

## 'Distant causes and immediate responsibilities' from the Corriere della Sera (7 October 1973)

**Caption:** On 7 October 1973, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera describes the Kippour War, declared the previous day by Egypt and Syria against Israel, as a renewed threat to stability in the Middle East.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Ottone, Piero. 07.10.1973, n° 232; anno 98. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Cause remote e colpe immediate", p. 1.

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## Distant causes and immediate responsibilities

The Middle East is once again in flames. Suddenly, yesterday at noon, bitter fighting broke out between Israel, Egypt and Syria. Although the news arriving from the scene of the action is still confused and contradictory, we can already conclude that the current crisis is the most severe that the three countries have experienced since the 'Six Day War' in 1967. Unless urgent measures are taken to bring about a ceasefire, the fighting could develop into a full-scale war with critical consequences for not only the Middle East but the whole international situation.

It is still too early to establish with certainty who lit the fuse that ignited the Middle Eastern powder keg: Israelis, Egyptians and Syrians are, as usual, hurling accusations at one another. The way the conflict has developed thus far, however, leads us to conclude that Egypt and Syria were the ones to launch the attack. Contrary to what happened in 1967, this bout of violence started simultaneously on both fronts, as if the action had been coordinated. It has led to an initial victory for the Arab forces, who have managed to cross the Suez Canal for the first time in six years and raise the Islamic flag on Sinai soil. The Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat had issued a threatening warning a short time previously and had positioned large numbers of troops and arms along the borders with Israel.

It is difficult to find an explanation for the behaviour of the Arab countries. Cairo and Damascus probably figured that their troops would be able to gain some ground by making the most of the element of surprise, which was significantly greater yesterday as Israel was celebrating Yom Kippur, an important religious festival, and that the United Nations or the world powers would move in to stop the fighting before Jerusalem had a chance to react. In such a case the Arab countries would be in a stronger position in any political negotiations. But that is a risky calculation that underestimates Israel's ability to react quickly and forcefully, and certainly more effectively than the UN; if the calculation proved wrong, the consequences for all the Arab countries would be disastrous, particularly for Egypt and Syria.

The Arab attitude is all the more incomprehensible in that Israel has lately been experiencing difficult times and starting to show signs of growing nervousness. The success of the terrorist attack in Austria, the breakdown of diplomatic relations with Zaire (the latest in a long list of African countries), and the growing importance of 'oil diplomacy' supported by Libya and Saudi Arabia, all threatened to leave Israel in a state of isolation which would have been extremely serious for such a small and vulnerable country. This is why, based on past experience, many observers had predicted a military initiative by Jerusalem, and at first glance it seemed as if the facts had proved them right.

The outbreak of hostilities shows the frustration of the Arab states following their failed attempts to secure the peaceful retreat of Israeli forces from their territories. Under the pressure of ever more worried and disheartened public opinion at home and of a mass of Palestinian refugees, ever more discontented and inclined to terrorism, the Arab states wanted to end the diplomatic stalemate by trying, once again, to resolve the situation by force. But this was a reckless move that could burn all their bridges.

Our condemnation must first of all be for those who bear the main responsibility for the new attacks, namely, it appears, the Arab countries. However, we must not forget the role played by Israel, with its all too frequent displays of arrogance in the past. The world powers also share the responsibility here as, by concentrating on their particular interests rather than the general interest of peace, they have allowed the situation to deteriorate. As for the so-called 'plans' that have been put forward from time to time, the last of which was drawn up by Henry Kissinger, the US Secretary of State, these have proved to be too cautious and too late. This new wave of hostilities in the Middle East may well encourage the world powers to renew their efforts with increased conviction and courage, and everyone hopes they will succeed. Otherwise they too could become involved in the crisis between Israel and the Arab countries, and the current process of détente could grind to a halt.