctrine: Shaping US geopolitical strategy in the global power struggle with the USSR

“Oil has literally made foreign and security policy for decades”.

Bill Richardson, Secretary of Energy, 1999
(cited in Kaldor *et al.* 2007, 1)

The possession of significant domestic oil supplies, with unimpeded access to the world’s largest reserves—particularly those in the Middle East—was crucial in securing the United States’ dominant position relative to the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, by the early 1970s, US oil production had peaked, leading to increased dependence on imported oil. This shift coincided with a period of intense nationalisation of oil companies in the Middle East, sharp spikes in oil prices, and the outbreak of numerous conflicts and wars, all of which threatened the stability of global oil supplies (Klare 2009; Ramachandran 2017).

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union emerged as the world’s largest oil producer, surpassing the United States and leveraging high oil prices to fuel significant investments in its economy and military industry. This newfound economic strength allowed the Soviet Union to expand its influence in Third World countries, challenging US dominance. The ongoing crises in the Middle East exacerbated these

tensions, jeopardising US access to oil in the region and raising fears that the Soviet Union might gain the upper hand in the Cold War. This broader geopolitical context also threatened to destabilise the US leadership within the Western alliance. The control over global oil resources, from the end of the Second World War to the present, has been a cornerstone of the US strategy to maintain its dominant position within the international system (Lustick 2020). The intertwining of energy security and geopolitical strategy underscores the critical importance of oil in shaping the balance of power during the Cold War and beyond, highlighting the stakes involved in US foreign policy decisions in the Middle East during this period.

Two pivotal events at the end of the 1970s significantly reinforced and validated the US geopolitical and geostrategic approach to the Middle East, initially set in motion by Henry Kissinger a few years earlier. These events were the culmination of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both of which occurred in the same year, sending shock waves through the US military and civilian establishment and necessitating decisive action. The entire US administration, spanning both Republican and Democratic parties, recognised these developments as serious threats to the uninterrupted access and flow of oil from the Persian Gulf—a region of immense strategic importance to the United States, given that it holds two-thirds of the world's oil reserves (Hill and Taspinar 2006).

In a critical address to the US Congress on January 23, 1980, President Jimmy Carter (1980, 1) unequivocally stated, “Let our position be absolutely clear: An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force”. This declaration marked the adoption of a radical foreign policy strategy, wherein the US explicitly committed to using military force to secure and protect its access to Middle Eastern oil. This strategic commitment, articulated by Carter nearly half a century ago, continues to guide US engagement in the Middle East to this day (Pavgi and Kadaba 2012). It underscores the enduring importance of the region in US foreign policy, rooted in the necessity of maintaining control over vital energy resources as a means of sustaining global influence and national security. The fear of Soviet influence expanding, particularly in the Middle East, was central to Kissinger's geopolitical strategy in the early 1970s. This concern was later institutionalised under President Jimmy Carter. Although Kissinger had successfully convinced Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat in 1973 to expel Soviet military personnel and sever ties with the Soviet Union through skilful manoeuvring, manipulation, and diplomacy, the US geopolitical nightmare materialised in 1979 when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan. This invasion brought Soviet troops

within approximately 500 kilometres of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical choke point through which a significant portion of the world's oil supply passes (Young 2022).

At the time, the United States perceived this move as an attempt by the Soviet Union to consolidate its power and strategic position in a region crucial for global oil transport. The potential threat to the flow of Middle Eastern oil was a direct challenge to US strategic interests. In response and following the announcement of the Carter Doctrine, the US faced a significant dilemma: it lacked military forces in the Middle East capable of enforcing this new policy. To address this, Carter ordered the creation of the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), later transformed into Central Command (CENTCOM) by Ronald Reagan three years later. Since 1979, the US has established over 200 military bases from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, alongside the already present Sixth Fleet, a floating military base designed to support a wide range of military operations. These bases have played pivotal roles in major conflicts, including the First Gulf War, the war in Afghanistan, the invasion of Iraq, military operations in Syria, and ongoing military engagements in Yemen, as well as in the United States' strategic posture against Iran. CENTCOM's area of responsibility is extensive, covering 27 countries from Spain, Portugal, and East Africa to the Far East and Central Asia. It also includes vital international waters such as the Mediterranean and Red Seas, the Persian Gulf, and the western parts of the Indian Ocean (Yergin 2020).

This strategic military expansion reflects the enduring influence of Kissinger's geopolitical thinking, with the United States continuing to prioritise the security of Middle Eastern oil supplies and countering Soviet, now Russian, influence in the region. All subsequent US presidents have adhered to the fundamental principles of the Carter Doctrine, invoking its maxims when engaging in Middle Eastern conflicts. Even Democratic President Bill Clinton, who did not explicitly reference the doctrine, remained committed to its core practices. It is crucial to emphasise that the Carter Doctrine, which outlined the US policy of using military force to ensure unobstructed access to Middle Eastern oil and to prevent Soviet, and now Russian, influence in the region, is not merely the policy of a single president or political party. Rather, it represents a bipartisan cornerstone of US foreign and security policy (Zeleneva 2013). This continuity across administrations underscores the enduring strategic importance of the Middle East to US interests and reflects the deep-seated belief in the necessity of maintaining influence over the region's critical energy resources. The doctrine's principles have transcended partisan divides, shaping US engagement in the Middle East for decades.

The Carter Doctrine remains as relevant today as it was when it was first articulated nearly fifty years ago, particularly in the face of contemporary challenges such as Iran's nuclear ambitions (Goldstein and Makovsky 2010). As

noted by Michael T. Klare (2009, 23), “The essential strategic premise of every US intervention in the Gulf, from 1980 to the present, is the core concept of the Carter Doctrine: to prevent a hostile power from taking control of the mineral resources in this part of the world”. While originally focused on the Persian Gulf, the doctrine has since expanded its reach globally, applying to oil-rich regions across South America, West Africa, the Caspian Sea, the Asia-Pacific region, and the South China Sea. The Carter Doctrine fundamentally reshaped America’s national security policy by militarising its foreign policy, making resource security a central mission of the US military. Klare (2004b, 67), one of the foremost authorities in this field, asserts that “resource security has become the primary mission of the US military”. President George W. Bush further globalised the Carter Doctrine, making it a central tenet of US foreign policy.

However, it is important to recall that, when President Carter (1980) declared in January 1980 that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force,” his focus was initially limited. The doctrine was primarily a warning directed at the Kremlin, cautioning the Soviet Union not to encroach upon a region of strategic importance to the United States (Yergin 2020). Over time, the doctrine has evolved to become a broader framework for US intervention in resource-rich regions worldwide, reflecting the ongoing importance of securing access to critical mineral resources in shaping US foreign and security policy.

Conclusion

Henry Kissinger stands out as one of the most influential and, at the same time, controversial statesmen and diplomats of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Although numerous scholarly works have been published on his academic and foreign policy achievements, including his role in the peace process in the Middle East following the Yom Kippur War, this manuscript distinguishes itself by emphasising the geopolitical multidimensionality and complexity of his shuttle diplomacy. Specifically, this research focuses on the intricate and multifaceted nature of Henry Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy in the early 1970s, situating it within the broader geopolitical context of the Cold War.

The central thesis of this article posits that Kissinger’s diplomatic efforts were not solely focused on achieving peace between Israel and its Arab neighbours; rather, they were strategically designed to thwart the expansion of Soviet influence

in the Middle East, thereby preserving the global balance of power in favour of the United States. Kissinger used the Arab-Israeli conflict as a platform to push the Soviet Union out of a region crucial to the economic and national security interests of the US. His broader goal was reasserting US influence at a time when its global standing was seriously undermined by the Vietnam War. Through skilful manoeuvring and manipulation of both the Arab countries and Israel, while carefully avoiding any disruption of *détente* with the Soviet Union, Kissinger succeeded in diminishing Moscow's influence in the Middle East. He managed to contain the situation, preventing it from escalating into an open conflict between the two Cold War superpowers. Ultimately, by altering the dynamics of the Cold War, Kissinger significantly influenced the course of history.

Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy exemplifies the complexities and risks inherent in strategic diplomatic negotiation, highlighting the personal dynamics of direct meetings with statesmen and the delicate balancing of conflicting interests. This approach, grounded in the geostrategic concepts of geographer Saul Bernard Cohen and characterised by *realpolitik*, accentuating pragmatism over moral or ideological considerations, has been both effective and controversial. One of the most telling examples of this controversy occurred during a meeting with the Saudi King Faisal al Saud when Kissinger candidly acknowledged the pragmatic underpinnings of his actions: "Your Majesty may not approve, but he must know why we acted as we did. We were motivated by a desire to prevent an increase of Communist influence, and when the Soviets began to send in arms, we had to react" (Sheehan 1976, 15). This statement underscores the often contentious nature of Kissinger's diplomacy, which prioritised geopolitical strategy over ideological alignment.

Notably, the research clearly demonstrates that Kissinger's diplomatic approach involved deliberate, skilful, strategic, and calculated manipulation of global geopolitical dynamics. By leveraging the political and emotional realities of all involved parties, each step of his calculated diplomatic actions was designed to bring about specific outcomes favourable to US national interest. A key finding of the study is the identification of Kissinger's strategy as a pivotal moment in the evolution of US foreign policy in the Middle East, highlighting its significant contribution to the long-term institutionalisation of the Carter Doctrine. This doctrine has since become a cornerstone of the US foreign and security policy, not only in the Middle East but also in other oil-rich regions around the world. In what was undoubtedly a critical juncture in the history of international relations and diplomacy, Kissinger succeeded in reshaping the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East and influencing the global political order. His actions set the stage for

future diplomatic negotiations and defined the geopolitical map of the region, leaving a lasting impact on the conduct of international diplomacy.

Moreover, Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy stands as a unique case study that will continue to be explored by both theorists and practitioners of diplomacy. It encapsulates the intricate complexities of international relations, showcasing the delicate balance between moral dilemmas and national interests, as well as the multi-layered issues that define the global stage—much like an iceberg, with some aspects immediately visible and others requiring deeper exploration to uncover the true underlying motives. His personal, hands-on approach, coupled with strategic leveraging of US military and technological superiority, solidified his position as both the most influential and the most controversial diplomat and statesman of the 20th century. Through this example, Kissinger masterfully revealed new insights into the geopolitics of oil, power, and influence.

Finally, this article reinforces the argument that Kissinger's diplomatic manoeuvring represents a sophisticated blend of peace diplomacy, geopolitics, power politics, and national interests. His strategy, characterised by its complex, multidimensional, and multi-layered nature, had a lasting impact on the stability of the Middle East and global power dynamics. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy, deeply rooted in *realpolitik*, demonstrated a strategic approach prioritising US national interests over conventional diplomatic and ethical norms. Kissinger's approach to "strategising peace through power" involved using military and geopolitical power as tools to achieve peace. Unlike the traditional concept of "strategising peace through strength", which suggests that military power alone can deter aggression and maintain peace as a byproduct of strength, "strategising peace through power" emphasises a more nuanced, calculated, and strategic application of power to achieve peace. In this context, power extends beyond mere military might to include diplomatic and economic influence, geopolitical manoeuvring, and even subtle coercion to achieve desired outcomes in diplomatic negotiations. The focus here is on strategically leveraging power through complex, indirect, and often manipulative means to secure peace and advance national interests.

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Selma DELALIĆ, Dželila MEKIĆ

**MOĆ U ULOZI STRATEGIJE MIRA:
REALPOLITIKA I ŠATL DIPLOMATIJA HENRIJA KISINDŽERA
NA BLISKOM ISTOKU RANIH 1970-IH GODINA**

Sažetak: Kroz svoju šatl diplomatiju nakon Jomkipurskog rata, Henri Kisindžer, jedan od najutjecajnijih i najkontroverznijih diplomata s kraja 20. i početka 21. stoljeća, odigrao je ključnu ulogu u oblikovanju geopolitičkog pejzaža Bliskog istoka. Ovaj članak istražuje višedimenzionalnu i slojevitu prirodu Kisindžerove strategije, utemeljene na geostrateškim konceptima Saula Bernarda Koena. Dok je Kisindžerova misija imala za cilj da okonča neprijateljstva između Izraela i njegovih arapskih suseda, ona je također nastojala da smanji rastući uticaj Sovjetskog Saveza u regionu, što je ključni aspekt koji se često zanemaruje u postojećim naučnim radovima. Istražujući geopolitiku nafte, moći i uticaja kroz prizmu Karterove doktrine, ovo istraživanje ilustrira na koji način je Kisindžerova realpolitika uticala ne samo na arapsko-izraelske mirovne pregovore, nego i u kojoj mjeri je izmijenila dinamiku Hladnog rata, preoblikujući, na taj način, tok istorije.

Ključne riječi: Henri Kisindžer, posrednička komunikacija, Sovjetski Savez, Jomkipurski rat, geopolitika, nafta.