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Matloff: This is Part IV of an oral history interview with Dr. James R. Schlesinger, held in Washington, D.C., on August 1, 1991, at 9:30 A.M. Again representing the OSD Historical Office are Drs. Alfred Goldberg and Maurice Matloff.

Dr. Schlesinger, we would like to go on with other

foreign area problems and crises in which you became involved during your tenure. First, let's turn to the Middle East. Just three months after you took office, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack against Israel, and you became involved. What role did you play during the Yom Kippur war of 1973?

Schlesinger: It shouldn't have been a surprise attack. Clearly, it was a sudden attack. However, we had good intelligence indicating that something was going on, intelligence that we disregarded, partly because we turned to the Israelis, who assured us that they wouldn't dare attack. I don't know the current classification status of this, but the NSA had very good intelligence which clearly pointed to the probability of an attack. This got lost as it moved up through the intelligence apparatus, partly because we consulted the Israelis, who said that they wouldn't dare. The Israelis had the axiom that no enemy would dare attack Israel unless it had established air

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Schlesinger: No. It was Dinitz. It was part of the game of Kissinger saying that he was doing his best for Israel but could not persuade the DoD to be cooperative. At that time I did not know that he was following that particular game, however; I assumed that we were operating more or less on the same wavelength.

Matloff: In the subsequent negotiations of Kissinger in the Middle East and the attempt of the administration to defuse potential conflict in the area--were you drawn in on any of that?

Schlesinger: I was drawn in on that, yes. I was drawn in both in the Nixon years and in the Ford period.

Matloff: Let's move on to the dispute between Greece and Turkey over Cyprus which flared in July of 1974, shortly before Ford became President. What was your position on this? Did you make any public statements about that intervention by Turkey?

Schlesinger: No, none that I can remember. I referred to it as a Greek tragedy, kind of a banal statement on my part. Kissinger picked that up when he was in Europe, that the Secretary of Defense had said that it was a Greek tragedy. In any event, you are not asking about public statements, primarily. I had press conferences, in which I made some banal statements such as political figures

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will make under such circumstances. I was perfectly happy with the position of the Nixon administration, which had been to support the colonels; I was perfectly content with that until it became clear around June of 1974. It came up in one of the the NSC subgroups, the WSAG, or the

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Washington Action Group, in which I was participating, and I said that it was about time for us to begin to distance ourselves from the Greek colonels. Henry went crazy about that. It was not a moral judgment on my part. As long as they were clearly in command in Greece we could deal with them, but the probability of their surviving was going down and for the United States to be wholly identified with the Greek colonels at that point would have worsened our relations with the Greeks subsequent to their departure. At one of the WSAG meetings I had said that it looked to me as if the colonels were likely to lose power in Greece and that the United States would be well advised to distance itself from that, but for a variety of reasons Kissinger and the President did not want to do so. I thought that it was in the best interests of the country that we not be identified as the last-ditch supporters of the colonels; and that if we were so identified, any subsequent Greek regime was likely to take a very harsh attitude towards the bases that the United States had in

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Greece. Indeed, any successive regime to the colonels was bound to be much further to the left and to reflect some of the hostility to the United States that was current on the left in Greek politics. Henry felt that this was a positioning of the Department of Defense more than it was

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a positioning of the United States.

Matloff: On the question of continued aid to Turkey, do you recall any strong differences of views with Nixon and Kissinger?

Schlesinger: No. We were all together on that, and Jerry Ford as well. On the issue of the necessity of sustaining our support of the Turks, everybody was in exactly the same position.

Matloff: When Ford signed the Foreign Assistance Act in December 1974, he signed it with the prohibition. I guess his hand was forced by Congress on that one.

Schlesinger: He felt that it was forced by Congress; and then the Turks began to cut off our water at our various bases. I was very anxious to resolve the differences between ourselves and the Turks, which meant getting a reconciliation between the Congress and the administration. So I talked to various parties on the Hill, including Rosenberg and Sarbanes, who were engaged in the cutoff, and sought to get a resolution of that.