

IMPACTS OF WORLDVIEW, IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS, BIASES, AND GROUPTHINK ON ISRAELI OPERATIONAL PLANS IN 1973

A Monograph

by

MAJ Barry L. Johnson

Army National Guard



School of Advanced Military Studies

United States Army Command and General Staff College

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Name of Candidate: MAJ Barry L. Johnson

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Approved by:

_____, Monograph Director
Christopher Marsh, Ph.D.

_____, Seminar Leader
Gordon A. Richardson, COL

_____, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies
Thomas C. Graves, COL

Accepted this 23rd day of May 2013 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

IMPACTS OF WORLDVIEW, IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS, BIASES, AND GROUPTHINK
ON ISRAELI OPERATIONAL PLANS IN 1973, by MAJ Barry L. Johnson 46 pages.

This monograph examines some cognitive constructs such as worldview, implicit assumptions, and groupthink. Further, the monograph discusses biases such as anchoring, status quo bias, confirmation bias, sunk-cost bias, framing trap, halo and pitchfork effect, narrative fallacy, and the self-fulfilling prophecy bias. To examine the impact of these constructs on operational planning the monograph looks at the case study of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. Documentation of this conflict provides insight into the inner workings of Israeli planning groups. Investigation of this case study allows the monograph to determine that Israeli leaders and planners struggled with cognitive biases. Further, planners struggled with flawed assumptions, faulty worldview, and groupthink. This resulted in impacts on Israeli operations and the relationships between operational planners and strategic leaders.

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ACRONYMS

ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
IAF	Israeli Air Force
IDF	Israeli Defense Force
IDF GHQ	Israeli Defense Force General Headquarters
UFMCS	University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies

INTRODUCTION

When we speak of *improving the mind* we are usually referring to the acquisition of information or knowledge, or to the type of thoughts one should have, and not the actual functioning of the mind. We spend little time monitoring our own thinking and comparing it with a more sophisticated ideal.

—James L. Adams, *Conceptual Blockbusting: A Guide to Better Ideas*

Military planners expend tremendous effort to understand the art and science of operational and strategic planning. Planners attend schools, pursue post-graduate civilian education, read stacks of books, and spend countless hours gaining hard won experience. However, historical accounts of operations, most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, clearly demonstrate that even plans created from the strictest operational science and most creative operational art are sometimes flawed. How planners think, not what they think, is partly to blame. It is important that planners, during all of this learning, build an understanding of how thinking occurs. It is easy to focus on the outcome. However, understanding the process of getting there is an entirely different challenge.

This paper will examine a few of the constructs and biases that impact how planners think. The discussion will examine worldview as defined by Gary B. Palmer. Further, Dietrich Dörner provides insight into complexity. The paper also references *The Red Team Handbook*. Red Teaming is a U.S. Army process of analyzing plans with respect to alternative possibilities, culture, planning biases, and assumptions.¹ The handbook provides an excellent reference for these concepts and outlines several biases. This monograph looks at a few of the biases. This includes anchoring, status quo bias, confirmation bias, sunk-cost bias, framing trap, halo and

¹Training and Doctrine Command, “University of Foreign and Military Cultural Studies: Red Teaming,” U.S. Department of the Army, <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/UFMCS/index.asp> (accessed April 03, 2013).

pitchfork effect, narrative fallacy, and the self-fulfilling prophecy bias. It is critical that planners understand each of these constructs.

Logically, once these biases are understood, one begins to think they are easy to identify. The paper looks at cognitive blind spots as presented by Richard F. West and Russell J. Meserve, and Keith E. Stanovich. This will help add a little perspective. Further, when looking back with the benefit of outcome knowledge, one is tempted to assert that planners should have recognized certain conditions in spite of bias. To examine this, the paper takes a brief look at Baruch Fischhoff's discussion of hindsight bias.

Additionally, the paper looks at groupthink. Irving Janis is one of the most quoted authors on this subject. Groupthink, according to Janis, shows itself through behaviors and symptoms. Reviewing the behavior of Israeli planning and leadership groups provides insight into the impact of groupthink on operational plans. Did the Israeli planners face this? Did it make a difference? The monograph studies these issues through a combination of Janis' work and the work of Uri Bar-Joseph. Bar-Joseph served in the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) reserves during the Yom Kippur War.

To understand worldview, complexity, biases, and groupthink the paper looks at the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. As it occurred forty years ago, much has been written on the operational and strategic planning, as well as execution, of the conflict. Although study of both Israeli and Egyptian planning groups reveals many lessons, this monograph focuses on Israeli planners. The documentation of this conflict provides good examples of the inner workings of planning groups. Further, this case study shows the linkages between biases, assumptions, and worldview. Lastly, it provides insight into the relationship between operational planners and strategic political leaders. All of this allows the monograph to address a few questions. Did Israeli leaders and planners struggle with cognitive biases? What behaviors indicated this? If leaders did suffer from

biases, did this impact their operational plans? This paper does answer those questions. What the paper does not do is attempt to assign any single cause to Israel's surprise and initial response.

The path of the monograph begins with the discussion of cognitive constructs. This includes worldview, complexity, implicit assumptions, biases, groupthink, and cognitive blind spots. Following this, the paper looks at the strategic context of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War. The analysis section examines how the cognitive constructs meshed with the efforts of operational and strategic planners. Lastly, the conclusion section outlines the findings of the paper.

COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTS

Worldview

When people interpret events, activities, and situations they filter this information through a specific lens. The lens is called worldview. It determines how individuals interpret everything. In his book, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Linguistics*, Gary Palmer explains that “[a] comprehensive world view (or worldview) is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society encompassing the entirety of the individual or society's knowledge and point-of-view, including natural philosophy; fundamental, existential, and normative postulates; or themes, values, emotions, and ethics.”²

There are several important aspects of this definition. First, this is a fundamental cognitive orientation.³ As a cognitive construct, worldview is a means of evaluating complex aspects of the surrounding world. As with any cognitive construct, it varies from person to person and organization to organization. Although analytical frameworks provide a common starting

²Gary B. Palmer, *Toward A Theory of Cultural Linguistics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 114.

³Ibid.

point, interpretation is up to the individuals or groups of individuals that make up an organization. Each of these entities or persons rely on their own histories, experiences (shared or unique), and education to create the cognitive construct.

The words “encompassing the entirety of the individual or society’s knowledge”⁴ show that the factors contributing to a worldview are far reaching. Although worldview is a construct that applies to everyone, the discussion here focuses on the worldview of planners. Worldview significantly impacts their analysis. Planners use this comprehensive construct, lens if you will, to analyze foreign cultures. However, before the analysis of foreign cultures begins, it is equally important that planners analyze the same elements of their own cultures. This is how planners begin to understand how they view their world. Once planners understand their worldview they can further understand their biases and implicit assumptions.

Palmer also stipulates that “...world view (or worldview) is the fundamental cognitive orientation of an individual or society.”⁵ This is an important concept. You can see that individuals, through their experience, education, morals, values, and culture form a specific worldview. However, you should also note that organizations have a collective worldview as well. This is built from organizational education, interaction between individuals, organizational doctrine, policy, input from senior leadership, and shared organizational experiences. Both individual and organizational worldviews must be examined for biases and implicit assumptions.

U.S. Army planners recognize the need for these concepts to be understood. Army doctrine, in *The Operations Process*, states the following:

Effective Army leaders understand and appreciate their own culture (individual, military, and national) in relation to the various cultures of others in the operational area. Just as

⁴Palmer, 114.

⁵Ibid.

culture shapes how other groups view themselves and the world around them, culture shapes how commanders, leaders, and Soldiers perceive the world. Individuals tend to interpret events according to the principles and values intrinsic to their culture. Effective commanders acknowledge that their individual perceptions greatly influence how they understand situations and make decisions. Through reflection, collaboration, and analysis of differences between their culture and the cultures in the operational area, commanders expose and question their assumptions about the situation.⁶

As you can see U.S. Army doctrine recognizes that there is a need not only to evaluate other cultures, but also to understand the individual perceptions, biases, and assumptions of those conducting the evaluations.

Complexity

Worldview is, in itself, a challenge. It is a means of interpreting considerable complexity.

Dietrich Dörner, in *The Logic of Failure*, tackles the issue of complexity. According to Dörner,

Complexity is the label we give to many interdependent variables in a system. The more variables and the greater their interdependence, the greater that system's complexity. Great complexity places high demands on a planner's capacities to gather information, integrate findings, and design effective actions. The links between the variables oblige us to attend to a great many features simultaneously, and that, concomitantly makes it impossible for us to undertake only one action in complex system.⁷

By defining complexity in this way, Dörner highlights the interdependence of variables. Carl von Clausewitz, in *On War*, hints at complexity and even includes chance. "This tremendous friction, which cannot, as in mechanics, be reduced to a few points, is everywhere in contact with chance, and brings about effects that cannot be measured, just because they are largely due to chance."⁸

Although Clausewitz was certainly not discussing worldview the same interconnected

⁶U.S. Department of the Army, *The Operations Process (ADRP 5-0)* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, May 2012), 1-10.

⁷Dietrich Dörner, *The Logic of Failure: Recognizing and Avoiding Error in Complex Situations* (United States: Basic Books, 1997), 38.

⁸Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 120.

complexities apply.

Dörner continues his discussion of complexity by highlighting that not only are variables interconnected so that they require multiple actions to achieve a result, but an increasing number of them may be overwhelming. He states that “[a] system of variables is ‘interrelated’ if an action that affects or is meant to affect one part of the system will also always affect other parts of it. Interrelatedness guarantees that an action aimed at one variable will have side effects and long-term repercussions. A large number of variables will make it easy to overlook them.”⁹ It is at this point, when overwhelmed, that planners reach out to theory and make determinations based on implicit assumptions and unconscious cognitive biases.¹⁰

Implicit Assumptions

Implicit assumptions are built into each of our worldviews. These assumptions, as the phrase indicates, are implicit or unstated. The Red Team Handbook states that “...we often misperceive reality and carry assumptions which exist below the level of our conscious thought. These are known as implicit assumptions, and are the most dangerous kind, as we are often unaware of their existence.”¹¹ Army planners frequently identify and list planning assumptions, which must be verified or denied during the planning and execution of operations. However, implicit assumptions do not fit this category. They are much more difficult to identify, list, and understand. They are a means to draw quick conclusions and, like biases, may be mistaken for fact.

⁹Dörner, 38.

¹⁰University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, April 2012), 39.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 39-40.

Robert H. Ennis discussed implicit assumptions in an article in 1982. “Sometimes implicit assumptions are propositions that are needed to support the conclusion, to make the argument a good one, to make a position rational, etc. On the other hand, sometimes they are unstated reasons that a person actually used consciously (or subconsciously, if you believe in subconscious reasons) as a basis of argument or action.”¹² Ennis provides an explanation of the term, implicit assumptions. He highlights that they may be created either consciously or unconsciously. Further, these assumptions provide rational support for argumentative positions and may indeed lead to some specific action. The danger is that implicit assumptions that are not identified and challenged, may lead to inappropriate arguments and actions.

Biases

Morgan D. Jones in *The Thinker’s Toolkit* explains that these implicit assumptions are built from unfounded emotions and biases:

We view the world through a dense veil of burdensome, thought warping emotions, biases, and mind-sets. Through this veil we sometimes perceive cause-and-effect and other ‘patterns’ where there are none. We are prone to grace these nonexistent patterns with self-satisfying explanations with whose validity we are instinctively unconcerned. Finally, we convert these explanations into rock-hard beliefs that we defend in the face of incontrovertible contradictory evidence.¹³

Jones uses the phrase “rock-hard beliefs that we defend in the face of incontrovertible contradictory evidence.” This is true of both biases and implicit assumptions. The cognitive challenge is to expose and question accepted facts that are created from self-satisfying explanations before we convert them into rock-hard beliefs.

¹²Robert H. Ennis, “Identifying Implicit Assumptions,” *Synthese* 51, no. 1 (April, 1982): 61-86.

¹³Morgan D. Jones, *The Thinker’s Toolkit: Fourteen Powerful Techniques for Problem Solving* (New York: Three River Press 1998), 46.

The purpose of this discussion is not to explore, in detail, the relationship between biases and implicit assumptions. However, you can see that these two concepts are related and may feed off of each other. Further, planners must, at a minimum, have a broad understanding of the relationship between biases, implicit assumptions, and operational plans. This is important when you begin to expose accepted facts that are actually non-factual assumptions based on biases. Although there are many cognitive biases, this paper will focus on select biases that played a role in the Israeli plans of 1973. The Red Team Handbook highlights several that are related to military planners, this includes: anchoring, status quo bias, confirmation bias, sunk-cost bias, framing trap, halo and pitchfork effect, narrative fallacy, and the self-fulfilling prophecy bias.¹⁴

In *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*, Scott Plous identified anchoring as a key element of decision making.¹⁵ Plous reviewed several studies and even conducted his own. He identified that once a number had been posed, even if out of context and sometimes random, research subjects became attached to it. An example of this follows:

In front of you is a wheel of fortune. The perimeter is lined with an array of numbers, and after the wheel is given a spin, the needle lands on 65. You are confronted with a question: Is the percentage of African countries in the United Nations greater or less than 65? Not a matter if you have thought much about, but nonetheless you are fairly sure that the percentage is less than 65. What, you are next asked, is the *exact* percentage of African countries in the United Nations? After some thought you respond with an estimate of 45 percent.¹⁶

As you can see, 45% is relatively close to the 65% number in the question. Plous identified that other subjects, given a different initial number, also responded to the second question with a

¹⁴University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6*, 41-43.

¹⁵Scott Plous, *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 145-153.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 145.

guess relatively close to their anchor.¹⁷ However, an anchoring bias is not solely related to numbers. Planners who are aware of a planning solution that worked, or nearly worked, in the past may become anchored to it. They may adopt the plan of the past and make only minor changes to it without open-mindedly evaluating other solutions.

Status quo biases are closely related to anchoring. The article by John S. Hammond, Ralph L. Keeney, and Howard Raiffa, *The Hidden Traps in Decision Making*, discusses this. “Decision makers display, for example, a strong bias toward alternatives that perpetuate the status quo.”¹⁸ This bias reflects a comfort level with the current situation and anxiety related to change.¹⁹ Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa relate this to a concern for change related retribution. “In business, where sins of commission (doing something) tend to be punished much more severely than sins of omission (doing nothing), the status quo bias is particularly strong.”²⁰ Planners relying on status quo and anchoring biases lean on existing situational information and try not to vary too far from it.

Another bias that attempts to limit variance is the bias toward seeking out confirming evidence. Gary Marcus, in *Kluge*, explains some details of confirmation biases. “Confirmation bias might be an inevitable consequence of contextually driven memory. Because we retrieve memory not by systematically searching for all relevant data (as computers do) but by finding things that match, we can’t help but be better at noticing things that confirm the notions we begin

¹⁷Plous, 145-153.

¹⁸John S. Hammond, Ralph L. Keeney, and Howard Raiffa, “The Hidden Traps in Decision Making,” *Harvard Business Review* 84, no. 1 (2006): 121.

¹⁹University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6*, 42.

²⁰Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa, 122.

with.”²¹ This certainly applies to military planners who seek out and confirm data that supports their plan or course of action. Marcus further stipulates that “[t]o consider something *well* [emphasis in original], of course, is to evaluate both sides of an argument, but unless we go the extra mile of deliberately forcing ourselves to consider alternatives – not something that comes naturally – we are more prone to recall evidence consistent with an accepted proposition than evidence inconsistent with it.”²²

Sunk-cost bias springs from an aversion to admitting that time and resources have been erroneously dedicated to solving the problem at hand. *The Red Team Handbook* explains sunk-cost bias as “[a] bias in which humans increasingly persist in deciding and acting illogically, based upon decisions made previously.”²³ One of the many explanations for this is the aversion to admitting fault, “[s]unk-cost bias occurs because it relieves one of the necessity to admit that preceding decisions might have been made in error.”²⁴

Framing the problem represents another error prone task for planners. “The first step in making a decision is to frame the question. It’s also one of the most dangerous steps. The way a problem is framed can profoundly influence the choices you make.”²⁵ This is a crucial challenge for planners. They must ensure that the problems presented to senior decision makers are not framed in such a way as to promote an inappropriate solution. To do this, planners must question

²¹Gary Marcus, *Kluge: The Haphazard Evolution of the Human Mind* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 54.

²²Marcus, 54-55.

²³University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6*, 42.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa, 124.

the problem frame throughout the process, even near the end.²⁶ They must keep in mind, as Hammond, Keeney, and Raifa stated “[a] poorly framed problem can undermine even the best-considered decision.”²⁷

Halo and pitchfork effects are biases built on “mental contamination”²⁸ Marcus states, “[t]he halo effect (and its devilish opposite) is really just a special case of a more general phenomenon: just about anything that hangs around in our mind, even a stray word or two, can influence how we perceive the world and what we believe.”²⁹ He illustrates this by explaining that “for example, the fact that students rate better-looking professors as teaching better classes. If we have positive feelings toward a given person in one respect, we tend to automatically generalize that positive regard to other traits, an illustration of what is known in psychology as the ‘halo effect.’”³⁰ The pitchfork effect is exactly the opposite. Analysts transfer negative feelings, based on one aspect of analysis, to another aspect. Both effects demonstrate how beliefs affect analysis. Planners beware.

The narrative fallacy, as explained by Nassim Nicholas Taleb in *The Black Swan*, is “associated with our vulnerability to overinterpretation and our predilection for compact stories over raw truths.”³¹ In short, this is the creation of a story, or narrative, to explain a series of facts of events. This is an effort to understand a situation. However, it is paradoxical. Planners may

²⁶Hammond, Keeney, and Raiffa, 124.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Marcus, 46.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 42.

³¹Nassim Nicholas Taleb, *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable* (New York: Random House, 2007), 63.

create a story to explain the facts, but that story, since it is a cognitive creation, is not evidence. Planners and analysts must monitor the narratives. They must be certain that narratives are factually based and be on guard against narratives created from assumptions or bias rather than facts.

The self-fulfilling prophecy generates behavior based on false determinations. Plous defined this as “[t]he self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error. For the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the beginning.”³² Planners who accept these biased assumptions as fact start down a precarious road. Later, when looking back, planners will use the outcomes of this path as evidence. In other words, if they believe something to be true, the behaviors that follow it can make it so. Further, in the case of this fallacy, they may use the developing events to prove that they right from the beginning.³³ Plous summed it up by saying, “self-fulfilling prophecies are misconceptions, but they are misconceptions that ultimately prove true.”³⁴ Although, by definition, self-fulfilling prophecies prove themselves to be true that fact certainly does not imply a sound plan. In fact, these prophecies may prove true but at a high cost.

³²Plous, 234-235.

³³University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6*, 43.

³⁴Plous, 235.

Groupthink

Military educators often discuss groupthink as a particular hazard to planning efforts. Planners and group leaders must be ever watchful for symptoms of groupthink. In short, groupthink is the creation, by group members, of internal pressure to accept group ideas. This pressure often prevents individuals from espousing dissenting opinions. The end result is that biases and implicit assumptions may not be properly examined and questioned. Irving L. Janis discussed this in his book *Victims of Groupthink*. Janis defined groupthink as follows:

I use the term ‘groupthink’ as a quick and easy way to refer to a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action... I realize that groupthink takes on an invidiousness. The invidiousness is intentional: Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.³⁵

In this description Janis highlights group cohesiveness, a desire for unanimity, and in-group pressures as key aspects of the phenomenon.

Janis identifies 8 major symptoms of groupthink. Many authors quote these symptoms. They are used as reference in the *The Red Team Handbook*. By using red teamers, Army planners are using Janis’ work. As you will see later, analysts have used these symptoms to evaluate Israeli planning efforts. Janis’ list of 8 major symptoms follows:

1. an illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks;
2. collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings which might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to their past policy decisions;
3. an unquestional belief in the group’s inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions;
4. stereotyped views of enemy leaders as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purposes;

³⁵Irving L. Janis, *Victims of Groupthink* (Boston: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), 9.

5. direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members;
6. self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member's inclination to minimize to himself the importance of his doubts and counterarguments;
7. a shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view (partly resulting from self-censorship of deviations, augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent);
8. the emergence of self-appointed mindguards – members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions.³⁶

Janis analyzed these elements of groupthink by studying Kennedy Administration during the Bay of Pigs Invasion. However, you will see that each element also applies to Israeli planners in 1973.

Cognitive Blind Spots

In relation to groupthink and biases, one may question why they are difficult to overcome. After all, if so much is written on these topics why don't planners simply check for them? Richard F. West and Russell J. Meserve look at this in their article "Cognitive Sophistication Does Not Attenuate the Bias Blind Spot":

The so-called bias blind spot arises when people report that thinking biases are more prevalent in others than in themselves. Bias turns out to be relatively easy to recognize in the behaviors of others, but often difficult to detect in one's own judgments. Most previous research on the bias blind spot has focused on bias in the social domain. In 2 studies, we found replicable bias blind spots with respect to many of the classic cognitive biases studied in the heuristics and biases literature (e.g., Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Further, we found that none of these bias blind spots were attenuated by measures of cognitive sophistication such as cognitive ability or thinking dispositions related to bias. If anything, a larger bias blind spot was associated with higher cognitive ability. Additional analyses indicated that being free of the bias blind spot does not help a person avoid the actual classic cognitive biases.³⁷

³⁶Janis, 197-198.

³⁷Richard F. West, Russell J. Meserve, and Keith E. Stanovich, "Cognitive Sophistication Does Not Attenuate the Bias Blind Spot," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 103, no. 3 (2012): 506.

West and Meserve found that it is much easier to recognize biases in others' perspectives than in our own. Further, they found that being aware of biases and having strong cognitive understanding and ability did not necessarily mitigate biased thoughts. It is important for planners to understand that bias awareness and strong intellectual ability, being smart, actually created larger bias blind spots.

The discussion of worldview, assumptions, biases, groupthink, and cognitive blind spots establishes a foundation for examining the behaviors of Israeli planners during 1973. As West and Meserve pointed out, these cognitive shortcuts are more easily noticed in others. The decision makers and planners of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War provide an excellent opportunity to study how these constructs relate to military planning. Analysts of the 1973 war provide significant background for the case study. This documentation explains the inner workings of Israeli planning groups. The case study also demonstrates the links between biases, assumptions, and worldview. Lastly, study of this conflict shows the close relationship of operational planners and strategic leader.

CASE STUDY: ARAB-ISRAELI WAR OF 1973

Yom Kippur is the Jewish Day of Atonement. "In Jewish tradition, Yom Kippur is the climax of the Ten Days of Awe, during which man makes accounts with his maker."³⁸ On this day, Arab nations attacked Israel from both the north and south. They believed Israeli forces would be preoccupied with the holiday and mobilize slowly.³⁹ Additionally, on this day, tides and currents in the Suez Canal provided the most favorable crossing opportunity.⁴⁰ Egypt and Syria

³⁸Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Shocken Books, 2004), 4.

³⁹Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East*, 3rd Updated ed. (New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, 2010), 229.

formed a coalition and coordinated their attacks so that Israel faced multiple fronts. The two Arab nations intended to recover territory that Israel seized in 1967 and subsequently occupied. To understand the strategic context of the 1973 conflict it is necessary to understand elements of the strategic environment that include the Six-Day War in 1967, and reach back to the very creation of Israel.

Although the seeds of the long-running conflict date much further back, the discussion in this paper begins with the United Nations General Assembly vote on November 29, 1947. This vote was “to partition the territory of Palestine west of the River Jordan, there to establish a Jewish state and an Arab state, leaving Jerusalem to be an internationally administered area.”⁴¹ At the time, the British controlled Palestine. The British Mandate for control was to end at midnight on May 14, 1948.⁴² Although the UN intended for the Jewish and Arab populations to live peacefully together the November vote was ill received by Arab governments. The Middle East Research and Information Project explains, “[t]he Palestinian Arabs and the surrounding Arab states rejected the UN plan and regarded the General Assembly vote as an international betrayal.”⁴³ On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion, soon to be head of the Israeli provisional government, “declared the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine to be known as the State of Israel.”⁴⁴ Arab attacks began the very next morning.⁴⁵ Thus the stage was set for Israel’s War of

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Herzog, 11.

⁴²Ibid., 46-48.

⁴³Middle East Research and Information Project, “The United Nations Partition Plan,” http://www.merip.org/palestine-israel_primer/un-partition-plan-pal-isr.html (accessed December 5, 2012).

⁴⁴Herzog, 46.

Independence. Israelis fought for the survival of a new state. Here, the Jewish people could finally have the opportunity to govern themselves and live with dignity and freedom. Arabs fought to recover territory they believed the international community had stolen from them.

In 1967, twenty years later, tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors had again reached an explosive pinnacle. A UN presence along the Egyptian border, following the 1956 Sinai Campaign, kept Egyptian President Gamal Abd al Nasser at bay.⁴⁶ However, Nasser was a key player in establishing the United Arab Republic with a northern, Syrian region, and a southern, Egyptian region. This allowed Nasser to further Arab efforts against Israel along the Syrian front.⁴⁷ Syrians frequently attacked into Israel from the Golan Heights. According to Herzog, “[w]hile Israel’s border with Egypt remained comparatively quiet, the centre [sic] of Arab activity against Israel developed along the Syrian, and later along the Jordanian border. The Syrians shelled Israeli settlements from their advantageous positions on the Golan Heights, laid mines and developed a minor war of attrition along the frontier.”⁴⁸ This activity established the strategic relevance of the Golan Heights. Herzog further explains: “the Syrians continued to attack fishing boats on the lake [Sea of Galilee], shell villages in the Huleh valley, and fire on agricultural workers in the demilitarized zone along the frontier.”⁴⁹

Adding to this tension, a 1964 Arab Summit Conference determined to divert water from the Jordan River. Herzog explains the importance of this:

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Herzog, 149.

⁴⁷Ibid., 145-147.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

The work on the diversion of the Jordan waters proceeded apace both in Lebanon and in Syria, where a canal was dug to divert the waters of the Hazbani in Lebanon and the Banias in Syria into the River Yarmuk in Jordan, thus depriving Israel of two-thirds of the water in the Jordan. Israel had on many occasions declared that the closing of the Straits of Tiran or the diversion of the Jordan waters would themselves be considered acts of war.⁵⁰

Thus, with the Arab states threatening the water supply and Syrian attacks from the Golan Heights, Israel was in a precarious position.

Further, The Soviet Union attempted to persuade Egypt to threaten Israel's southern border. They believed this would improve Syria's security position in the north. Initially, Nasser, facing low public opinion, was primarily and pragmatically concerned with the pressures of domestic politics. However, on May 17, 1967, Nasser began to move forces to the Sinai and by May 20 Egypt had massed seven divisions with over 1,000 tanks. Nasser's popularity rose and the Arab world prepared for war. Adding to this, Nasser boldly demanded that UN troops be withdrawn, which they were. Nasser also closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. He blatantly told the Arab Trade Union Congress that the intent was to destroy Israel.⁵¹

Nasser and the Arab coalition did not destroy Israel. In fact, at the end of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel maintained significant territorial gains and established military dominance in the region. Andrew Duncan summarizes the 1967 outcome:

In June 1967 Israel, by the end of the third Arab-Israeli War, "The Six-Day war", had captured vast territories from its neighbours [sic]. Egypt lost the whole of the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip (the territory of Mandatory Palestine occupied by Egypt during Israel's War of Independence); Jordan – the territory of Mandatory Palestine it had occupied and annexed in 1948-49 – the West Bank and East Jerusalem; and from Syria Israel gained the Golan Heights from which the Syrian Army had harassed Northern Israel for many years.⁵²

⁵⁰Herzog, 147.

⁵¹Herzog, 148-149.

⁵²Andrew Duncan, "Land for Peace Israel's Choice," in *Between War and Peace*:

Israel achieved a significant advantage through territorial gains. Herzog states that “for the first time in its history, Israel had the benefit of defence [sic] in depth.”⁵³ The buffer zones allowed for improved defense and, potentially, improved Israel’s position at the negotiating table.

In addition to the core problems that existed between Arabs and Israelis, the Israeli victory in 1967 provided additional strategic cause for the Arab attacks. Eliot Cohen and John Gooch discusses this in their book *Military Misfortunes*, “[t]he roots of the 1973 war lie in the smashing defeat suffered by the Arab states in June 1967, when in six days the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the areas west of the Jordan River, and the Golan Heights.”⁵⁴ By the end of the Six Day War, Israeli forces occupied territory which Jordan, Syria, and Egypt previously controlled. The Israeli occupation of these areas represented a significant black eye to Arab leaders.

In 1973, Israel’s strategic goal was to maintain the protective buffer they had established in 1967. Israeli leaders intended to maintain the occupied territories. However, as the conflict began Israel recognized that early Arab success left Israel vulnerable. In turn, this could lead to more Arab opposition if a coalition formed. Israeli leadership recognized that they had entered a struggle to maintain their relative power in the Middle East. They recognized that to achieve strategic success in 1973 they must defeat Arab forces in the north and the south.

Egypt and Syria began the 1973 undertaking with clear strategic goals. For Syria the simple strategic goal was to regain control of the Golan Heights.⁵⁵ Egyptian president Anwar

Dilemmas of Israeli Security, ed. Efraim Karsh (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1996), 59.

⁵³Herzog, 189.

⁵⁴Eliot Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1990), Kindle edition, location 2019.

⁵⁵Cohen and Gooch, location 2047.

Sadat embraced more complicated aims, “[f]irst and foremost, Sadat thought it essential to break a diplomatic stalemate intolerable for Egypt (and his own position as president); by the very act of opening fire the deadlock would break, and fluidity would return to Middle Eastern politics.”⁵⁶ Anything short of a catastrophic Arab failure, and perhaps even that, would force the United States and the Soviet Union to renew the quest for a Middle East settlement.⁵⁷ Sadat also knew that his country needed to break free of stigma surrounding the Arab defeat of 1967. To accomplish all of this, Egypt simply had to gain control of a small part of the Sinai, thus Egypt could establish the conditions for a negotiated settlement.⁵⁸

Although Sadat calculated that securing only a small bit of the Sinai would be enough, he also recognized that Arabs must inflict significant losses on the Israelis. Cohen and Gooch state that “Sadat had shrewdly formulated intangible war objectives – the smashing of an enemy’s theory, the resurrection of Egyptian pride, and the alarming of the superpowers – although they could require, as he well knew, massive bloodshed.”⁵⁹ As Cohen and Gooch further highlight, “he would content himself with very limited territorial gains, provided Israel suffered enough in battle.”⁶⁰ The theory Cohen and Gooch are referring to is what Sadat called “Israeli Security Theory.”⁶¹ Egyptians believed this theory relied on the predominant view that the Israelis held military superiority and that the Arabs could not defeat them. Further, the Israelis based their

⁵⁶Cohen and Gooch, location 2064.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., location 2055.

⁵⁹Ibid., location 2081.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Ibid., location 2067.

security theory on the recent history of short wars in Arab territories as the Israelis could not tolerate high casualties and the Israeli economy could not tolerate long expensive wars.⁶² Sadat knew that the conflict must be extremely short to negate the advantage Israel would gain after full mobilization. He also knew it must cost the Israelis many casualties and result in capturing some part of the Sinai.⁶³

Israeli leadership recognized the strategic advantage of maintaining the buffer zones established in 1967. They understood that, if a war broke out, the Arabs would achieve a significant political advantage in border negotiations. Although preventing war was important, Israeli leadership also recognized that once it started, they must inflict as much damage as possible to achieve a long-standing military advantage. As in every Arab-Israeli conflict, the very existence of Israel would be at stake. As Chaim Herzog discussed in *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, “Israel’s aims were to avoid war if possible by deterrence; to prevent the Arabs from gaining any territorial advantage in the initial attack; to gain and maintain the upper hand in the air by destroying the Arab missile system; to destroy Arab forces; and to capture territory for use as a political bargaining factor.”⁶⁴

To accomplish the strategic goals, Arab leaders focused on achieving strategic surprise and disrupting air and armor attacks. Israeli leaders anticipated two full days of advanced warning. They had only a half-day of warning and did not mobilize their reserves, two-thirds of their fighting force, until immediately before the attack. Israeli leaders further anticipated that, even if the ground efforts were initially slow, the supremacy of their air assets would fill the gap.

⁶²Cohen and Gooch, location 2067.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Herzog, 315-316.

Finally, they planned to use armor to conduct a hasty defense. Arab leaders accounted for each of these by achieving strategic surprise, countering initial air attacks with SAMS, and disrupting Israel's armor efforts with Sagger antitank systems. These three factors significantly slowed and disrupted Israel's initial response.⁶⁵

The outcome of the 1973 war is not clear or one sided. In his book *The Yom Kippur War*, Abraham Rabinovich discusses the outcome, "[w]ho won? Egypt did. So did Israel."⁶⁶ Rabinovich also discusses the numbers, "Israel lost 2,656 dead and 7,250 wounded. Arab casualties as given by a Western analyst were 8,528 dead and 19,540 wounded."⁶⁷ However, the numbers don't tell the story of strategic and operational success. Egypt had seized the initiative, seized small amounts of territory, and achieved a superpower-imposed ceasefire. Sadat achieved his strategic aims while regaining prestige lost in 1967.⁶⁸ Israel, on the other hand, would eventually recover from the shock of military surprise and recognize that they had reacted to simultaneous unexpected attacks with a partially mobilized army and limited air assets.⁶⁹ Further, they gained the advantage and within two weeks were able to threaten both enemy capitals.⁷⁰

A significant contributing factor to the strategic context of the 1973 war was the historical tension between Arabs and Israelis. This existed even before the creation of Israel.

⁶⁵Rabinovich, 28-38.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, 497.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 498.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

From the moment the UN resolution established the Jewish state, the tensions have grown. Although there have been many conflicts since the creation of Israel, the 1967 Six Day War set the stage for the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Arabs intended to regain territory and prestige by pursuing limited goals and spurring superpower intervention. Israel intended to maintain their strategic buffer zones as well as their position of relative power within the region.

ANALYSIS

Planners still study the 1973 war and discuss potential reasons for the delayed Israeli response. Dörner's definition of complexity, discussed above, points out that complex systems have many interdependent variables. The Arab-Israeli War of 1973 exemplifies this. There are many contributing factors that impacted the Israeli response. Assigning causality to any one factor is error prone and not very useful. Identifying multiple factors such as assumptions, groupthink, and other cognitive biases and studying the contribution of each is a much more useful process.

Assumptions

Analysts frequently discuss, as a significant contributing factor, the pre-war Israeli assumptions. The basic beliefs included a few strongly held assumptions. The first is the regional dominance of Israeli air power. The second includes the primacy of Israeli armor and dominance of Israeli air power. Israelis developed these assumptions after the 1967 war, which included significant air and armor successes. These two beliefs fed the most widely accepted assumption, which was the overarching belief that the Israeli military was technologically and intellectually superior to Arab forces. Israelis believed not only in their own superiority, but they also believed

Arabs to be an inferior people. Thus, Arabs were incapable of matching the Israeli level of military prowess.⁷¹

This kind of belief exemplifies Marcus' halo and pitch fork effects. Positive and negative feelings can contribute to biased assumptions such as the superiority of Israeli forces and the inferiority of Arab forces. As you have seen, Israel's perception of their own ability was very high. Additionally, their perception of Arab inferiority led to some faulty assumptions.

When considering these assumptions, one must also consider that they are linked. It is not simply a cascade of assumptions, one leading to another. Instead, they are interdependent, each priming the other. The interrelation of flawed assumptions then contributes to a biased worldview. Much of this is based on experience from previous wars. Thus it is a cycle where flawed assumptions create a biased worldview that perpetuates more flawed assumptions.

This highlights the danger in projecting outcomes of the last war into current and future operations. It is apparent that the successes of 1967 contributed to the core assumptions of Israeli planners. Much of the belief in Israeli superiority comes from the 1967 war. Herzog discusses this:

[B]ecause of the astounding victory that was achieved, there was a tendency to sweep many of the shortcomings of the Israel Defence Forces under the carpet and not to deal with them. (This too was to have its effect in 1973.) In general the victory in the Six Day War was such an astounding and unexpected one that the Israeli Command tended to credit itself with many achievements that were in some cases more a result of Arab negligence, lack of co-ordination and poor command at the higher level than of Israeli effectiveness.⁷²

It is important to identify these core assumptions, spoken or unspoken, implicit or explicit, and then to examine the validity of each. After all, these assumptions make their way into all aspects

⁷¹Herzog, Chapter 5.

⁷²Herzog, 189.

of planning.

Planners and politicians throughout the Israeli chain of command relied on these beliefs to develop operational assumptions. Based on the destruction of Egyptian forces in 1967 and the Arab losses Israel inflicted during the following War of Attrition, planners believed that the

Egyptians would not be able to pose a significant military threat until the 1975-76 timeframe.⁷³ Planners based this assumption on Israeli strength, Egyptian weakness, and the amount of time it would take for Egypt to build a credible force.⁷⁴ However, they held onto the assumption too long. This is an example of anchoring bias. Further, the resultant problem frame proved erroneous. When planners create problem frames based on biased assumptions the results can be dangerous. In this case, Israeli leaders combined these assumptions into a particular lens, part of their worldview, which they used for policy and operational decisions.

An additional operational assumption was the belief that Israeli intelligence could provide advanced notice prior to any Arab attack. Cohen and Gooch write, “Israeli military planning before 1973 assumed that the IDF would anticipate the onset of war by two days, more or less. This would give Israel time to mobilize its reserve forces and to strike a preemptive blow with its air force, bringing the war to a favorable conclusion in four or five days.”⁷⁵ Rabinovich discusses this when recounting Elazar’s reflections on the day of the attack:

It had been a basic assumption that intelligence would provide five or six days’ warning of war. This would have permitted full mobilization and allowed time for equipment to be put into proper working order and for reservists to adjust to military mode. Two days’

⁷³Cohen and Gooch, location 2105.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., location 2115.

warning was the least expected, enough for mobilization. The present situation, just half a day's warning, was something he had never seriously thought possible.⁷⁶

This assumption, by itself, is not bad. However, one can see that it contributes greatly to the erroneous problem frame.

Further, you must consider the impact of the core assumptions listed above. Planners and analysts viewed Egyptian actions leading up to the Yom Kippur War through the lenses of Israeli military dominance, Arab inferiority, and a lack of Egyptian military capability. It seems that Israeli planners believed the buildup of Egyptian forces on the Suez Canal and the increased exercises could not possibly be true preparations for war. General Eli Zeira, head of military intelligence, exemplified this sentiment in a statement at a general staff meeting on September 30: "There are several sources saying the exercise is not an exercise but is leading towards war... This definitely does not seem likely to us even though these are good sources."⁷⁷ Zeira's statement shows the overwhelming Israeli tendency to rely on core assumptions and beliefs even when presented with disconfirming evidence. This is an example of Marcus' confirmation bias and a narrative fallacy. Leaders displayed the tendency to seek out and accept only information congruent with current opinions. Further, they created explanations, or narratives, that accounted for the facts in a manner that supported the dominant opinions.

Israelis further discounted the abilities of Egyptian and Syrian forces by inflating the 1967 air and armor successes. This shows not only projecting the past onto the present, but also a sunk-cost bias. Israeli leaders recognized that their armor and air assets were a tremendous

⁷⁶Rabinovich, 86.

⁷⁷Ibid. 28.

resource. This kind of investment leads one to utilize the assets rather than seeking an alternative solution. In 1973 Israel based much of its armor doctrine on a concept of “totality of the tank.”⁷⁸

General Tal, the commander of the armored corps, believed that armor assets could operate independently. Particularly in the desert, combined arms served little purpose. Rabinovich highlights Tal’s views of armor dominance by explaining that “there was precious little brush for infantrymen with bazookas to hide behind. As for enemy antitank guns, these are easily spotted in the naked desert and could be hit at a distance with great accuracy.”⁷⁹ Rabinovich further highlights Tal’s intent by highlighting “[t]anks would advance swiftly to reduce exposure to enemy fire, not stopping till they had broken the enemy line. Such a charge would create an effect of ‘armor shock.’”⁸⁰ The successes of Israeli armor assets in previous wars, particularly 1967, provided evidence to support this. Once again, this basic assumption influenced the views of senior leaders.⁸¹

Israeli leadership became overly confident in the capability of their tanks while underestimating elements of the enemy threat. Rabinovich discusses these shortcomings, “[t]he acquisition by Egyptians and Syrians of the Sagger antitank missile made little impression on the Israelis. They had encountered a number of missiles in exchanges of fire across the lines during the War of Attrition and regarded them as just another antitank weapon along with conventional antitank guns.”⁸² The Israelis indeed did identify the threat but dismissed it based on

⁷⁸Rabinovich, 34.

⁷⁹Ibid., 35.

⁸⁰Ibid., 35.

⁸¹Ibid., 34-35.

⁸²Ibid., 35.

overconfidence in their own capability as well underestimating the enemy capability. In fact, although pamphlets were created to publicize the risk of Sagger systems, very little information reached the tank crews.⁸³ This is yet another example of filtering new information through the lens of past experience.

It was the same lens of experience that left the Israeli Air Force (IAF) vulnerable. During the War of Attrition Israeli planes dominated the Egyptians. The loss ratio during that period was seven Egyptian planes for every one Israeli plane.⁸⁴ The Egyptians countered the Israeli air threat by moving Air Defenses forward near the canal. This included SAM-2, SAM-3, and SAM-6 missile batteries.⁸⁵ Uri Bar-Joseph summarizes the effect of Egypt's air defense: "In operational terms, it enabled the Egyptian army, for the first time since 1967 to effectively limit the IAF freedom of action over the theater of operations."⁸⁶

Although the Israelis knew of this threat, just as they did the Sagger threat, senior leaders treated it with relative disregard. Air Force representatives briefed members of the General Staff on the missile threat. The plans were extensive and detailed. However, after the briefing Brigadier General Benny Peled, Israeli Air force commander during the 1973 war, explained that achieving the operational effects of the plans required the ability to strike first. Moshe Dyan, Israeli Minister of Defense, indicated that the slightest hint of an Arab attack would allow Israel to attack first. Thus the status quo was maintained. Leaders walked away from the brief with

⁸³Rabinovich, 34.

⁸⁴Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), location 182.

⁸⁵Bar-Joseph, location 190.

⁸⁶Ibid.

overconfidence in the IAF and clear assumption that indications and warnings would provide first strike capability.⁸⁷

Cognitive Biases

When examining these biases, analysts must be aware that one single conclusive cause for the failure to predict the attacks has not been identified. Aryeh Shalev highlights this in the conclusion of his book *Israel's Intelligence Assessment Before the Yom Kippur War: Disentangling Deception and Distraction*. He highlights that when looking for reasons to explain the intelligence failure “[t]his question has no decisive answer.”⁸⁸ Israeli leadership faced many problems during the time leading up to the 1973 attack. Cognitive biases certainly contributed to the failure to recognize the coming attack. However, it is difficult to conclusively attribute the failure solely to these biases. The difficulties in attribution range from lack of personal admission to the evolving concepts of biases. You have seen that leaders made faulty assumptions, which in turn affected the Israeli response.

Uri-Bar Joseph provides significant insight into the potential of groupthink. Bar-Joseph identified four potential forums within Israeli leadership that showed symptoms of groupthink. Bar-Joseph's groups include senior intelligence analysts, leaders in the Research Department, senior decision makers, and the Israeli Defense Force General Headquarters (IDF GHQ). He identifies key characteristics of groupthink in each group.

The senior analyst group displayed three important groupthink behaviors. The key leaders of the group all agree that “Egypt and Syria did not perceive themselves as having the capability

⁸⁷Rabinovich, 33-34.

⁸⁸Aryeh Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment Before the Yo Kippur War* (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 227.

to launch war.”⁸⁹ By itself, leadership agreement does not constitute groupthink. However, in at least two instances, dissenting members of the group were excluded. Bar-Joseph explains this:

There is some evidence, however, of attempts to prevent other intelligence officers who – estimated that war was probable – from hindering the assessment process that was dominated by this group. For example, the head of the Egyptian political section, Mr. Albert Sudai, demanded on a number of occasions to participate in a discussion with DMI [Director of Military Intelligence] Zeira, so that he would be able to present his view that war was imminent. He ultimately found out the discussion took place without his participation. Similarly, the head of Branch 2, one of the more prominent “alarmists” ... was never invited to any of the central discussions about the likelihood of war.⁹⁰

The use of the term “alarmists” is important. Bar-Joseph explains that the purposeful exclusion and the use of the nickname “reflects the groupthink’s symptom of using out-group stereotypes.”⁹¹ In his study of groupthink, Janis explains this phenomenon as “the tendency of groups to develop stereotyped images that dehumanize out-groups against whom they are engaged in competitive struggle and the tendency for the collective judgments ... to shift toward riskier courses of action that the individual members would otherwise be prepared to take.”⁹² As you can see, this small group of analysts displayed clear symptoms of groupthink.

The second group Bar-Joseph identified was the branch heads of the Research Department. He described it as the “most senior analysis forum. Taking part in it was considered to be highly prestigious, and its conclusions laid the bases for the national intelligence estimate.”⁹³ In studying this group, Bar- Joseph identified all 8 of the symptoms of groupthink that Janis defined: the illusion of invulnerability, belief in inherent group morality, collective

⁸⁹Bar-Joseph, location 3390.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Bar-Joseph, location 3390.

⁹²Janis, 6.

⁹³Bar-Joseph, location 3397.

rationalization, out-group stereotypes, self-censorship, the illusion of unanimity, direct pressure on dissident views, and self-appointed mindguards.⁹⁴ The discussion here focuses on self-censorship, pressure on dissident views, and self-appointed mindguards.

Janis defines self-censorship as “censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member’s inclination to minimize to himself the importance of his doubts and counterarguments.”⁹⁵ Bar-Joseph explains that “[o]fficers who participated in the discussions expressed reservations about the dominant view in the discussion room, but they did so only in informal talks with their colleges, in the corridors, or in the restroom.”⁹⁶ Further, “the head of Branch 5 decreased the tone of his criticism of the dominant thesis after the incident of October 1, in which he was rebuked for alerting the Northern Command to the possibility of war.”⁹⁷ The facts that officers discussed dissenting views quietly and were rebuked for openly sharing those views are clear indications of groupthink. This kind of environment creates strong tendencies to question ones own views while accepting the views of the group. In the described environment, groups can easily increase the pressure on those with dissenting views.

Janis described this as “[d]irect pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group’s stereotypes, illusions, or commitments, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members.”⁹⁸ Direct pressure varies slightly from the concept of self-censorship. As shown, many members of the forum did not openly

⁹⁴Janis, chapter 8, adapted by Bar-Joseph, location 3397-3426.

⁹⁵Janis, 174.

⁹⁶Bar-Joseph, location 3412.

⁹⁷Bar-Joseph, location 3415.

⁹⁸Janis, 175.

disagree with the group. They did this of their own will. Bar-Joseph explains direct pressure, formal and informal, using two examples. The first, the head of Branch 5, estimated that war was imminent but, as a result of pressure, did not forcefully express his views.⁹⁹ The second example involves formal pressure. Here, Bar-Joseph discusses Yona Bandman, the head of branch 6 of the Research Department. Bandman and his department became responsible for estimating Egyptian intentions.¹⁰⁰ Bar-Joseph illustrates the formal pressure by stating, “[t]he head of the Research Department demanded that the head of Branch 2 avoid criticizing Bandman’s thesis that war was unlikely.”¹⁰¹ In this example, you can see overt and direct pressure. This is a challenge for group leaders, as they must monitor the groups they lead, as well as themselves, to guard against such behavior.

Leaders must also guard against the third symptom of groupthink displayed in this forum, self-appointed mindguards. Janis defines this as “members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter the shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decision.”¹⁰² It is important to note that groups or individuals may exhibit mindguard behavior. Further, this behavior ties very closely the direct pressure explained above. Again, Bar-Joseph provides examples of each: “The mere use of the term ‘alarmists’ or ‘panickers’ to point to anyone who threatened the calming atmosphere was an expression of the existence of this symptom.”¹⁰³ This shows that the group adopted a specific behavior to protect the complacency.

⁹⁹Bar-Joseph, location 3421.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., location 800.

¹⁰¹Bar-Joseph, location 3421.

¹⁰²Janis, 175.

¹⁰³Bar-Joseph, location 3421.

As evidence of an individual behavior Bar-Joseph states that “he [Bandman] demonstrated by body language his objection to any opposition to the dominant concept.”¹⁰⁴ Although this seems subtle, it provides an example of direct pressure by a self-appointed mindguard who wanted to preserve the group agreement on the prevailing belief that war was not imminent.

The third group Bar-Joseph discusses is the decision-making forum. Janis points out that “[o]nly when a group of policy-makers is moderately or highly cohesive can we expect the groupthink syndrome to emerge as the members are working collectively on one or another of their important policy decisions.”¹⁰⁵ Bar-Joseph explains that this group included strong personality differences and did not display the cohesiveness typical of groupthink. However, he further points out that accepting the possibility of imminent attack was done only after Golda Meir and Maj. Gen. Zvi Zur, Moshe Dyan’s assistant raised the issue.¹⁰⁶ The requirement for external intervention is a strong indicator of groupthink.

Bar Joseph’s final forum is the Israeli Defense Force General Headquarters (IDF GHQ). Bar-Joseph illustrates groupthink in this forum by providing evidence of the close-knit nature of the group. Further, he cites a strong respect for Zeira and Aman as reasons that this group did not challenge the dominant thesis. High levels of respect for the analysis of leaders and organizations may make one less willing to challenge the status quo. Although Bar-Joseph makes stronger cases for the other forums, this final forum is still applicable.

Bar- Joseph also addresses confirmation bias. His main theme is that leaders had critical evidence available but maintained their erroneous views until Syria and Egypt had exposed their

¹⁰⁴Bar-Joseph, location 3421.

¹⁰⁵Janis, 176.

¹⁰⁶Bar-Joseph, location 3428.

true intentions. Bar-Joseph defines confirmation bias as “[t]he human tendency to notice and look for information that confirms one’s beliefs, and to ignore, not look for, or undervalue the relevance of information that contradicts it.”¹⁰⁷

The analysis of the strategic context and the biases related to decision making must also include a brief discussion of hindsight bias. Briefly stated, this is the tendency to believe past events were predictable. Baruch Fishoff explains this:

“Making sense” out of what we are told about the past is, in turn, so natural that we may be unaware that outcome knowledge has had any effect on us. Even if we are aware of there having been an effect, we may still be unaware of exactly what it was. In trying to reconstruct our foresightful state of mind, we will remain anchored in our hindsightful perspective, leaving the reported outcome too likely looking.¹⁰⁸

By using this lens to examine the events of 1973, one may conclude that regardless of biases that impacted assumptions, Israeli planners were not likely to have predicted the Arab attacks. The pending attack only appears obvious with the benefit of outcome knowledge.

CONCLUSION

This paper discussed worldview, some basic planning biases, and implicit or unstated assumptions. Further, the discussion explored the links between these constructs and how they influence one another. The interconnectedness of the constructs highlights the complexity surrounding them. Additionally, using the case study of the Arab-Israeli War of 1973, the paper studied the impact of the constructs on operational planning. However, the paper did not attempt

¹⁰⁷Jonathan T. Evans, *Bias in Human Reasoning: Causes and Consequences* (London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1989), 41, quoted in Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), location 3441.

¹⁰⁸Baruch Fischhoff, “Hindsight $\neq$ Foresight: The Effect of Outcome Knowledge on Judgment Under Uncertainty,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, no. 1 (1975): 288–99.

identify or recommend improved operational planning techniques. The findings are limited to the scope of the case study and the discussion does not attempt to assign causal linkages between biases and operational outcomes. The paper does identify the existence of biases and groupthink in the Israeli planning processes of 1973.

The first concept the paper discussed was worldview. It is the cognitive construct that individuals and organizations use to understand the complex environment around them. Both individual and organizational worldviews are based on implicit assumptions and potentially involve biases. Worldview impacts the way planners view others as well as the way planners view themselves. In short, worldview is a construct that allows planners to reduce the significant complexities of the operational environment to a workable level.¹⁰⁹

Dörner explains that complexity is comprised of numerous interdependent variables within a system.¹¹⁰ The variables are so numerous, in fact, that the human mind cannot process the large number of connections.¹¹¹ Worldview provides a means to reduce this. In addition to worldview, assumptions and biases allow planners to reduce this complexity to something they can process.

Implicit assumptions, as the name implies, are unstated or hidden. It is the hidden nature of these assumptions that allows planner to, without question, accept them as facts. It is the nature of these constructs that makes their very existence difficult to identify. Although humans require these assumptions to function, they inherently create problems. Planners must seek out, identify,

¹⁰⁹Palmer, 114.

¹¹⁰Dörner, 38.

¹¹¹Ibid.

and validate these assumptions. Implicit assumptions may be based on emotions or biases. Planners must be aware of this and monitor the effects of these assumptions on operational plans.

Biases represent an additional cognitive construct that planners must identify and validate. This paper discussed a few of them: anchoring, status quo bias, confirmation bias, sunk-cost bias, framing trap, halo and pitchfork effect, narrative fallacy, and the self-fulfilling prophecy bias.¹¹² It is up to planners to guard against the effects of these. For example, an anchoring bias may draw planners to an initially established solution and prevent them from considering alternative solutions. Similarly, a desire to avoid personal risk associated with posing a new solution may cause planners to nurture a status quo bias. Planners may seek out and accept only the evidence that supports their current position. This is confirming evidence bias. Some solutions also leverage previous investments in time and resources. By creating these solutions planners avoid admitting that previous decisions did not hold true over time. This is sunk cost bias. Other biases come from creating narratives that explain away facts or improperly frame problems. These biases are only a few that planners must guard against and all were present among Israeli planning groups in 1973.

The strategic context surrounding the 1973 conflict played heavily in creating biased beliefs. Israeli planners expected future conflicts to be similar to past conflicts in that they would be short lived and Israeli armor and air assets would dominate Arab opponents. In fact, the strategic context shows that this conflict was deeply seated in historic struggles between Arab and Jewish states. As you have seen, previous successes, Israeli biases, and implicit assumptions contributed greatly to the worldview of Israeli leadership.

The erroneous biases and implicit assumptions of Israeli planners and leadership strongly

¹¹²University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies (UFMCS), *Red Team Handbook version 6*, 41-43.

underscore the danger of allowing the constructs to be accepted as fact and further translated into operational plans. Israelis held a predominant view that the Israeli military was superior to the militaries of their Arab neighbors. Israeli planners embraced this. They also assumed that they would have clear warning two days prior to Arab attacks. As you have seen, this became an invalid anchor value and was not questioned.

Planners and leaders relied on these views to create an incorrect problem frame. Unquestioned implicit assumptions and biased views provided the foundation for the erroneous frame. Israeli planners maintained a biased view of their own superiority, the certainty of advanced warning, and their past armor and air successes. They shared this frame with political leaders. In turn, leaders relied on the shared environmental understanding for policy and operational decisions. These erroneous views led to misinterpretation of Syrian and Egyptian exercises, dismissal of Egyptian actions prior to Yom Kippur, and slow mobilization of Israeli reserves.

Once Israeli leaders did recognize the imminent threat of attack, they continued to struggle with biases. Israeli planners continued to create operational approaches that relied heavily on armor and air assets. The historical success of these approaches created predominant assumptions related to Israeli air and armor superiority. Israeli planners recognized this and relied heavily on these assets. This kind of sunk-cost bias prevents planners from looking at alternative solutions. Further, these solutions allowed Israelis, for a brief time, to avoid challenging the status quo. This status quo tendency is evident after the IAF brief. Dyan left the briefing strongly confident that there would be sufficient early warning for Israel to launch a preemptive attack and that Israel's air assets would be more than capable of carrying out a first strike.¹¹³

¹¹³Rabinovich, 34-35.

The planning groups also dealt with the problem of groupthink. Bar-Joseph identified and analyzed four groups. Each group displayed symptoms of groupthink. This included the senior analyst group that used outgroup stereotypes and labeled anyone who maintained an alternative view as an alarmist. Further, Branch 5 of the research department showed self censorship and direct pressure from leadership to agree with the prevailing assessments. The decision-making forum also showed groupthink symptoms by requiring external intervention to break group norms. Lastly, IDF GHQ held their leaders in such high esteem that they would not challenge their views. These groups displayed all of Janis' symptoms of groupthink and a strong tendency to seek out and accept only the evidence that confirmed current views.¹¹⁴

Each of the biases impacted Israeli plans. This clearly demonstrated the interrelation of implicit assumptions and biases. This also demonstrates the impact of these constructs on creating a worldview. This impact affected operational plans but cannot be labeled as a singular cause for failing to anticipate or the Arab attacks. Although hindsight bias gives the impression that the pending Arab attacks were evident, understanding cognitive blind spots provides insight into why the attacks seemed less evident. Planners and policy makers must consider all of this when creating operational plans and defining national policy.

¹¹⁴Bar-Joseph, location 3421.

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