1973 YOM KIPPUR WAR: BACKGROUND
Israel's stunning victory in the Six-Day War of 1967 left the Jewish nation in control of territory four times its previous size. Egypt lost the 23,500-square-mile Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip, Jordan lost the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Syria lost the strategic Golan Heights. When Anwar el-Sadat (1918-81) became president of Egypt in 1970, he found himself leader of an economically troubled nation that could ill afford to continue its endless crusade against Israel. He wanted to make peace and thereby achieve stability and recovery of the Sinai, but after Israel's 1967 victory it was unlikely that Israel's peace terms would be favorable to Egypt. So Sadat conceived of a daring plan to attack Israel again, which, even if unsuccessful, might convince the Israelis that peace with Egypt was necessary.

Did You Know?
On October 6, 1981, Anwar Sadat was assassinated by Muslim extremists in Cairo while viewing a military parade commemorating the anniversary of Egypt's crossing of the Suez Canal at the start of the Yom Kippur War.

In 1972, Sadat expelled 20,000 Soviet advisers from Egypt and opened new diplomatic channels with Washington, D.C., which, as Israel's key ally, would be an essential mediator in any future peace talks. He formed a new alliance with Syria, and a concerted attack on Israel was planned.

YOM KIPPUR WAR: OCTOBER 1973
When the fourth Arab-Israeli war began on October 6, 1973, many of Israel's soldiers were away from their posts observing Yom Kippur (or Day of Atonement), and the Arab armies made impressive advances with their up-to-date Soviet weaponry. Iraqi forces soon joined the war, and Syria received support from Jordan. After several days, Israel was fully mobilized, and the Israel Defense Forces began beating back the Arab gains at a heavy cost to soldiers and equipment. A U.S. airlift of arms aided Israel's cause, but President Richard Nixon (1913-94) delayed the emergency military aid for a week as a tacit signal of U.S. sympathy for Egypt. On October 25, an Egyptian-Israeli cease-fire was secured by the United Nations.

YOM KIPPUR WAR: AFTERMATH
Israel's victory came at the cost of heavy casualties, and Israelis criticized the government's lack of preparedness. In April 1974, the nation's prime minister, Golda Meir (1898-1978), stepped down.

Although Egypt had again suffered military defeat at the hands of its Jewish neighbor, the initial Egyptian successes greatly enhanced Sadat's prestige in the Middle East and gave him an opportunity to seek peace. In 1974, the first of two Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreements providing for the return of portions of the Sinai to Egypt were signed, and in 1979 Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1913-92) signed the first peace agreement between Israel and one of its Arab neighbors. In 1982, Israel fulfilled the 1979 peace treaty by returning the last segment of the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt.

For Syria, the Yom Kippur War was a disaster. The unexpected Egyptian-Israeli cease-fire exposed Syria to military defeat, and Israel seized even more territory in the Golan Heights. In 1979, Syria voted with other Arab states to expel Egypt from the Arab League.