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Sadat and the Yom Kippur War, October 1973

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Introduction. On October 6, 1973, the high Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, Egyptian troops stormed across the Suez Canal in a startling attack on their bitter Israeli rival, culminating a long period of frustration for the proud Arab nation. Six years earlier, Israel had attacked and won, dealing the Egyptians a territorial loss as well as a psychological blow. In between wars, Egypt had gained a new leader, Anwar Sadat. President Sadat learned to deal with the difficult domestic turmoil surrounding him while pressing for a favorable international response to his problems with his troublesome Israeli neighbor. Eventually, Sadat was left with only one response to gain back what Egyptians had lost in the 1967 War: a surprise military offensive. This paper will show how Sadat's limited military objective of attacking Israel and establishing a bridgehead across the Suez Canal helped achieve his twin political aims of forcing Israel to negotiate the return of occupied Egyptian territory and regaining Egyptian honor.

International Context. In the period after he had taken over as Egyptian president in September 1970, Sadat was faced with a mixed international political environment.¹ Both superpowers had acted coolly towards Egypt's insistence for the return of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip that Israel had occupied since 1967. The United States and Russia were very interested in détente and, despite the importance of the Middle East to both countries, were not willing to risk a superpower confrontation over the region.² In 1970, as part of the so-called Rogers Plan, the United States had implicitly committed to help get Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 242.³ By 1972, however, no appreciable movement on the issue had occurred. Nixon had been reelected president of the United States with the aid of the Jewish bloc and was not disposed to lean on Israel to give back the occupied Arab territory.⁴ Further, as Sadat would find out through the Soviets, the United States viewed Egypt as a "motionless corpse," incapable of forcing American

intervention for a settlement favorable to Egypt.⁵ The Soviet Union, on the other hand, was the major supplier of military weapons to Egypt, but wanted a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli territorial dispute.⁶ Israel had ruled out the return of *all* occupied territory as required by the United Nations resolution. The country had developed an arrogance toward its Arab neighbors after several victorious military campaigns and was not under any real internal or external compulsion to negotiate on an equal basis with them.

As for Sadat's Arab brethren, Syrian President Hafez el Assad was in trouble and needed to divert attention from domestic difficulties.⁷ Syria had lost the strategic Golan Heights during the 1967 War with Israel and was eager to regain its lost territory. The historically fragile Arab unity was holding in many aspects but years of "no peace, no war" with Israel soon was likely to erode this harmony.⁸ Indeed, one of Israel's Arab neighbors, Jordan, had already distanced itself from Egypt and Syria over the Palestinian issue.⁹ Syria and Egypt (along with Libya) were now members of the United Arab Republic. Similarly, the oil producing Arab states were cooperating with one another and Israel and the West were deeply dependent on their oil.

Domestic Context. At home, Sadat was faced with growing discontent. The psychological setback in 1967 was a source of humiliation and shame for the Egyptians.¹⁰ The Egyptian president was under pressure from hawks to seek revenge and faced eroding credibility if he did not fulfill his promise to wage what he had called in 1972 a "battle of destiny," after describing 1971 as "the year of decision."¹¹ A general mobilization since 1967 had sapped critical Egyptian economic and human resources.¹² As 1973 came, he could not afford another year of failure politically, economically, or socially.¹³ And yet, because of the reticence of the superpowers and the sagging perception of Egyptian will and strength, Sadat was coming to the realization that a peaceful change was unlikely.¹⁴

National Interests. Since the bitter loss in the 1967 War, Egypt had sought to regain the Sinai. The Peninsula was part of its sovereign territory and provided the eastern shore of the all-important Suez Canal. The canal had been shut down ever since Israel had occupied the Sinai, costing the Egyptians dearly in lost revenues.¹⁵ Sadat was confident that Israel was unlikely to agree to a peaceful solution with Egypt unless Egypt postured from a position of strength.¹⁶ The 1967 defeat had shamed the Egyptian people and indicated once again, at least in the minds of the Israelis, that Egypt was still a weak adversary. Six long years had gone by with no resolution to Israel's capture of Egyptian land and it was taking a toll on Sadat's credibility and legitimacy¹⁷. Sadat had to find a way to restore Egyptian honor to get in a favorable position to sit at the negotiation table with the Israelis, and to bolster his stature at home and his country in Arab affairs.

Threats and Opportunities. Israel posed a strong threat to these two chief Egyptian interests—the occupied Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip and Egyptian honor. Israel wanted to retain portions of the Sinai and Gaza Strip for security imperatives.¹⁸ Though smaller in area and population than Egypt, Israel possessed a notion of invincibility towards its Arab neighbors because of its past military successes. But, to the extent this bred overconfidence in the Israelis, Sadat could exploit it with a surprise attack. The United States also posed a threat to Sadat's interests because of its political, economic, and military support for Israel as well as its reluctance to pressure Israel to negotiate. To counter these threats, Sadat could exploit his relationship with the Soviet Union to increase Egyptian military power and political influence in the world. Additionally, his Arab allies afforded him the opportunity to improve his economic and military clout. For instance, cooperation with Syria offered Sadat the favorable position of

having a two-front war in any altercation with Israel and the infusion of Libyan oil wealth would help both Egypt and Syria pay for rearmament.¹⁹

Sadat's Political Objectives. As a result of the threat to these vital national interests, Sadat, virtually from the outset of his presidency, began to develop a foreign policy strategy to regain the Sinai Peninsula and restore Egyptian honor. Though he had declared his intention of waging a "battle of destiny," Sadat held out some hope that the United States would be able to convince Israel to negotiate a peaceful return of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip. But, absent a diplomatic settlement, Sadat was prepared to use military action to break the stalemate by damaging Israel's self-confidence and persuading the superpowers that the Middle East situation was too dangerous and important to remain unsolved indefinitely.²⁰ Sadat's purpose, Henry Kissinger discovered after the war, "was psychological and diplomatic, much more than military."²¹

Balance of Power Considerations. In considering a strategy to achieve these political objectives, Sadat had to capitalize on potential Egyptian strengths to improve Egypt's balance of power relative to a foe that had vanquished Egypt on three previous occasions: 1967, 1956 and 1948. One advantage Egypt possessed over Israel was in non-mobilized strength. Israel, a smaller nation, relied on the mobilization of reserves to bolster its small standing army. Additionally, the Sinai region was a significant distance from the population centers where Israeli reservists would mobilize, giving a distinct firepower advantage to the Egyptians if they could strike quickly without advance warning. Another reason for rapid advance in case of military action was the expectation that the United States would aid Israel in sustaining a long war, especially if Israel was losing. Sadat knew from previous wars that Israel was superior to the Arabs in maneuver warfare and possessed a vastly better air force. He would, therefore, have

to build an effective anti-armor defense and air defense network if he were going to prudently risk war with Israel.

Egypt had considerable influence with the Soviet Union to help counter the daunting economic and military capability Israel possessed by virtue of Israel's special relationship with the United States. The Soviets were interested in maintaining a foothold in the Middle East to counter their superpower rival. The Soviets had been supplying both Syria and Egypt with military equipment and training since as early as 1958.²² Sadat believed that Egypt would be able to overcome the Israeli air advantage if his ground troops could stay under the protective cover of a Soviet-supplied, modern air defense system. However, the Soviets had not been very reliable with arms shipments to Egypt in the two years leading up to the 1973 war. The Soviets' desire to avoid a superpower confrontation with the United States in the Middle East delayed the shipment of arms desired by Sadat. In fact, Sadat had ordered all Soviet advisors out of the country in July 1972, after one such refusal of the Soviets to deliver on promised arms.²³

The Egyptians also possessed a huge advantage, if properly developed, because of their natural relationship with other Arab countries in the region, three of which bordered Israel. One of these countries, Syria, already united with Egypt under a special military alliance and having also lost land to the Israelis in 1967, could be a valuable ally to open up a second front with Israel along the Golan Heights to force the dispersion of Israeli firepower and maneuver.

Sadat's Use of Statecraft. In the years leading up to October 1973, Sadat developed a coherent, complementary, and comprehensive approach to accomplishing his political objectives by effectively using many tools of statecraft. In order to accomplish the objectives of evicting Israel from the Sinai and restoring Egyptian honor, he proceeded with a plan for a military operation against his adversary while continuing to press for a peaceful, negotiated solution.

Needing to increase his political and military power relative to Israel, Sadat undertook several diplomatic initiatives, including the use of international organizations and alliances. First, he broadened support among the Arab world, including laying the ground work for the possible use of oil as a weapon.²⁴ Second, he persuaded the Organization of African Unity to condemn Israel at a May 1973 meeting, in effect cutting off Israel from relations with eighty percent of Africa.²⁵ Third, in June and July 1973, the UN Security Council for the first time supported the Egyptian position in a resolution favoring the Palestinian Liberation Organization.²⁶ And finally, in September 1973, Sadat attended the Non-Aligned Summit Conference and gained the backing of many of the Third World countries.²⁷ In nine months, Sadat had convinced one hundred countries to support his position for the return of occupied land.²⁸ As war became inevitable, Sadat met with Syria's Assad privately to agree to the joint plan of action against Israel.²⁹ To Sadat's credit, this military cooperation he achieved with a fellow Arab nation against Israel was truly historic.³⁰

In keeping with his dual strategy of pursuing peace while preparing for war, Sadat again reached out to the superpowers in February 1973, with mixed results. He tried to patch up relations with the Soviet Union and persuade the United States to apply pressure on Israel. After previously expelling the Soviet advisors from Egypt, Sadat reinstated high-level discussions with the Soviet Union. Though Sadat claimed to have made war plans based on weapons already on hand at the beginning of 1973, he lobbied hard for additional Soviet arms to better prepare for an offensive campaign against Israel.³¹ Sadat's War Minister, General Ahmed Ismail, concluded the largest arms deal ever with the Soviet Union in March 1973, with some arms and equipment arriving in Egypt by October 1973.³² In view of the spotty record with the Soviets, Sadat also put into place an agreement with Yugoslavia's Tito for the shipment of 140 tanks.³³ Sadat

continued to be frustrated by efforts to persuade the western world, and the United States in particular, to convince Israel to return the Arab land captured in 1967. When his National Security Advisor, Hafiz Ismail, failed to strike a deal with his counterpart, Henry Kissinger, in February 1973, Sadat concluded that it was now impossible for the United States to move on this issue unless Egypt took unilateral action.³⁴ In an eerie foreshadowing of Sadat's action later that year, Kissinger is reputed to have pointed out to the Egyptians the options they faced: "Either you can change the facts and consequently our perceptions will naturally change with regard to a solution or you can't change the facts, in which case solutions other than the ones you are offering will have to be found to suit your circumstances."³⁵

Sadat skillfully used the limited economic tools he had available to attempt to coerce a negotiated peace while also posturing to fight a limited war. To match and exceed the size of the Suez Canal defensive sand fortifications Israel had constructed opposite the Egyptians, Sadat spent 20 million Egyptian pounds, and an additional 127 million Egyptian pounds on other war preparations, including civil defense.³⁶ Sadat's use of training exercises in advance of his military plan, in addition to creating surprise for the eventual offensive, caused economic strain on Israel. Twice in 1973 before October, Egyptian troops massed on the western side of the Suez Canal, each time with the Israeli Defense Force mobilizing.³⁷ The impact of these false alarms on Israel was indicated by its Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan: Sadat "made me do it [mobilize] twice, at a cost of ten million dollars each time. So when it was the third time round I thought he wasn't serious, but he tricked me."³⁸ Later, during the fighting that eventually broke out, Sadat played the "oil card," getting the Arab oil-producing nations to reduce oil deliveries to western nations in the hope of raising fear of a potential superpower confrontation, thereby compelling the United States to coerce Israel into a settlement with the Arabs or forcing Israel

directly into concessions, as a result of the economic strain.³⁹ It is not clear how much impact this move had on bringing the war to a cease-fire, but the oil cutback led Japan and the European Economic Community to endorse Arab demands.⁴⁰

Sadat also geared up his military instrument of power in case a peaceful resolution was blocked. Nasser, his predecessor, had left him with no offensive plan.⁴¹ Sadat originally wanted his armed forces ready for a cross-canal invasion by November 15, 1972.⁴² He intentionally chose a date after the United States presidential elections to give its president-elect one more opportunity to effect a peaceful solution.⁴³ As that date approached it became evident the Egyptian armed forces would not be ready, as its leadership was reluctant to pursue an offensive plan. Sadat then placed General Ahmed Ismail in charge to bolster the confidence of the armed forces and develop a suitable war plan. Indeed, Sadat emphatically declared, “We couldn’t afford another 1967 tragedy.”⁴⁴ Later, Ismail was also appointed as general commander of the joint Egyptian-Syrian Federal armed forces, thus aiding Sadat in conducting a coordinated, joint Arab strike on Israel.⁴⁵ During the military build-up, Sadat also undertook measures to ensure continuity of domestic support in case of war. He ensured factories and power stations had redundant capability to operate after anticipated Israeli retaliation.⁴⁶

Despite the extensive diplomatic and economic initiatives Sadat pursued to achieve his political aims, by October 1973, the best hope left was to use the Egyptian armed forces in a limited offensive. Continued reliance on the Palestinian resistance to apply Arab pressure on Israel’s borders and in occupied land had not proven effective, and Sadat did not have the luxury to wait for results. Sadat rightly concluded he had to use his military in a forceful way to shatter the self-confidence of Israel and its imposition of will on the Arabs and draw the attention of the superpowers. But, keenly aware of the Israeli Defense Force’s superiority if he attempted a deep

offensive, Sadat prudently limited his military purpose to establishing a bridgehead on the east side of the Suez Canal. He did not have to achieve a total military victory, only an attention-getting demonstration sufficient, as one historian noted, “to convince Israel, and the world as well, that its military establishment was not invincible, [and] that its military achievements could not impose peace.”⁴⁷ Successful implementation of a properly restrained military option had a realistic chance of restoring Egyptian honor and convincing the United States to take the long-delayed action to force Israel to completely evacuate from the occupied Egyptian territory.

Sadat’s Military Objectives. War theorist Carl von Clausewitz stated, “Defense has a passive purpose: preservation; and attack a positive one: conquest. The defensive form of warfare is intrinsically stronger than the offensive. If defense is the stronger form of war, yet has a negative object, it follows that it should be used only so long as weakness compels, and be abandoned as soon as one is strong enough to pursue a positive object.”⁴⁸ Thus, the military challenge facing Sadat was to conceive, plan, coordinate, rehearse, and execute an offensive military strategy that would ultimately restore Egyptian honor while simultaneously creating conditions for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories: his political ends. Sadat believed Israel’s national strength and center of gravity were grounded in its “theory of national security,” based upon the belief of secure borders; military initiative through rapid mobilization; power of deterrence through repressing Arabs psychologically, politically, and militarily; and most importantly, support from the United States.⁴⁹ Sadat believed that if Egypt could “recapture even four inches of Sinai territory, and establish ourselves there so firmly that no power on earth could dislodge us, the whole Arab-Israeli situation would change—east, west, all over.”⁵⁰ Therefore, Sadat needed an offensive military strategy that would achieve the ends of successfully penetrating Israeli defenses, recapturing and holding portions of the occupied territories, and

inflicting the greatest possible losses on Israeli armed forces. This would demonstrate to Israel that continued occupation of Arab land would be more costly than Israel could afford, thereby paving the way for the return of occupied territories to the Arabs and destroying the Israeli theory of security.⁵¹ This was a daunting task; for after three previous defeats, which new military strategy would offer even a remote opportunity for success?

Military Options. Sadat considered several military strategy options. He believed a repeat of the 1969-1970 War of Attrition would be devastating given the current state of the Egyptian economy and civil unrest. Similarly, he believed Egypt lacked the ability to sustain a piecemeal, chopping offensive to sequentially recapture territory in a “meat grinder war.”⁵² Further, the Egyptian Air Force did not enjoy air superiority, thus Israeli-type, swift-strike Blitzkrieg tactics were out of the question. The recently established Federal Arab Military Command between Egypt, Syria, and Libya, however, offered promising possibilities for jointly executing a limited war using a two-front military offensive, resulting in a grave security challenge for Israel.⁵³ After securing agreement with Syria’s Assad in late October 1972 for a two-front offensive against Israel, Sadat turned his attention to the analysis of his available means and seriously preparing for war.

Sadat’s Assessment of War Capability. Having joined with Syria in the establishment of a Supreme Joint Council to develop an Egyptian-Syrian offensive plan and to coordinate future training and joint exercises and having General Ismail now as General Commander of the joint forces, Sadat felt he had achieved “unity of effort” and “unity of command”.⁵⁴ General Ismail and the Joint Council began the planning process by assessing in detail the capabilities and vulnerabilities of Israel and the Egypt-Syria alliance. Initial Arab facts, assumptions, and constraints for the offensive plan included: (1) the outcome must pressure Israel into accepting

conditions for a peaceful solution to the occupied territories; (2) the battle was well within Egyptian-Syrian capabilities; (3) supplies from the Soviets were limited and would not allow liberation of the entire Sinai or a protracted war; (4) losses would be heavy, but infinite belief in the justice of the Arab cause, faith in the Arab warrior, and solidarity of the Arab front would ensure the Israelis suffered greater losses; (5) time was not on Egypt's side; (6) surprise was vital, otherwise Israel would launch a preemptive strike; (7) an Egyptian ground attack would include breaching a formidable water obstacle; and (8) Egypt and Syria lacked air superiority.⁵⁵

Conversely, General Ismail and the Joint Council assessed facts, assumptions, and constraints for the offensive from an enemy perspective which included: (1) Egypt had been rattling sabers every year since 1971 and new threats were dismissed as weak-willed Arab bluffs; (2) Israeli mobilization was expensive, straining an already burdened economy; (3) Egypt would not attack as long as it lacked air superiority; (4) no attack would come without at least 24-48 hours' notice allowing the US to intervene and Israel to mobilize; (5) Israel's borders were defensible; (6) based on recent rhetoric, Arab nations were not expected to go to war until after the Israeli elections on October 30, 1973, in order to give a new US-brokered peace initiative one more chance; and (7) the United States would intervene and come to Israel's aid.⁵⁶

In addition to studying facts and assumptions for an offensive operation, the Joint Council also assessed the balance of forces, focusing on military strengths and weaknesses for both sides. Egypt's population at the time was 29 million, with an active military force of an estimated 500,000 personnel.⁵⁷ The total population of hostile Arab states on Israel's border was estimated to be 82 million.⁵⁸ Between 1967 and 1971, the Soviet Union provided virtually all of Egypt's and Syria's modernized weapons systems, including T-55/T-62 tanks; BTR/BMP mechanized infantry vehicles; 122mm and 152mm self-propelled artillery; Sagger anti-tank weapons; MiG-

25/MiG-21/Sukhoi fighter jets; and multiple SA-2/SA-3 fixed-site, SA-6/ZSU-23-4 mobile, and SA-7 hand-held surface-to-air missile systems.⁵⁹ Though having shunned Sadat's requests for additional weapons and equipment since 1971, the Soviet Union had provided Egypt extensive weapons and tactical maneuver training with the aid of 15,000 military advisors.⁶⁰ The Egyptian Army was a very different military force than the one Israel had faced in the 1967 war.

Egypt's strengths and advantages were few: (1) a perceived just cause for fighting, (2) Arab unity, (3) a sympathetic international environment except for the United States, (4) proven performance of Arab infantry in combat, (5) Israeli arrogance that the Egyptians were incapable of assaulting the Suez Canal, and (6) the most significant, a robust, interlocking, near-absolute air defense cover over the canal zone.⁶¹ Conversely, Egypt's assessed weaknesses and disadvantages were far greater: (1) lack of air superiority, (2) declining aid from the Soviet Union, (3) a significant water obstacle, (4) extensive fortified defensive positions on the east side of the canal and on the Golan Heights, (5) inability of Egyptian armored forces to survive in open terrain against the better-equipped Israelis, and (6) the requirement to synchronize the offensive on two fronts.

Israel, on the other hand, had a population of only 3 million, with an active military force of 80,000 personnel and a capability of mobilizing approximately 220,000 reserves.⁶² The United States had sold Israel \$600 million in arms including attack helicopters, and provided F-4 Phantom and A-4 Skyhawk fighter aircraft. Further, US advanced technology assistance aided Israel in developing and producing its own modernized tanks and infantry fighting vehicles.

The Joint Council estimated the significant Israeli strengths and advantages to be: (1) time, (2) air superiority, (3) immediate and continuous aid from the United States, (4) a fortified defensive system based upon the canal water obstacle, (5) a rapid and efficient mobilization

system, (6) mechanized and armored forces organized in successive echelons, (7) the opportunity to conduct defensive operations on internal lines, (8) demonstrated superior capability in maneuver tactics and command and control, and (9) an overwhelming spirit for survival.⁶³ A similar assessment determined Israeli weaknesses to be: (1) a total open border frontier of approximately 500 miles, (2) the long frontage of the canal, (3) long and extended lines of communication from sustainment bases, (4) demonstrated sensitivity to casualties, (5) decisive military power dependent on mobilization of reserves, (6) overconfidence in their ability to defeat the Arabs in any situation, (7) and most significantly, complacency toward Egypt's repeated threats of military action.⁶⁴

After careful evaluation of facts, assumptions, strengths, and weaknesses, Sadat and General Ismail determined the keys to successful Egyptian military action against the Israelis would be strategic surprise, multiple rehearsals of essential tasks, and their air defense capability over the eastern bank of the canal. Satisfied that Egypt and Syria had the means to jointly execute the two-front offensive, the Joint Council began developing a strategic and tactical concept of operations, the ways to achieve his military objectives.

Military Strategic Concept. Recapturing portions of the occupied territories meant Egyptian ground forces seizing terrain on the east bank of the canal and the Syrians attacking in the Golan Heights. Therefore, the key enabler and center of gravity of Egypt's military strategy was accomplishing one of the most difficult maneuvers of mobile warfare, an opposed breaching of a water obstacle against fortified defenses, the Bar Lev Line. Establishing bridges across the canal was an essential task in order to rapidly move armored and mechanized forces into the Sinai prior to mobilization of Israel's reserve armored forces. The Egyptian General Command desired to employ the bridges under the most optimum conditions and under cover of darkness.⁶⁵

They desired moonlight to build the bridges, then the total darkness of moonset to move forces across the canal. Topographic, meteorological, lunar, and hydrographic studies provided Sadat three periods of suitable conditions, May 1973, late August-early September 1973, and October 1973.⁶⁶ The October 1973 period coincided with the Arab observance of Ramadan as well as Israeli holidays. Therefore, the October 1973 period not only offered ideal operational conditions, but it also offered psychological and deception advantages. Sadat chose October 6, 1973, the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, to attack Israel.⁶⁷

Sadat's joint military operation, named Operation Badr, called for initial air strikes against command and control centers, fixed-site air defense systems, aerial combat headquarters, electronic jamming installations, and artillery emplacements in the Sinai.⁶⁸ A massive artillery barrage would follow the initial air strikes, supporting a broad front offensive, consisting of five bridgeheads, stretching along the whole length of the canal, 175 km, from Port Said in the north to Suez in the south.⁶⁹ The assault would be limited in depth, 10-15 km east, to remain under Egyptian interlocking, fixed-site surface-to-air missile cover over the east bank.⁷⁰ Specific tactical objectives were (1) for the infantry, equipped with anti-tank weapons, to destroy Bar Lev Line defensive positions and existing Israeli armored forces in the first post-crossing mission, (2) to defeat initial Israeli counterattacks to protect the crossing sites, (3) to seize and hold key terrain east of the crossing sites, and (4) to be prepared to continue the offensive eastward.⁷¹ Simultaneously, the Syrians were to attack and destroy Israeli defensive positions in the Golan Heights, and continue the offensive to objectives in the vicinity of the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias.⁷² This broad front offensive would delay and confuse Israeli reaction and force Israel to disperse ground and air counterattacks over the extended front, significantly reducing effectiveness and buying time for Egypt to move armored forces across the bridges.⁷³ Although

the assault over the canal was Sadat's primary essential task to achieve his military objectives, strategic and tactical surprise through deception as well as multiple joint rehearsals was vital in preparing for operations.

Deception Plan. The Chinese strategy theorist, Sun Tzu, stated, "All warfare is based upon deception."⁷⁴ Accordingly, deception and surprise were vital to Sadat's military concept to prevent Israel from launching preemptive strikes against Egypt. Several events played into the effectiveness of Sadat's deception plan. In March 1973, Sadat publicly announced that "war was inevitable; everyone had fallen asleep over the Middle East crisis...this would be the nightmare to end all nightmares."⁷⁵ However, similar previous statements had resulted in no action. In preparation for Operation Badr, Sadat launched a mass media campaign indicating war was imminent and ordered civil defense preparations to ensure continuation of vital utilities and services for the Egyptian society should Israel retaliate with air strikes.⁷⁶ During the same period, Egyptian engineers were also increasing the height of earthen obstacles along the west side of the canal. Again, the Israelis interpreted both of these efforts as purely defensive preparations.⁷⁷ Additionally, Sadat deceptively indicated he would be traveling to the United Nations in October 1973, and Egyptian intelligence prepared a false diplomatic message indicating that high-level military commanders would be traveling to Mecca for the Hajj during Ramadan; both false itineraries were intercepted by Israeli intelligence.⁷⁸ The Egyptians assessed the Israelis would not expect an Arab attack during Ramadan, given the physical exhaustion of Arab soldiers due to an extended period of required fasting, even though it was a time of intense Arab cultural fervor and unity.⁷⁹ Similarly, the Israelis weren't expecting an attack on Yom Kippur and shut down all public services including the national television and radio broadcasts that were the primary methods of signaling mobilization of the reserves.⁸⁰ The

most convincing piece of deception, however, took Israel and the international community by surprise; Sadat expelled the 15,000 Soviet advisors from Egypt beginning in July 1972. Israel and the United States viewed the move as a crumbling alliance between the Arabs and the Soviets, resulting in a significantly weaker Egyptian military and no possibility of war.⁸¹ In fact, however, Sadat expelled the Soviet advisors to give himself complete freedom of maneuver, stating to General Ismail that “no war could be fought while Soviet experts worked in Egypt.”⁸² Although Sadat acknowledged the Soviets were a valued ally of the Arabs, their superpower role would preclude them from decisively supporting the Arabs in regaining the occupied territories.⁸³

Rehearsal Exercises. Sadat’s final major act of deception played on the Israeli complacency of previous bluffs and the economic impact of Israeli mobilization, while providing Egypt and Syria the opportunity to rehearse their offensive. Soviet military training of the Egyptians occurred in two 6-month cycles annually, from individual and small unit tactics to large-scale maneuvers. The Israelis had become accustomed to the Egyptians moving forces close to the canal during these exercises. Between July and August 1973, the Egyptians conducted six large-scale tactical exercises that included positioning bridging equipment behind the earthen defenses on the west side of the canal.⁸⁴ Egyptian engineer and infantry units used these exercises to train on the tactics, techniques, and procedures needed to employ the bridges and breach the Bar Lev Line. Ironically, a last minute evacuation of Soviet diplomatic personnel and families on October 5, by Soviet transport aircraft, was interpreted by international agencies as exercise support, solidifying Israeli intelligence assessments that the Egyptians and Syrians were simply conducting large-scale joint maneuvers.⁸⁵ Had the Israelis reviewed recent Soviet military history, they would have realized that Soviet forces attacked Czechoslovakia from

tactical exercise positions.⁸⁶ Thus, through deception and joint exercises, Sadat was preparing Egypt for war beginning October 6, 1973, but nobody in the international community perceived this plan.

Sadat Weighs Costs, Risks, and Opportunities. In assessing costs, risks, and opportunities, Sadat realized both Egypt and Syria would incur heavy casualties, but as Arab soldiers, death would not be in vain. Similarly, Sadat expected Israel to retaliate against strategic targets within Egypt, but also expected his civil defense preparations to sustain his people. Although his forces were prepared, Sadat knew he was accepting significant risk and didn't have the military or economic capability to win a protracted war.⁸⁷ If he tried and failed again, his efforts might rekindle the fire of international sympathy and Arab reunification, but it could also result in deeper Arab humiliation and drive Egypt's economy into depression. An Arab victory promised tremendous opportunity to reclaim portions of the occupied territories, not only through Israeli defeat on the battlefield, but also through international intervention. Another Arab defeat, however, would severely harm whatever ongoing peace process remained. Regardless, Sadat attacked Israel from exercise positions at 1400 hours on October 6, 1973, with four divisions of the 2nd Egyptian Army in the north and three divisions of the 3rd Egyptian Army in the south.⁸⁸

Execution of Military Operations. Caught by surprise, Israel suffered significant casualties and equipment losses in the early days of the war. The Egyptian air strike hit an estimated 90 percent of its initial targets.⁸⁹ Israeli reserve personnel manning the Bar Lev Line for their annual training period were quickly overrun.⁹⁰ Infantry soldiers with Sagger and RPG-7 antitank weapons destroyed the initial Israeli armored counterattacks until Egyptian armored forces could cross the canal.⁹¹ Using high-pressure water pumps designed specifically for

Operation Badr, Egyptian engineers cut through the earthen defenses on both sides of the canal to facilitate constructing the bridgeheads.⁹² Egyptian fixed-site and mobile air defense systems proved lethal against Israeli aircraft. By midday on October 7, 1973, Egyptian forces had penetrated six miles into the Sinai, consolidating on key terrain.⁹³ Israel was on the verge of becoming combat ineffective until the United States airlifted badly needed replacement ammunition and equipment.⁹⁴ Although Syria attacked the Golan Heights with five divisions, and experienced initial success, Israel reinforced the Golan with mobilized reserves before the Sinai because of the lack of a territorial buffer in the north. Additionally, Israeli leadership reinforced the Golan defenses with the 7th Armored Brigade early in the first week of October, doubling the number of tanks in defensive positions.⁹⁵ The Egyptians were able to push five divisions across the canal using 10 bridges and 50 ferries under the air defense cover.⁹⁶ However, it was not until Syria, incurring heavy losses, requested increased offensive activity on the Egyptian front that General Ismail pushed Egyptian forces eastward out from under the air defense umbrella.⁹⁷ Although moderately easing Syria's tactical situation, this movement created gaps between the 2nd and 3rd Egyptian armies, which Israeli armored forces exploited by executing their own canal crossing and maneuvering into the rear of Egyptian forces on the west side of the canal.⁹⁸ Assessing his lines of communication that were pending destruction, Sadat agreed at this point in the battle to international calls for a cease-fire. When the fighting ended, Egypt had reclaimed two areas of the occupied territory along the east side of the canal, while Israel had routed the Syrian Army, captured an additional 165 square miles of Syrian territory, and was threatening Damascus.⁹⁹ Sadat had recaptured more than his four inches of the Sinai. More importantly, however, his cease-fire agreement also shielded the remainder of the Egyptian

Army from potential Israeli destruction. Sadat had achieved his military objectives and declared Egyptian victory against the Israelis.

Military Achievements Lead to Political Ends. The Yom Kippur War was generally marked by superb planning, coordination, rehearsal, and execution by Sadat and the Egyptian armed forces. It was successful not only in restoring Arab honor, but it also set the conditions for revitalized negotiation to end the Middle East stalemate and the return of the occupied territories. Sadat can be faulted for his ill-conceived choice to allow his troops to advance beyond the air defense cover after his initial military successes in the Sinai.¹⁰⁰ Had Sadat not responded to Syria's call for assistance he may have been able to consolidate even greater military power on the east side of the canal and saved Egyptian lives and weaponry. Although the Arab-Israeli struggle continues to this day, Sadat's limited-objective military strategy in October 1973 brilliantly supported his political ends. As Henry Kissinger stated, "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. Rare is the statesman who at the beginning of war has so clear a perception of its political objective; rarer still is a war fought to lay the basis for moderation in its aftermath."¹⁰¹

Epilogue. It can be argued that Israel emerged militarily victorious from the Yom Kippur War. By the time the cease-fire took hold, the Israeli military occupied newly acquired territory in both Egypt and Syria. However, the war shattered long-held perceptions and brought renewed superpower interest, which is after all, what Sadat had desired from the onset. In the war's aftermath, the United States, under two administrations, facilitated a series of disengagement initiatives to get Israel to withdraw from the Sinai over the next five and one-half years, culminating with the Camp David agreements between Sadat and Israel on March 26, 1979.¹⁰² It

is not hard to imagine that this negotiated solution was in part a result of the psychological change experienced by both parties as a result of Sadat's unlikely October 1973 war.

NOTES

¹ Major-General A. H. Farrar-Hockley, "The October War," Chapter 2, *Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Background and Events*, Adelphi Paper #111, (London: International Institute of Strategic Studies, Winter 1974-75), 14.

² The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, "Sadat Decides on War," Chapter 3, *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1974), 55.

³ Mohammed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 174.

⁴ London *Sunday Times*, 62.

⁵ Ibid., 56.

⁶ Ibid., 53.

⁷ Bard E. O'Neill, "The October War: A Political-Military Assessment," *Air University Review*, 25, (July-August 1974): 32.

⁸ London *Sunday Times*, 47.

⁹ El-Gamasy, 174.

¹⁰ O'Neill, 28, 32.

¹¹ O'Neill, 32; London *Sunday Times*, 48.

¹² El-Gamasy, 175.

¹³ London *Sunday Times*, 58.

¹⁴ O'Neill, 31.

¹⁵ El-Gamasy, 188.

¹⁶ London *Sunday Times*, 55.

¹⁷ O'Neill, 32.

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ *The Middle East*, 9th ed. (Washington DC: CQ Press, 2000), 40.

²⁰ El Badri, 18.

²¹ Henry Kissinger, "Why We Were Surprised," Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little, Brown, Inc. 1982), 460.

²² *The Middle East*, 224.

²³ Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 230.

²⁴ O'Neill, 31.

²⁵ Sadat, 239.

²⁶ Ibid., 239.

²⁷ O'Neill, 31; Sadat, 239.

²⁸ Sadat, 239.

²⁹ Ibid., 241-2.

³⁰ El-Gamasy, 183.

³¹ Ibid., 238.

³² Ibid., 238.

³³ Sadat, 255.

³⁴ Ibid., 238.

³⁵ El-Gamasy, 176.

³⁶ Ibid., 236, 241.

³⁷ Sadat, 241-2.

³⁸ Sadat, 242.

³⁹ O'Neill, 32.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

⁴¹ Sadat., 235-6.

⁴² Ibid., 234.

⁴³ Ibid., 234.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 236.

⁴⁵ Hassan El Badri, Taha El Magdoub and Mohammed Dia El Din Zohdy, "Decision and Concept," *The Ramadan War 1973* (Dunn Loring, VA.: T.N. Dupy Associates, Inc 1978), 25.

⁴⁶ Sadat, 241.

⁴⁷ El Badri, 17.

⁴⁸ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, (Princeton University Press, 1976), 358.

⁴⁹ El Badri, 19.

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- ⁵⁰ Sadat, 244.
- ⁵¹ El-Gamasy, 189.
- ⁵² London *Sunday Times*, 60.
- ⁵³ Ibid., 60.
- ⁵⁴ El Badri, 16.
- ⁵⁵ El-Gamasy, 184.
- ⁵⁶ Henry Kissinger, 460.
- ⁵⁷ Farrar-Hockley, 15.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid., 15.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., 14, 17, 22.
- ⁶⁰ London *Sunday Times*, 54
- ⁶¹ El Badri, 19.
- ⁶² Farrar-Hockley, 15.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 19.
- ⁶⁴ El Badri, 19.
- ⁶⁵ El-Gamasy, 180.
- ⁶⁶ Sadat, 241.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 242.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., 249.
- ⁶⁹ El Badri, 17, 21.
- ⁷⁰ Ibid., 17.
- ⁷¹ Ibid., 24.
- ⁷² Ibid., 17.
- ⁷³ Ibid., 21.
- ⁷⁴ Kissinger, 459.
- ⁷⁵ London *Sunday Times*, 62.
- ⁷⁶ Sadat, 241.

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- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 235.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid., 244.
- ⁷⁹ El-Gamasy, 181
- ⁸⁰ Ibid., 180, 181.
- ⁸¹ Sadat, 230.
- ⁸² Ibid., 230.
- ⁸³ O'Neill, 30, 31.
- ⁸⁴ Farrar-Hockley, 17.
- ⁸⁵ Kissinger, 465.
- ⁸⁶ Jon Emilienburg, Tidbits for 6 October, (Email to Col Jack Leonard, 6 October 2000), 3.
- ⁸⁷ Sadat, 245.
- ⁸⁸ Farrar-Hockley, 20.
- ⁸⁹ Sadat, 248.
- ⁹⁰ Farrar-Hockley, 17.
- ⁹¹ Ibid., 22.
- ⁹² Sadat, 250.
- ⁹³ Farrar-Hockley, 22.
- ⁹⁴ Emilienburg, 1.
- ⁹⁵ Emilienburg, 6.
- ⁹⁶ Sadat, 250.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid., 259.
- ⁹⁸ Farrar-Hockley, 28.
- ⁹⁹ Israel Record, The 1973 Yom Kippur War, (<http://www.adl.org/Israel/Record/yomkippur.html>), 28 Sep 2000, 1.
- ¹⁰⁰ *The Middle East*, 42.
- ¹⁰¹ Kissinger, 459-460.
- ¹⁰² *The Middle East*, 49.

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