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PAST AS PROLOGUE: SADAT'S WAR

MARTIN PANKOVE & RENATA LOUIE

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PROFESSORS

DR. JAMES LUCAS & COL "TATER" PEELER

ADVISORS

DR. MARK CLODFELTER & CAPT GEORGE MURPHY

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PAST AS PROLOGUE: SADAT'S WAR

Introduction

“The history of the twentieth century suffices to remind us that there are many ways to win a war, that the various ways are not equivalent, and that the final victory does not necessarily belong to the side that dictates the conditions for peace.”¹ The Six Day War of 5-10 June 1967 resulted in a decisive military victory by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) over the forces of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. It was a short engagement, based on maneuver warfare, and was concluded with a minimum number of casualties for the Israelis. This military superiority catapulted Israel into the position of regional superpower in the Middle East. What Israel did not know at the time was that its occupation and control of the Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip, West Bank, and east Jerusalem would become the object of future negotiations and a simmering, continuing war that has not abated to this day.

Anwar al-Sadat emerged as Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser's successor following Nasser's death on 28 September 1970 and opened the way for a new direction in the Arab-Israeli conflict. When Sadat took office, Egypt was wracked by four major issues: the economy of Egypt was deeply troubled; Egyptian dependence on the Soviet Union was too entrenched and unreliable; Arab states, in particular Jordan and Syria, were uneasy about Egypt's domineering ways and arrogance; finally, Egyptians were still devastated by the outcome of the Six Day War.²

¹Raymond Aron as quoted in George W. Gawrych, *The Albatross of Decisive Victory: War and Policy Between Egypt and Israel in the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2000), page before table of contents.

²Kenneth W. Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1999), 2.

The Three-Year Border War, the period between the 1967 and 1973 wars, became incrementally the catalyst for Egyptian movement towards a limited war. Throughout this period, only Egypt, of the three defeated Arab states (Egypt, Jordan and Syria) was involved in sustained armed resistance. While Jordan and Syria infiltrated Israel with guerrillas to inflict damage and casualties, Israeli and Egyptian regular forces steadily engaged in sustained clashes along the Egyptian-Israeli front. The experiences of the three-year border war between Egypt and Israel helped shape the attitudes and strategies for the 1973 conflict. In particular, the Three-Year Border War persuaded Sadat that, in a major war, the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF) would be incapable of inflicting serious damage on the IDF.

As the border war progressed, there was no movement on the diplomatic front. For, if Sadat wanted to reclaim Sinai, negotiations would have to move forward. The stasis of the border war did not provide incentive for any of the parties to the conflict or their supporters to re-engage diplomatically. Sadat felt that only a war could force diplomatic movement. He was also painfully aware that, although the EAF was better led and trained than in 1967, it faced an adversary superior in key aspects of modern warfare, including continuous U.S. supply of current technology. Economically, Egypt suffered from unemployment and the loss of revenues from the Israeli capture of key economic assets in the last war. It could not afford a protracted conflict. Additionally, the Soviets were not reliable in military support of Nasser's efforts to confront Israel. They viewed Sadat as a transitional, weak figure. Sadat wanted to move away from the Soviet sphere of influence and understood he needed U.S. support to recover the Sinai. However, there was no intimation of diplomatic movement. Sadat's political goals required military

action, so he initiated a limited war as the only realistic option within his capability (*thesis*).

Analysis

The Middle East in 1970, and in particular Egypt, presented a complex strategic landscape. Egypt's defeat in 1967 created a major "earthquake," causing President Nasser to accept and force change at all levels: economically, politically, and militarily. Egypt's reconstruction took place in the *milieu* of defeat and a nagging three-year border war with Israel. However, military reform was successful and the Three-Year Border War provided the opportunity for testing the EAF's spirit and robustness.

Sadat always had a clear vision and strong beliefs regarding his plans for Egypt. He carefully applied the appropriate means to his ends and was quite adept at embracing parallel avenues for reaching his goals. He possessed an incredible capacity for perseverance until achieving his goals. He was described as simultaneously a tactician and a strategist. "His methods for managing Israel, his Arab peers, his economy, and the superpowers were usually in some form of continuous formulation. His methods were in endless transition; his vision and goals were not."³ When Sadat first took office, he framed four areas of concern requiring a step-by-step alteration in Egypt's political course.

First, while Israel's economy boomed following the Six Day War, with the acquisition of Arab territories, the Egyptian economy was in terrible shape, plagued by unemployment, underemployment, overpopulation, and lack of infrastructure.⁴ The

³ Stein, 5.

⁴ Stein, 11.

integration of captured Arab territories into Israel resulted in new markets, cheap labor and valuable natural resources. The Sinai provided Israel with over half of its oil needs and control of the Golan Heights enabled Israeli channeling of more water from the Jordan River into Lake Galilee, creating 12,000 acres of arable land.⁵ From an economic standpoint, Israeli relinquishment of these territories would be extremely costly. From a strategic security standpoint, Israel was no longer 11 miles wide at its narrowest point: it had strategic depth; its population centers no longer less vulnerable than before.⁶ It is easy to see why Israel would avoid the negotiating table for the purpose of territorial restitution. Yet, in Sadat's view, the recovery of the Sinai was non-negotiable.

Second, Egypt was overly dependent on the Soviet Union. During the three years between the Six Day War of 1967 and the 1973 conflagration, the Soviets made verbal commitments to strengthen the defense capabilities of Egypt and other Arab countries, yet promised armaments were not forthcoming. In fact, when Sadat indicated to the Soviet ambassador that he wanted to go to Moscow to discuss his plans for military operations, the Soviet Union delayed his visit. Communist party leader Brezhnev and Prime Minister Kosygin turned down the list of weapons Sadat desired during his visit. Sadat was disappointed and frustrated: "It was clear that the stalemate—no peace, no war—suited the superpowers. There was some agreement between them about the level of arms supplies."⁷ Sadat became convinced that the superpowers would not risk a

⁵ Gawrych, 98.

⁶ Jordan lost half of its prewar population with loss of the West Bank, half of its agricultural exports, and 90 percent of its tourism. The greatest loss to the Arab and Muslim population was control over the entirety of Jerusalem and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the third most holy site in the Islamic world (see Stein, 51).

⁷ The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides on War," Chapter 3 in *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1974), 54.

confrontation in the Middle East. Therefore, his only alternative was to fight Israel, and soon, before the superpowers disengaged totally, stunting the negotiating process that might return Sinai to Egypt. Brezhnev and Nixon met on 29 May 1972 and Sadat received belated word from Moscow regarding the outcome of that meeting.

I waited for a notification [of what had been agreed]. And after 14 days [that is, on June 13] I received notification—including an analysis by the Soviet Union similar to what we had predicted at the April meeting. That is, that there was nothing new in the U.S. position because the U.S. position viewed Egypt and the Arabs as a motionless corpse and the U.S. only respect force. So if Egypt and the Arabs were a motionless corpse, why should the Americans act or change their position? The Soviet analysis was thus the same as our predictions before the April visit... I replied and said: ‘All right, now that your analysis is the same as the one we [the Egyptians] agreed upon, the questions—as agreed with you are the following.’⁸

After repeatedly soliciting Brezhnev for a response and receiving a non-committal three-page letter, Sadat decided to expel the Soviets from Egypt. He expected the United States engagement to fill the vacuum. Sadat, however walked an economic tightrope. The Egyptian economy and social structure could not bear the military burden much longer—no peace, no war was simply a war of attrition with no expectation except that Israel would wear Egypt down economically, socially, militarily, and morally. Sadat felt compelled to act. To act he needed weapons and therefore, Moscow. While on a parallel diplomatic path to coax weapons from the Soviet Union, Sadat began preparing for war. Simultaneously, Sadat lobbied Washington for attention and backing.

Sadat wanted and needed credibility from Washington; he wanted to have America on his side. But he also realized that Washington would not abandon Israel. In essence, he “wanted the lawyer to work for both sides.” Since Sadat’s long-term policy was predicated on making the United States his close friend, by necessity, that meant getting closer to Israel, a barely acceptable by-product of his grand strategy. In short, Sadat

⁸ The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 56.

did not *want* to make peace with Israel; rather, he *needed* to make an arrangement with Israel in order to enhance the likelihood of a positive relationship with the United States. He realized he had to show Washington in sharp, graphic, and unmistakable terms that Egypt, under his tenure in office, could be important to American interests.⁹

Sadat knew that he could not prosecute the war, even a limited one, against Israel alone. Yet, his neighbors, Jordan and Syria, had their own political agendas, which did not dovetail with Egypt's vital interests. They were also diffident of Egypt's motives. Therefore, a third concern Sadat harbored was the uneasiness the other Arab states held about Cairo's high-handed stance. This was reflected in Sadat's 'Egypt first' philosophy and ties into his other concern regarding Egypt's 1967 psychological loss of face.

Sadat was particularly resentful of Egypt's diminished influence in the region. First, Nasser's economic experiment in Arab socialism failed. Then, to worsen matters, after the June 1967 War, Egypt lost income from the Sinai oil fields, tourism, the closure of the Suez Canal, and the abandonment of the cities along the canal. Expenditures rose in absorbing refugees from those canal cities and in rebuilding the shattered army. Sadat disliked Egypt's dependence upon Arab oil states and Moscow. Egypt was aching with underemployment, unemployment, overpopulation, and demanding infrastructure needs... Sadat reflected a growing view in Egypt that if a choice had to be made, "Egyptianism" was far more important than pan-Arab commitments. To him, Cairo was the center of the Arab nation: without Egypt, the Arab world was without its core. Egypt was special, culturally unparalleled, more important than the other Arab countries. Indeed, Egypt had more than five thousand years of continuous history. All of this, therefore, made it superior. Sadat wanted to restore Egyptian leadership to its pre-June 1967 War status.¹⁰

Jordan and Syria resented Egypt's arrogance. However, by 1973 Sadat feared that if the stalemate with Israel continued, the cohesiveness of the Arab states *vis-à-vis* their commitment to war with Israel might also collapse. The eastern front (Syria, Jordan and Iraq) was already disintegrating and King Hussein of Jordan was beginning to distance

⁹ Stein, 9.

¹⁰ Stein, 11.

himself from Syria.¹¹ The 500-mile Israeli border with Syria, Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon was a significant weakness the Arab states could leverage in a war. To be successful, Sadat needed at least Syria, if not Jordan in the war. Egypt and Syria joined in a broad military coalition to create a second front to force Israel to stretch its forces beyond its limits. Then Sadat and President Assad engaged Jordan to enlist its cooperation in the war effort. Neither Egypt nor Syria had formal relations with Jordan. Nevertheless, King Hussein consented to a summit in Cairo (10-12 August 1973) in which Hussein committed to deploying forces to thwart the IDF from its territory in order to attack Syrian forces. However he did not agree to commence combat operations on a third front. The next day, Egypt and Syria restored diplomatic relations with Jordan.

Sadat also garnered the support of Saudi Arabia and the other Arab Gulf states to impose an oil embargo, unleashing an international oil crisis. Linked with the Middle East conflict, the embargo elevated the crisis associated with the October War to the international level. The Arab League (Algeria, Libya, Iraq, Morocco, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Kuwait) offered military support. Sadat was able to mobilize the Arab states despite politically diverse interests and notwithstanding Egypt's unabashed position of "Egypt first."

Finally, Egyptians remained psychologically devastated by the Israeli victory in the 1967 war—Sadat had to not only restore the Sinai back to Egyptian sovereignty but restore "Egypt's self-respect and thereby increase its diplomatic flexibility"¹² in future

¹¹ Mohammed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 174.

¹² Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, Inc., 1982), 460.

negotiations. Kissinger later characterized Sadat's strategy of surprise as a "classic" in the manner of Sun Tsu:

...the surprise of the October war...resulted from the misinterpretation of facts available for all to see, unclouded by any conflicting information. Sadat boldly all but told what he was going to do and we did not believe him. He overwhelmed us with information and let us draw the wrong conclusion...

Every Israeli (and American) analysis before October 1973 agreed that Egypt and Syria lacked the military capability to regain their territory by force of arms; hence there would be no war. The Arab armies must lose; hence they would not attack. The premises were correct. The conclusions were not...Yet Sadat achieved his fundamental objective of shaking belief in Israel's invincibility and Arab impotence, and thus transformed the psychological basis of the negotiating stalemate.¹³

Sadat had to break the stigma of humiliation Egypt had suffered in the 1967 War. In his view, this was the only way to return to the negotiating table and bargain for a lasting peace from a position of strength. A successful prosecution of the war would serve this political purpose.

On Egypt's national interests, Sadat was adamant—everything else was negotiable. He was, however, extremely careful that each step toward the achievement of his political goals was logically connected. He was keen on using the appropriate tools to most effectively achieve his goals, whether diplomatic or military. Known for following parallel paths simultaneously, never losing sight of his goal, he perplexed his adversaries and partners alike by his independence and impulsiveness. A close foreign policy advisor described him:

Sadat was a man of vision who looked beyond today's constraints and possessed a messianic sense. He had a mystical, almost prophetic feeling that the average Egyptian man supported him no matter how unconventional his choices were. Intellectuals, he felt, were wrapped up in their own ego, rhetoric, and self-interest. And yet he was pragmatic, not a

¹³ Kissinger, 459.

dreamer, nor simple-minded, nor gullible. His willingness and ability to take courageous political steps and unprecedented risks were greater than what Nasser was ever willing to do.¹⁴

Sadat clearly understood the economy of his country could no longer withstand the strain of a war of attrition and this would not get him any closer to his goals. Sadat was also painfully aware Soviet support had reached the point of diminishing returns. Unless he engaged the United States and made Egypt's position supportive of U.S. interests, he might not be able to break the diplomatic stalemate bleeding his country dry. Sadat knew that he needed to engage in a limited war to "shock" the players into movement. He knew he could not take on this war without the help of his Arab neighbors—Syria and Jordan. His "Egypt first" philosophy, coupled with the parallel, often confusing paths Sadat pursued publicly, caused his Arab neighbors to view Sadat's behavior with distrust. These feelings exhibited themselves by mixed signals during the 1973 war. Their long-term impact is still felt.

The Decision For War

The decision to resort to military force was made in November 1972 when Egypt's political and military elements concluded that Egypt could not escape the stalemate of no peace, no war. Continuing on this course of action would simply wear down Egypt politically and militarily, losing the objective of having the Sinai returned to Egyptian sovereignty. Either they could remain entrapped in this war of attrition or Egypt could launch a limited war to break the diplomatic impasse.

¹⁴ Usamah al-Baz, as quoted in Stein, 3-4.

Military Background to the 1973 Conflict

Before 1967, Israel lacked strategic depth for deployment, necessitating the strategic requirement to take the initiative in any conflict with her neighbors for the purpose of seizing room to maneuver¹⁵. The Israeli victory in 1967 resulted in annexation of Sinai, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, creating buffer zones envisioned to protect Israeli population centers from future conflicts.

The Sinai provided a desert barrier 150 miles wide between Egypt and Israel bounded by the Suez Canal. The IDF constructed defensive positions along the Israeli side of the canal. The Bar-Lev Line¹⁶ consisted of regularly- spaced fortifications interspersed with observation posts and backed by tanks and artillery. The West Bank added depth from Jordanian attack and the Golan Heights provided defensive high ground from which to defend against Syria.

The period between 1968 and 1973 marked regular skirmishes between the Israelis and their Arab neighbors, but static strategies of Israeli defense and ineffective Arab offenses resulted in maintenance of the post-1967 status quo. This ended with the Egyptian attack across the Suez Canal on 6 October 1973.

Objectives

The Egyptian strategic goal was to dislodge Israel from areas occupied in the 1967 War and end the state of neither peace nor war that existed since the Arab defeat in 1967. This required defeat of Israeli forces in the Sinai and on the Syrian plateau.¹⁷ The

¹⁵ Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement*, (Boston, MA: Little Brown and Company, 1975), 2.

¹⁶ Herzog, 6-7 (a good description of the defensive fortifications).

¹⁷ Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohamed Dia El Din Zohdy, *The Ramadan War*, (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1978), 17.

Israeli center of gravity was nothing less than national security. Israel's fundamental national security strategy was secure borders based on military initiative, deterrence, and single-front conflict with Arab neighbors.¹⁸

Under the command of Field Marshal Ahmed Ismail Ali, Egypt planned to attack across the Suez Canal, capture the Bar-Lev Line, and establish five bridgeheads 10 to 15 kilometers deep on the eastern bank of the canal. Then they would hold their positions while defeating Israeli counterblow. Simultaneously, Syria would overwhelm the Israeli center of gravity in the north at the Golan Heights.¹⁹ Jordan's King Hussein declined to participate in military action against Israel, but agreed to deny Israeli use of Jordanian territory to attack Syria.

Egypt identified five principal military objectives: (1) to destroy Israeli armed forces; (2) weaken Israeli air superiority thus depriving land forces of air cover and preventing a decisive counter strike; (3) confuse Israeli command and control to prevent rapid mobilization and concentration of Israeli forces; (4) prevent Israeli movement along internal lines against more than one front at a time; and (5) immediately neutralize the Bar-Lev line to handicap Israel's defensive maneuver and flexibility.²⁰

Egypt envisioned a battle of destiny (albeit limited in scope to establishment of bridgeheads in the Sinai) to recoup honor and dignity to offset the humiliation and shame of the ignominious defeat in 1967.

¹⁸ El Badri, 17.

¹⁹ El Badri, 17.

²⁰ El Badri, 24.

Military Capabilities and Vulnerabilities

Israel had two distinct advantages, airpower and U.S. aid. Israel had disadvantages of extended lines of communication, a long front along the Suez Canal, inability to stand a prolonged conflict, small population unable to withstand large casualties, and arrogance.²¹

The perceived Egyptian advantages were an interlocking surface-to-air (SAM) system providing an integrated air defense over the canal and the will of the Arab infantry soldier in a defensive position. Further, Egypt benefited from Arab unity (although less than a full coalition since Jordan declined to open a third front on the West Bank), world opinion, and a just cause for fighting.²² While Egypt benefited from superior numbers, inferior Soviet tanks hindered them.²³ Syria enjoyed superior troop numbers and an abundance of Soviet equipment. Syria's weakness was inferior command and control hampered by Soviet doctrine.

Egypt's Strategic Concept

Sadat envisioned a limited offensive war to establish bridgeheads on the east bank of the Suez Canal while Syria engaged on a second front at the Golan Heights.²⁴ Sadat appointed General Ismail War Minister and Commander-in-Chief in November 1972. Ismail became Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces throughout the Arab Federation (Egypt and Syria) in January 1973.

²¹ El Badri, 19,23

²² El Badri, 19

²³ Christopher Robin Lew, "Yom Kippur War: East-West Testing Ground," *Military History* 15 (October 1998): 34.

²⁴ Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub, and Mohamed Dia El Din Zohdy, 17.

In the spring of 1973, the Egyptian army began training in strength by running divisions and eventually the entire army all the way to the canal under air cover. This was an attempt to lure the Israelis into mobilization of the reserves at great economic expense to the small country. At the same time, the exercises served to build confidence in the Egyptian troops and familiarity with specialist skills required for operation of Sagger anti-tank missiles and mobile and portable surface-to-air missiles.²⁵ Sadat prepared the Egyptian infrastructure for war and potential interruption of services.²⁶

The Egyptians successfully used their annual autumn maneuvers to mask their intended build-up along the Suez Canal by announcing the movements well in advance. The exercises began on 26 September 1973, the day before the Jewish New Year, and were to conclude on 7 October.²⁷ In true Clausewitzian fashion, the Egyptians used a disinformation campaign to maintain Israeli complacency. Examples included political business as usual with cabinet ministers, uninformed about the pending operations, maintaining their foreign travel schedules. Planted stories in the print media detailed demobilizations and sailboat races involving high profile naval personnel.

The exercises appeared normal and did not arouse Israeli suspicions.²⁸ The high sand ramparts of the east bank of the canal effectively concealed preparations. In fact, regular IDF forces manning the Bar-Lev line, replaced by reservists, departed for Yom Kippur. To maximize the element of surprise, D-Day was scheduled for 6 October 1973,

²⁵ A. H. Farrar-Hockley, "The October War," Chapter 2 in *The Arab-Israel War, October 1973: Background and Events*, *Adelphi Paper #111* (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies IISS, Winter 1974-75), 15-16.

²⁶ Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, Inc., 1978), 241.

²⁷ Gawrych, 165.

²⁸ Gawrych, 165.

Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, an important Jewish holiday, while public services in Israel were suspended.²⁹ Lack of public transportation would delay the Israeli reserve mobilization following the attacks across the Suez Canal and against the Golan Heights.

Egypt successfully maintained operational security and did not inform combat commanders of the actual date for the attack until 1 October. At the platoon level, there was only six hours' notice.³⁰ On the morning of the attack, Egyptian soldiers fished innocently from the bank of the canal.³¹

Israel had intelligence that Soviet diplomatic personnel evacuated their embassy in Cairo on 5 October. Israeli intelligence interpreted the evacuation as sign of imminent military action. However, they thought Israel would have several days' warning and did not mobilize the reserves. The IDF deployed additional armor to the Golan Heights, placed the Air Force on alert and alerted the Armor School to move to Sinai.³² These measures were sufficient to avert a catastrophe. Israeli leadership learned about the imminent attack at 0430 on 6 October. Israel expected the attack at 1800 the same day. In actuality, the attack came at 1400. The Israeli reserves were just beginning their mobilization when the Arabs attacked.³³

Combat in Sinai and Golan

The Arab armies caught Israel unprepared. Israel's basic assumptions about readiness proved incorrect. The Israelis believed that there was a low probability of attack

²⁹ Sadat, 241.

³⁰ Gawrych, 165.

³¹ Gawrych, 166.

³² Gawrych, 168.

³³ Gawrych, 168.

in October, that there would be sufficient warning, and that they would prevent Egypt from crossing the Suez Canal.³⁴ Israel was unaccustomed to fighting where the enemy had seized the initiative. At the Suez Canal, the attack commenced with daylight air strikes by 222 jets. Within twenty minutes, the Egyptian Air Force reported 90 percent targets hit with a loss of only five planes. The targets were Israeli command posts, aerial command centers, air defense and jamming, missile batteries, and gun emplacements in Sinai. Orchestrated artillery by 3,000 guns accompanied the air strikes.³⁵ Egyptian Special Forces penetrated Israeli positions along the entire front and engaged Israeli armor with Soviet antitank weapons.

Five Egyptian armored divisions crossed the canal and in an innovative display of combat engineering, breached earth works up to 60 feet high by use of high-pressure water cannons. Seventy breaching groups opened separate passages to accommodate temporary heavy and light bridges, ferries, and boat landings. Israeli armor forces failed to deploy until two hours after the start of the attack. Then they were unable to find the Egyptian center of mass. The Egyptians defied conventional tactics and attacked all across a broad front. In the resulting confusion, Israel failed to evacuate strong points along the Bar-Lev Line resulting in heavy losses due to encirclement by the attacking Egyptians. The presence of Egyptian commandos in the Israeli defensive depth exacerbated the problem.³⁶

³⁴ Gawrych, quoting Golda Meir, 173.

³⁵ Sadat, 249-251.

³⁶ Gawrych, 175-176.

The Egyptian armor forces operated under heavy missile cover, devastating the counter attacking Israeli Air Force.³⁷ Meanwhile a coordinated Syrian armored assault commenced against the Golan Heights. The Syrian plan depended on rapid capture of the Golan Heights and Soviet diplomatic assistance to achieve an immediate ceasefire. Initially, the Syrians inflicted major damage to the Israeli forces on the Golan Heights. When the Syrian Army paused to regroup, the Israelis successfully mobilized reserves to reinforce positions that came dangerously close to falling. The aggressors' plan miscued when Syria lost 1,200 tanks in one day as Israel achieved success on the prioritized Syrian front.³⁸

The initial battles were particularly intense. In the first three days, Israel lost one third of its air force.³⁹ In Sinai, Israel lost an entire brigade of tanks (Brigade 190) and by the fourth day of the war urgently requested replacements from the United States. The United States was surprised as well, though the Nixon administration anticipated a quick Israeli victory. Rather than victory, Israel urgently requested military assistance to counter Egyptian air defenses. By 7 October, the Egyptian bridgehead on the east bank of the Suez Canal was six to eight kilometers wide, four kilometers deep and held 50,000 Egyptian troops and 400 tanks.⁴⁰ By the end of the fourth day of fighting, the Egyptians had extended their bridgeheads into Sinai, and the Israelis, repulsed in several counter-attacks, were regrouping.

³⁷ Farrar-Hockley, 19-21.

³⁸ Farrar-Hockley, 22-24.

³⁹ Sadat, 255.

⁴⁰ Gawrych, 178-179.

Meanwhile, Sadat stayed with his plan of limited war and initiated diplomatic contact with the Soviet Union to reassure his ally that there would not be a wider conflict. He also opened communications with the United States explaining the attack and offering to break the diplomatic deadlock over free navigation through the canal and Israel's right to exist.⁴¹

On 14 October, Sadat ordered further Egyptian advances in Sinai to divert Israeli attention from the Syrian front to give his ally some respite. Because of that decision, the Egyptian forces advanced past their protective SAM cover. U.S. satellite imagery intelligence provided Israel the opportunity for a counter-thrust that resulted in the encirclement of Egyptian forces on the western side of the Suez Canal. Cut off from their supply lines, the Egyptians never recovered.⁴²

The Israeli counter-attack against Syrian forces reached a culminating point exploited by Israeli pursuit, which actually pushed Syrian forces back to halfway from the Golan Heights to Damascus.

The United States responded to a British plea to save Israel and used an old Egyptian airfield in Sinai after day four to replace tanks.⁴³ The United States supplied in excess of 55,000 tons of materiel by airlift to offset Soviet supplies to the Arabs. The U.S. replenishment included TV guided rockets to attack Egyptian missile batteries and thereby tilted the balance of forces enough to allow the Israelis to battle to a stalemate.

⁴¹ Gawrych, 179-194.

⁴² Gawrych, 198-221.

⁴³ Sadat, .260.

Despite operational setbacks, Egypt "exacted a heavy toll in IDF blood and treasure."⁴⁴ Egypt recognized that it could not fight U.S. weapons and agreed to a cease-fire on 22 October 1973.

Conclusion: The Aftermath

The 1973 hostilities raged for sixteen days until Henry Kissinger and Leonid Brezhnev brokered a UN resolution for a cease-fire on 22 October 1973. UN Security Council Resolution 338 called for termination of military operations and for the respective parties to remain in place. Further, the parties were to implement the 1967 U.N. resolution ending the Six Day War and engage diplomatically to achieve a just and lasting peace. This proved to be an unacceptable solution as both sides promptly violated the cease-fire. Egypt, on the one hand, launched SCUDs at Israeli positions in Sinai. Israel completed the encirclement of the cut-off Egyptian Third Army on the west bank of the Suez Canal.⁴⁵

The Israeli losses were 2,200 dead, 5,600 wounded, or four times as many as during the Six Day War. This was a staggering loss, equivalent on a population equivalent basis, to 200,000 Americans killed. Egypt lost 8,500 killed as opposed to 61,000 in 1967.

Israel continued to inflict pain on the encircled Third Army and threatened Cairo, now only sixty miles away and without protective reserves.⁴⁶ The USSR threatened

⁴⁴ Gawrych, 232.

⁴⁵ Stein, 91.

⁴⁶ Stein, 93.

intervention in favor of Egypt and the U.S. countered by a threat. intervention on behalf of Israel.

The ambiguous outcome of the conflict was potentially disastrous for both sides. Sadat politically could not afford a loss by annihilation of the Third Army or Russian intervention. Israel wanted repatriation of prisoners and war dead. The Israeli economy could not sustain itself much longer on a war footing. The parties entered into direct negotiations with each other.

Henry Kissinger as lead American negotiator brokered a disengagement agreement between Israel and Egypt on 11 November 1973 following generally six points:

1. Egypt and Israel observe the cease-fire called for by the U.N. Security Council
2. Both sides agree to immediate discussion of return to 22 October positions and separation of forces monitored by the United Nations
3. The town of Suez to receive daily water, supplies, and medicine. Evacuation of wounded civilians
4. No impediment of movement of nonmilitary supplies to the East Bank
5. Israeli checkpoints on the West Bank of the Suez Canal replaced with U.N. checkpoints
6. Exchange of POWs

At this point, the status quo of the Three-Year Border War was broken and with Kissinger as honest broker, Sadat was willing to enter into “an interim agreement disguised as disengagement.”⁴⁷ The Egyptian Army had gained the prestige Sadat had sought based on its limited success. Syria was soundly defeated and excluded from the Israeli-Egyptian negotiations. Assad felt betrayed by Sadat. With Israeli artillery in range

⁴⁷ Stein, 114.

of Damascus, he pursued a separate disengagement plan, losing the Golan Heights again.⁴⁸

Sadat accomplished his strategic goal of breaking the deadlock in the peace process, but at high cost in personnel and treasure. Israel narrowly averted disaster. The honest brokerage of the United States resulted in a large foreign aid burden to the U.S. taxpayer that exists to this day. Israel enjoys the strongest economy in the Middle East and peace with Egypt. Egypt entered the U.S. sphere of influence and switched its allegiance away from Russian dominance. Kissinger's legacy became the invention of shuttle diplomacy and he became a popular dinner guest. Sadat's strategic success and willingness to attempt peace with Israel in exchange for the Sinai had a crucial impact on the direction of the Israeli Arab conflict. It also changed the strategic relationship among the United States, Egypt and Israel: the United States recognized the importance of Egypt in regional stability in the Middle East. If the past is prologue, the continuation of the Middle East conflict today and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war may reflect the classic Clausewitzian dialectic and represent a new synthesis. If the past is truly prologue, conflict resolution may well be embedded somewhere among the root causes of this seemingly intractable conflict.

⁴⁸ Stein, 115.

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