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"History Shows Arafat can Extricate Himself"

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On October 23, 1973, then-Israeli General Ariel Sharon wanted to liquidate all semblance of Egypt's new presence on the eastern side of the Suez Canal.

After its surprise attack on Israel on October 6, Egypt, under President Anwar Sadat, had successfully implanted three army divisions on the Israeli-held east side of the canal. Egypt destroyed Israel's vaunted line of defense along the canal and exposed Israel's national vulnerability.

Israeli military leaders wanted to inflict as much pain as possible on Egypt. Retribution was Sharon's motivation.

But at the same time, Israeli society was traumatized by the loss of more than 2,200 soldiers, nearly 6,000 wounded and hundreds of Israeli POWs held. It was urgent for Israel to enter negotiations and have her POWs returned.

Before Israeli's prime minister, Golda Meir, reined in Sharon, his troops fully encircled the Egyptian Third Army, cutting it off from food and supplies. Had Sharon destroyed the 15,000-man Third Army, Sadat's presidency would surely have faltered and no negotiations would have occurred.

Enter Henry Kissinger. After Israeli and Egyptian generals negotiated a cease-fire and separation of forces, an Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement was signed. Both the Israeli trauma and the potential of Sadat's rule ending unceremoniously forced both sides to turn to American mediation.

Six years later President Carter finished the process when the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty was signed.

Events in 1973 and today are uncanny in similarity and perhaps outcome.

Within the last fortnight, 50 Israeli have died at the hands of Palestinian terrorists, and many more since the Palestinian uprising

began in September 2000. Israel is again a sullen and traumatized state. Yasser Arafat's helicopters and runways for escape are destroyed; he and his people are surrounded by Israeli troops. His condition is even more dire than Sadat's was in October 1973.

Is there a way for Arafat to extricate himself? Yes, if he wishes to use it.

The Bush administration publicly supports a Palestinian state and Jewish Israeli state alongside each other. Secretary of State Colin Powell requested an end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. Meanwhile, two senior U.S. envoys sit in Jerusalem waiting to mediate a cease-fire and restart security cooperation between the sides.

Ultimately, the Palestinian and Israeli people will have to share the land west of the Jordan River in separate states. This will mean a demilitarized Palestinian state with Jerusalem as the first city to be a shared and yet undivided capital of two states.

It will require sharing water sources; it will mean removing some Israeli settlements and being sure that the Palestinian state, if demilitarized, is contiguous. It will mean a Palestinian state that can't enter foreign alliances that would jeopardize Israeli security. And it will mean a firm commitment from primarily European and Arab donors that a foreign aid package of more than \$2 billion per year for a decade will be available for job creation and infrastructure needs.

There are no viable alternatives to these general outlines. The question is, will it happen before more needless killings occur? If Arafat postpones the inevitable indefinitely, it means that he cannot or will not be the Palestinian state's first president.