



The Two O'Clock War: The 1973 Yom Kippur Conflict and the Airlift That Saved Israel

By Walter J. Boyne

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It's usually called the Yom Kippur War. Or sometimes the October War. The players that surround it are familiar: Sadat and Mubarak, Meir and Sharon, Nixon and Kissinger, Brezhnev and Dobrynin. It was a war that brought Arab and Jew into vicious conflict. A war in which Israel almost unleashed her nuclear arsenal and set two superpowers on a treacherous course of nuclear escalation.

And a war that eventually brought peace. But a peace fraught with delicate tensions, disputed borders, and a legacy of further bloodshed.

The Two O'Clock War is a spellbinding chronicle of the international chess game that was played out in October 1973. It is a story of diplomacy and military might that accounts for many of the dilemmas faced in the present-day Middle East.

This is a war that Israel never thought was possible. Surprised by the fury and excellent execution of the Arab onslaught, and perhaps more than a little complacent, Israel suddenly found itself on the point of losing a war because of a lack of ammunition, planes and tanks. The United States, after much vacillation, finally elected to help Israel, beginning a tremendous airlift (code name: Operation Nickel Grass) which incurred the wrath of the Arab states, and their sponsor, the Soviet Union.

Fortunately the airlift came just in time for Israeli ground forces to stabilize their positions and eventually turn the tide in the Sinai and Golan Heights. And it was all made possible by an operation that dwarfed the Berlin Airlift and the Soviets' simultaneous efforts in Egypt and Syria.

The Two O'Clock War is bound to become the definitive history of a war that quite literally approached Armageddon.



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Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #674537 in eBooks
- Published on: 2002-09-14
- Released on: 2002-09-14
- Format: Kindle eBook



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In *The Two O'Clock War* Walter J. Boyne chronicles with intense detail the brief but furious October 1973 invasion of Israel by Egypt and Syria, an episode also known as the Yom Kippur War. Boyne alternates his attention between actual battlefield descriptions and the equally frantic maneuvering by diplomats and statesmen of the combatant countries, their allies, and, most ominously, Russia and the United States, which refused to stop rattling their sabers at each other. At least twice, the region--and by implication the greater world--came perilously close to suffering the ultimate nightmare: nuclear war. Boyne's language is often blunt but he is generally fair-minded: his showers of blame and praise fall on individuals on both sides of the conflict. Running through the book is his premise, convincingly presented, that a massive American airlift--Operation Nickel Grass--was the decisive factor in Israel's fending off defeat. The book--especially its military sections--demands a reader's full attention. --H. O'Billovich

From Publishers Weekly

Boyne's focus on Israel's initial defeats after being surprised by Egypt and Syria in the fall of 1973 establishes the key scenario of his book: a near-ultimatum to U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger that Israel's continuing deferral of the nuclear option would depend on American delivery of diplomatic and military aid. The best and most useful parts of the book are those devoted to the U.S. decision to mount a massive airlift, using the old reliable C-141s and the newer, larger C-5s, whose acquisition costs and technical reliability had been major points of controversy in earlier years. Boyne (Beyond Wild Blue), a retired air force colonel and former Air and Space Museum director, credits the U.S. Air Force's military airlift command with establishing a lifeline of vital equipment and spare parts that in turn sustained the Israeli Defense Force as it rallied and counterattacked enemies unable to exploit their initial victories. No less remarkable was the air force's ability simultaneously to sustain its other commitments in Vietnam and Europe a sharp contrast with a similar Soviet airlift to Syria and Egypt that suffered constant, embarrassing gridlocks. Initially unable to convince its Arab clients to accept a cease-fire, the Soviet Union turned to Kissinger. In face to face negotiations, the superpowers hammered out an agreement which almost collapsed when a Soviet-sanctioned Egyptian missile launch generated a chain reaction that culminated in the U.S. escalating its alert status to DefCon III and the Soviet Politburo debating a direct response. Boyne concludes that war was avoided less by positive decision making than because specific mistakes were not made. His emphasis on the importance of contingency informs the book as a whole and makes it a useful counterpoint to Michael Oren's recent account of the 1967 conflict, *Six Days of War*.

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From Library Journal

Boyne here tells the story of how, on Yom Kippur, October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a surprise attack using tanks and jet bombers that could have ended the existence of Israel and started a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. In a controversial decision, the United States came to Israel's aid with an enormous airlift and changed the situation. Boyne (Beyond the Horizons; Beyond the Wild Blue) is a retired air force colonel and former Air and Space Museum director. While telling the dramatic story, he also provides valuable insight on war strategy, focusing on the psychological factors and subtle political interactions of the conflict's decision makers. In that respect, this book contrasts greatly with Michael Oren's recent *Six Days of War*, which focuses on documented and factual events. Boyne's writing is engaging and easy to read, making this book a good addition to public as well as academic libraries.

Ethan Pullman, Univ. of Pittsburgh Lib.

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