



Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War

By Victor Israelyan

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Victor Israelyan was a senior ambassador in the Soviet Foreign Ministry when the armies of Egypt and Syria invaded Israeli-occupied territory on October 6, 1973. Critical to the outcome of this conflict were the Soviet Union and the United States, whose diplomatic maneuverings behind the scenes eventually ended what came to be known as the Yom Kippur War. During the crisis, however, tensions between the superpowers nearly escalated into nuclear war. Israelyan is the first Soviet official to give us a firsthand account of what actually happened inside the Kremlin during these three important weeks in 1973.

Israelyan's account is a fascinating mixture of memoir, anecdotes, and historical reporting. As a member of Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko's staff, he was assigned to a four-man task force that attended the many Politburo meetings held during the war. The job of this task force was to take notes and prepare drafts of letters and other documents for the Politburo. In remarkable detail, made possible by his sharp memory and the notes and documents he saved, Israelyan chronicles the day-by-day activities of Kremlin leaders as they confronted the crisis. For the first time we can see how the cumbersome Soviet policy-making mechanism, headed by the Politburo, functioned in a tense international situation. We see how the actions of Henry Kissinger, Anwar Sadat, Hafiz al-Assad, and other participants in the crisis were interpreted in Moscow. From his own experience Israelyan gives us intimate portraits of top Soviet officials including Brezhnev, Gromyko, and Andropov. His access to important documents—including letters from Richard Nixon to Leonid Brezhnev, never officially released in the U.S.—provide a much-needed corrective to assertions made by Kissinger, Nixon, and Sadat about the war.

Supplemented by rare photographs and interviews with other Soviet officials, *Inside the Kremlin During the Yom Kippur War* is more than a record of the past. Israelyan offers a unique vantage point on the continuing Middle East conflict, and his candid assessment of the mindset of Russian leaders is instructive for understanding how the present leadership of Russia faces its new role in the post-Cold War world.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Not since Leon Trotsky’s writings in the 1930s has a witness to the foreign policy-making decision process of the Communist Party’s top leadership provided us with so substantive a work.”

—Alvin Z. Rubinstein, from the Foreword

“For more than 20 years, scholars and pundits have been writing about the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war with one enormous handicap: the missing piece of the puzzle was what was going on in Moscow during a crisis that brought the world to the brink of confrontation and set the stage for the unraveling of détente. Now a Kremlin insider has written the book that shines light on precisely this hitherto mysterious topic—and what a story it is! Almost all the assumptions about Soviet policy made by leading diplomats and scholars—American, Israeli, and Arab—seem to have been wrong. . . . One wishes other Soviet diplomats of Israelyan’s caliber would write honest memoirs of this sort on the other great crises of the Cold War. But for now, his stands alone as a model to be emulated.”

—*Foreign Affairs*

“. . . [A]n extraordinary and unprecedented memoir from a Soviet observer, Ambassador Victor Israelyan Writing from his notes, recollections, and interviews with other diplomats and policy makers, Israelyan has provided the first authoritative account of policy deliberations among Politburo members on any issue and, until Kremlin archives are opened, the most complete description of Politburo politics during a crisis.”

—*Middle East Journal*

“A fascinating eye-witness account Israelyan captures the atmosphere and mood of the Kremlin particularly well. From the hushed corridors and rooms, where officials lowered their voices to whispers, the figure of the General Secretary, Leonid Brezhnev, emerges as the clearly dominant and powerful personality who, at this time, still possessed considerable charisma, dynamism and quickness of mind. . . . [P]robably the most interesting, detailed and informative account of Soviet foreign policy decision-making to have emerged since the disintegration of the Soviet Union.”

—Roland Dannreuther

From the Inside Flap

“Memoirs are worthless if their authors attempt to present themselves as angels. I resolutely oppose those of my countrymen who shift responsibility for Soviet evils exclusively to the leaders. It is important that each

Soviet citizen realize and admit his or her share of the responsibility." -from On the Battlefields of the Cold War

For more than forty years Victor Israelyan served in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, rising through the ranks to become one of the Soviet Union's leading diplomats specializing in disarmament negotiations. He was forced to retire in 1987, a casualty of a system that was about to collapse under the weight of its contradictions. *On the Battlefields of the Cold War* offers unique insight into the volatile inner workings of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, where the battle lines of the Cold War were often first drawn.

Israelyan has no patience for those of his compatriots who argue that Soviet foreign policy was ultimately just, save for a few "aberrations" such as the invasions of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Afghanistan. These acts were intrinsic to the system, and without them the mighty Soviet Union would not have existed as long as it did. The very foundation of Soviet foreign policy, therefore, was untenable, and the entire structure it supported was destined to implode.

Israelyan brings to this memoir a wealth of experience, having worked with all the postwar Soviet foreign ministers—from Molotov and Vyshinsky to Gromyko and Shevardnadze—and established diplomatic ties to the West, particularly to the United States. As part of the middle tier of the diplomatic hierarchy, he was privy both to meetings of the Collegium of the Foreign Ministry as well as to the many informal, private discussions among rank-and-file diplomats. Israelyan explains how he and his colleagues, as faithful defenders of Soviet ideology, viewed the United States, the Soviet Union's main adversary and partner. He tells of distinct factions within the Soviet foreign policy apparatus—factions that Soviet leaders sought to hide, fearing that any internal divisions might be interpreted by outsiders as discord. This aging Cold Warrior—one who accepts that he belonged to the party that lost the war—relates a deeply human story whose legacy continues today.

About the Author

Victor Israelyan has had a rich and distinguished career as a physician, diplomat, scholar, and professor spanning more than five decades. During the 1970s and 1980s, he was one of the Soviet Union's leading diplomats specializing in disarmament negotiations. He retired from the Foreign Ministry in 1987. He has written more than ten books, including *Russian Diplomacy in Transition* (Penn State, forthcoming).

Users Review

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