The Mideast war: was the US prepared?

By Norman Sandler

The war between the Arab nations and Israel has escalated on all fronts, and the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, are being drawn into the conflict in a greater extent than ever before.

However, the war which broke out two weeks ago did not come as a total surprise to either the Israelis or the Arabs. In fact, there is reason to believe all involved parties had reasonable knowledge of the impending eruption of hostilities, with the Israelis choosing not to act as the aggressor.

The US and Israeli intelligence networks had several indications that the Arabs were bracing for the coming conflict. The issue was not whether the US would become involved, but how.

In retrospect, it appears US intelligence failed in its task of warning the US government. The US was not informed of the impending attack, and it appears that throughout the war, the Soviets were not acting as a US intelligence source.

The Egyptian army, which was supplying the Israelis with military hardware, was caught in port prior to the actual movement of troops against Israeli positions at the Suez Canal.

US intelligence officials warned the US government about the impending conflict to a greater extent every day. The US was aware of the war but was not able to prevent it.

The war between the Arab nations, the Soviet Union, the United States, and the superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, are being drawn into the conflict in a greater extent than ever before.

However, the attitude of US officials in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict is still uncertain. It does seem odd that if the US, through its military and intelligence agencies, had accurately assessed the situation in the Middle East, Israeli issues would have been as high as they are.

The Israelis have lost an estimated one third of their forces, and another one third of their troops, both critical components of the military force.

Until Monday the United States was cool to Israeli requests for military aid, in the form of replacements of F-4 Phantom fighters and electronic counter measures (ECM) to be used by the Israelis to "spook" surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites in Egypt near the Suez and in Syria.

State Department officials Monday confirmed the US is supplying Israel with heavy arms, including fighters and tanks, as well as small arms and ammunition shipments reportedly flown to Israel over the weekend. However, Foreign officials are still holding out on the Israelis' request for sophisticated electronic gear to "spook" the Soviet-built SAM-6's, being used effectively by the Arabs against the Israeli air force.

The attitude of US military and diplomatic officials to Israel's requests for aid may be explained by a desire that the Israelis not strike a decisive victory over the Arabs as they did on erst year.

Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger has suggested the US keep a "close watch" on the Mideast situation, but officials appear to be setting out the fighting, waiting for both sides to tire to the point where negotiations for a compromise can commence.

Such a compromise would probably include provisions for an Israeli pullback from the area around Damascus to the Golan Heights, and the Egyptians will probably succeed in regaining control of the Suez, with the Israeli troops pulled back about 10 miles from the canal.

The war in the Middle East cannot continue for long. Soon there will be either a compromise settlement or a decisive victory by one side or the other. The latter seems an unreasonable proposition.

However, the attitude of US officials thus far indicates they expect a settlement to this war which will provide for a lasting, more stable peace in the Middle East than was achieved after 1967.

Currently we can only hope that this posture, where compromise is possible, comes in the near future, before more lives are lost and the superpowers more deeply involved in the war in the Middle East.

(No Names Sandler is Executive Editor of The Tech.)

MIT officials today said that tuition for the 1974-1975 academic year will increase $250, to $3,500, students are encouraged to attend the annual $1 tuition riot Wednesday night. -Ed