STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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THE CROSSING OF THE SUEZ CANAL, OCTOBER 6, 1973

(THE RAMADAN WAR)

BY

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The Crossing of the Suez Canal, October 6 1973.

(The Ramadan War)

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper deals with the Egypt- Israel War of 1973 from an Egyptian perspective. The study initially focuses on the real cause of conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis: The unfair establishment of the state of Israel on the Arab lands at the cost of Palestinians. It then summarizes the three wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors, which were won by the Israelis with the active support of foreign powers and which caused Israel to become more belligerent in its attitude towards Arabs. The paper then analyzes the decision of former President Sadat of Egypt, to use political and military power to break the stalemate of the "no-war, no-peace" situation, existing in the Middle East from 1967 to 1973. It then dwells at some length on the preparations that were undertaken to ensure success by the Egyptian and Syrian Armed Forces. The most detailed part covers the conduct of war as it unfolded, giving brief analysis of decisions taken by the Egyptian high command during the battles. It then goes on to cover the final effects achieved by the Offensive in breaking the stalemate and creating conditions for peace on an equitable footing.

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THE CROSSING OF THE SUEZ CANAL-1973

GENERAL

This paper discusses the Egyptian campaign of October 1973 to liberate the Sinai from Israeli occupation that began six years earlier as a result of the 1967 Six-Day War. The panorama of 17 days of fighting in the Middle East during the October 1973 War offers some fascinating examples of men applying their minds, their instincts and their physical capabilities, in circumstances of extraordinary difficulty to achieve the desired outcome. I seek to present an Egyptian perspective of the war based largely on personal experience and knowledge. My analysis and approach offers the reader a viewpoint not commonly found in the western literature on this subject.

The 1956 and 1967 Israeli campaigns in the Sinai were based upon the strategy of expansion. In 1956 U.S. President Eisenhower denied the fruits of aggressions to the Israelis, because, according to his own words, "he wanted to meet his creator with a clear conscience."[1] By 1967 the public opinion in the U.S. had changed, and Israel was allowed to launch its aggression and, moreover, this time to begin an illegal occupation of Arab lands that had nothing to do with either Palestine or the Palestinian problem.

According to the Israeli defense doctrine, the Arab lands of the Sinai, the West bank, and the Golan Heights, amounting to 56,000 square kilometers, were needed by Israel to provide security. The territory captured by Israel in this war was considered indispensable for the security of the originally recognized state of Israel. Another matter was that the Arabs of the region could also evolve their own effective style of war based on their experience. The Israelis' easy victory in the six-day war of 1967 confirmed their assumption of continuing Arab disunity and incompetence.

Following the defeat of June 1967, the Arabs attempted to reach a just and fair solution for the Middle East Crisis, but faced constant Israeli rejection of every initiative that sought peace. By the end of 1972, Egypt had exhausted all means to break the stalemate of a "no-war, no-peace" situation. Additionally, Egypt had formally accepted all resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly and the Security Council, and participated in all international initiatives for peace, including two initiatives of US Secretary of State Roger's, as well as an initiative by UN Secretary General, Gunnar Jarring. In addition President Sadat had proposed the terms of his own peace settlement, which espoused a substantial compromise to accommodate Israeli security concerns. This was to be a major concession, given Israel's national security concept built on the myth of secure borders and the power of deterrence.

All this Egypt did to break the stalemate, but to no avail, owing to Israeli intransigence to defeat all these initiatives. Moreover, Israel exploited the passage of time to escalate its own expansionist designs, to frustrate Arab policies to achieve supremacy in the Middle East, and to impose a fait accompli on the international community. [2] While diplomatic efforts were underway, Egypt did not waste time; the country took the opportunity to gather strength in political economic, moral, and military areas.

The political decision to use military power was taken. The Syrian and Egyptian Armed Forces prepared to launch a joint offensive operation with the purpose of changing the balance of political and military power in the Middle East and of paving the way for the subsequent and ever lasting peace. To

achieve this goal a Joint Operational Council was established under Egyptian General to undertake tasks of coordination and mutual cooperation between Syria and Egypt.

The Egyptian plan was designed to neutralize the Israeli military strategy. Its initial premise was based on depriving Israel of its ability to control the air during conflicts and required the implementation of a modern, well disciplined air defense system combined with a capability to mount a preemptive air strike, enabling surprise at all levels. An equally important conclusion was that a ground offensive was a compulsion during the first stages of the assault to liberate illegally held Israeli occupied territory. To assist the operation, Egyptian naval forces needed to blockade the entrance of the Red Sea at Bab El-Mandeb as well as effecting the closure of the Suez Canal.[3] The overall concept of operation would be based on a strategically broad front offensive, stretching along the whole length of the canal (175-km) extending further south, but limited in depth up to the range of defensive air cover provided by surface to air missiles. Once the operation was initiated, the focus of the plan would shift from air operations to infantry operations with armor acting providing close support. This was a major change in contemporary tactical trends. A broad front would force Israel to distribute ground and air counterstrikes over an extended front, thus neutralizing his advantages and accentuating his weaknesses.

BACKGROUND

The Roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict are extremely complex and date back over two millennia when the Kingdom of David was founded in Palestine. Since then, the Jews experienced Diaspora and discrimination leading to the rise of Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism, and following the Holocaust it culminated in the founding of Israel in 1948 at the expense of Arab rights in Palestine.[4] Since that time, Arab states and Israel have fought four wars or formal international hostilities.[5]-- the first Arab-Israeli War 1948-1949, the second Arab-Israeli War 1956, the third Arab-Israeli War 1967, and the fourth Arab-Israeli War 1973.

The first Arab-Israeli War 1948 - 1949: The nineteenth century Zionist movements of Eastern Europe shared objectives with many other nationalists of the time, but they did not then possess a land they could call their own.[6] In 1917, Lord Belfour the British Secretary issued a declaration, which contained a promise for a national homeland for Jews as a reward for their assistance during World War I. Following the Second World War, the British ceded control of Palestine to the United Nations (UN), which allowed the partitioning of the area into separate Arab and Jewish states. Within hours after the end of the British Mandate, a war ensued between Israel and the neighboring Arab states. During the course of war, with some outside assistance, the Israelis fielded an army that would successfully achieve its goals. At the end of the war they had actually acquired more territory than was granted in the original UN agreement.[7]

The Second Arab-Israeli War 1956: The years following the armistice of 1949 were characterized by political and military tensions.[8] On July 18, 1956 the United States withdrew its promised aid to Egypt for the Aswan Dam project, a reflection of the American unease over increasingly friendly relations of

Egypt with the Soviet Union. By the end of July, President Gamal Abdel Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. He stated that revenues from the Canal would be used for the construction of the dam. Britain and France raised the Canal nationalization and revenue issue in the UN Security Council and initiated plans for military action against Egypt.[9] In coordination with the Anglo-French assaults at Port Said (north of the Suez Canal), the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) struck an opening blow with a paratroop insertion deep into the Sinai peninsula. The invasion was not successful due to the brave resistance of the Egyptians in Port Said as well as Soviet warnings to the combatants to cease hostilities with Egypt.

The Third Arab-Israeli War 1967: From 1957 to 1966 tensions remained high. In May 1967, President Nasser ordered the UN Emergency Force monitoring the 1956 cease-fire lines to be withdrawn. He then announced a blockade of the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli shipping. This action was followed by the military mobilization of Egyptians, Syrian and other Arab forces. The Israelis responded to this threatening situation with a devastating surprise attack. Early in the morning of June 5, 1967 the Israeli Air Forces stormed into Egyptian airspace, struck practically every Egyptian airfield and virtually wiped out the Egyptian Air Force. [10] Taking advantage of complete air superiority, the IDF then drove deep into Arab territory with classical blitzkrieg operations. In six days the IDF destroyed much of the Arab coalition force and occupied the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank of the Jordan River and the Golan Heights in Syria.[11]

The Fourth Arab-Israel War 1973 (The Ramadan War): The period from June 1967 to October 1973 was characterized by various Arab attempts to redress the imbalance and earn a respectable place in the comity of nations. How did the valiant forces of Egypt and Syria achieve this sacred task is a subject of great interest to all the contemporary armies of the world. An attempt has been made in this paper to present how the victory was achieved against overwhelming odds.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR

PRELUDE TO WAR

At the conclusion of 1967 Israeli campaign in the Sinai, the Egyptian Armed Forces emerged from a painful trial. They had been pushed into an unequal battle without the slightest chance of winning. We had defeated ourselves and yielded to the enemy an easy victory by the sixth day, which he did not rightfully deserve. Israel's French-equipped air force wiped out the air power and was the chief instrument in the destruction of the Arab forces. Land under Israel's jurisdiction after the 1967 conquest was about four times the size of the area of its 1949 armistice holdings. The defeat had the most far-reaching effects on the Arab States Armed Forces. A painful lesson was learned; all Arabs decided that such a disastrous setback would not befall them ever again.

The October War, which commenced on the sixth of October 1973, had its origins at least six years earlier. The victory achieved by the Arab Armed Forces was not the fruit of that day alone, nor was it a chance victory. This victory was achieved with hard labor, sweat, and blood after a long and arduous

struggle. The record of the six years preceding the October (Ramadan) War can be divided into four main stages:

- Defiance and Persistence (June1967-August1968): The main objective of the Egyptian Armed Forces during this period was to remain calm and work towards reconstruction and clearing ruins as rapidly as possible. The Armed Forces were also to prepare for the defense of the Suez Canal. Despite the cease-fire, the Egyptian Armed Forces, with negligible resources in men and equipment, were involved in a number of military actions. The first was repelling the Israeli assault to occupy Port Fuad near the entrance to the Canal on July 1, 1967. On July 14, Egyptian aircrafts launched a strike against enemy positions, hitting artillery, armored, and mechanized troops. The Egyptian Navy also destroyed one-half of the Israeli naval fleet (the Elath) on October 21, 1967.
- Active Defense (September1968-February1969): The conflict during this period was characterized by protracted and intense exchange of fire. This limited the freedom of movement of the Israeli troops on maneuvers and reconnaissance, and inflicted heavy losses on the Israelis. To avoid the losses, they began to establish a strong fortified line along the eastern bank of the Canal, the so-called Bar-Lev Line. Despite heavy losses in equipment and personnel, Israelis succeeded in completing this line of defense, relying on air superiority. This was facilitated to an extent because the Egyptians had stopped the use of artillery because the enemy was retaliating against the civilian population in the cities and villages along the Canal.[12]
- War of Attrition (March1969-August1970): The war of attrition continued from March 1969 to August 1970, when Egypt accepted the Roger's initiative in August 1970. During this period a series of limited successful attacks were made on Israeli positions across the Canal by day and night. The aim was to reduce the Israeli military capabilities and raise the morale of the Egyptian Forces. During this stage, Israeli attacks on civilian targets failed to shake the confidence of the Egyptians in the Armed Forces ability to protect the lives and property of the people. Among these cowardly acts were the bombing of a primary school full of children in the village of Bahr el Baqar and a civilian factory at Abu Zaabal. Egyptian antiaircraft crews succeeded in shooting down twenty-one Israeli aircraft during July1970.
- Cease Fire "No War, No Peace" (August1970-October1973): A cease-fire was imposed as a result of the Roger's Initiative,[13] and the Arab guns remained silent until they roared once again on October 6, 1973. During this period, Egypt entered into a new phase of its history, working silently and patiently, planning and preparing for the battle to recover self-respect, and that was what happened in the Ramadan War of 1973.[14]

All elements of national power prepared themselves for the upcoming war, a battle of destiny, through moral and spiritual conditioning, rebuilding self-confidence and economic preparations, whereby the Armed Forces requirements were provided and their combat capabilities upgraded. In developing the organizational structure of the armed forces, consideration was given to strategic and tactical balance. Despite Israeli strikes on antiaircraft missile bases in Egypt, Egyptian engineers, antiaircraft personnel,

and civilian workers continued their construction and support efforts under the most difficult conditions, with many of them losing their lives in the process.

The General Command undertook several estimates and studies. It looked into basic elements of close cooperation with Syria, which were considered indispensable for achievement of success. It carried out an analysis of the Israeli military strategy, to identify its strong and weak points for exploitation. A study of the topographical and meteorological circumstances on the battle was conducted in order to select the most appropriate time for conduct of war. A study of the psychological temperament of the Israeli Military Command and its expected reactions to Arab actions was under taken to work own counter actions. Like wise data about the enemy defense preparedness along with minutest details about the Bar-Lev line itself was collected with a view to evolving best possible methods of breaching it. Additionally a training and mobilization methodology was evolved for preparing and organizing the Egyptian Armed Forces for the difficult missions without giving any wind to the Israelis. Finally full concentration on insuring availability of means that would ensure success and, above all, measures to be adopted to achieve strategic, operational and technical surprise.[15]

DECISION AND CONCEPT

The Crossing Plan: Based on thorough studies and war games covering various aspects of battle, a crossing plan was evolved. This included mobilization of the forces, evaluation of detailed operational plans, likely reactions by the Israelis and own counter actions and above all intensive training of the Armed Forces in battle like conditions. High level and close coordination was carried out by the Egyptian and Syrian Armed Forces, thereby allowing the war to start simultaneously on both Fronts.[16]

Outline of the Operation:

- After accurately and objectively assessing the enemy's capabilities and those of the Egyptian Armed Forces, it was planned to destroy a major part of the enemy's armed forces on the land, in the air, and at sea. Israel Air Force was to be especially targeted since it was considered as a center of gravity and whose neutralization would deprive its land forces of the protective shield, thereby undermining its counter stroke potential.
- The plans also depended on paralyzing enemy command and control structure and confuse them for a certain period of time with a view to retarding their quick mobilization process as well as delay concentration, to prevent them from launching a timely counter stroke. It also deprived him of the liberty of action to plan and maneuver against a multi front threat, as it had done on the two previous occasions, in the first round (1948) and in the third round (1967). It also catered for neutralizing enemy's firepower in the very initial stages of the battle, thus denuding its defenses from the much needed artillery fire at the time of own attack. Simultaneously the Egyptian Forces were to reduce enemy's air supremacy, destroy enemy forces, and especially armor, soon after the crossing.

- The plan also depended on absorbing hostile reactions through a mix of defensive and active tactical measures. The question of developing the offensive eastward was made contingent upon the success of the bridgehead battle. To keep the enemy guessing about the main thrust lines, the offensive was launched simultaneously all along the front extending right up to southern Sinai. The combined offensive operation was code-named Operation Badr. The operation plan matured by the later part of 1972, awaiting the supreme commander's final decision.[17]

The Decision to cross the Canal: The final decision was made in November 1972 when Egypt's political and military leaders reached consensus that Egypt could never move forward from the stagnated state of "no war; no peace", without recourse to use of instrument of military power. It was considered a last resort to persuade Israel of the futility of continuing aggression, occupying Arab territories by force, and ignoring the rights of the Palestinians. There were two courses of action open to the Egyptian Military Command: either return to the war of attrition or launch a limited war. Extensive discussions led to the conclusion that the war of Attrition had proved its futility and any attempt on Egypt's part to adopt a strategy of attrition would certainly be met with stronger Israeli reaction. This meant that Egypt was facing a no win situation.

It was therefore considered necessary to implement the limited war option. This in all likelihood would tip the status quo in favor of the Arab World, by putting the Israelis in a position of weakness in the final negotiations, towards achieving an ever-lasting peace in the region and a just solution of the Palestinian problem. It was decided that Egypt had to deliver a strong blow against Israel, while at the same time taking all the necessary safeguards against likely Israeli reactions.

The military objective was to defeat Israeli Armed Forces deployed in the Sinai and the Syrian Plateau and to seize strategic land that would pave the way for the complete liberation of the occupied territories in order to impose a just and peaceful solution to the problem. On the basis of this clear-cut objective, the Egyptian General Command worked out the detailed modalities of the plan with the Syrian Armed Forces.

Egypt was to deliver a carefully planned assault across the Suez Canal to achieve its mission, while at the same time, Syria was to launch an offensive to penetrate enemy defenses in the Golan Heights, destroy enemy concentrations there, and reach the Jordan River and the shores of Lake Tiberias. Accordingly, on October 5,1973 former President Sadat gave the decision for the crossing to proceed. He envisioned three main tasks; put an end to military stalemate by violating the existing cease-fire, inflict the gravest possible losses on Israel, in terms of personnel, armor and equipment and finally work for the liberation of the occupied territories in successive phases, depending on the degree of success achieved. [18] This was political war to regain the lost territories, achieve Israeli recognition of Egyptian power, and attain peace in the region and not to destroy state of Israel. A secondary matter was to convince Israel and the world that Israel's military establishment was not invincible and its military

achievements could not alone impose peace. Also, that Israel's natural or artificial obstacles would not provide security for the country.

PLANNING FOR THE WAR

In fact the planning and preparation had started as early as 1968. From autumn 1968 the General Headquarters (GHQ) of Egyptian Armed Forces began conducting annual strategic exercises. The purpose was to retain the GHQ as supreme HQ and the service headquarters subordinate to it. This meant that Air Force HQ, Naval HQ, Air Defense HQ, the headquarters of the field armies, the Special Forces, Red Sea and other military districts, under conditions approaching a war environment.

As a part of the deception plan, it was announced the 1973 strategic exercise would begin October 1 and last the expected seven days. Over the next four years our offensive capabilities steadily grew, as our planning became more realistic. The gulf between planning and military capabilities, enormous in 1968, shrank with each year's exercise until, in October 1973 when exercise became reality, planning and capability were one.

The problems, which faced the Egyptian planners to achieve their aim, were:[19]

- Crossing the Suez Canal: A unique water obstacle 175 kilometers in length, with an average width of 200 meters and depth of about 18 meters, with very steep banks. Its banks were covered with cement and iron obstacles to prevent amphibious vehicles from landing and breaching the line. Water level of the canal varies with the tidal flow, which changed direction at six- hour intervals. The canal itself has a strong and rapid current, reaching 18 meters per minute in the North and as much as 90 meters per minute in the South.
- The Sand Barrier: Israeli increased the height of the sand barrier on the east bank, a result of dredging operations, to a height of up to 30 meters.
- Bar-Lev Line and the Fortified Defense Area: The Israelis had established a fortified military controlled area from the banks of the canal to 35 kilometers to the east. The Bar Lev line was typical of the then current Israeli military capabilities, 31 complex, multi–leveled strong–points, each a fortification with several reinforced concrete bunkers providing for all round firing positions. Wire entanglements and mine fields surrounded each strong point and extended to a depth of 800 meters.
- The Fuel Oil Pipes (Napalm): Numerous points along the Bar-Lev Line were equipped with napalm tanks, giving the ability to cover the Canal locally with fuel, which would produce a sheet of flames one meter in height and raise the temperature of the water to a boiling point.
- The Assault of the Bar-Lev Line: It was assessed by the GHQ that there was no way to cross the Suez Canal and assault the Bar-Lev Line except from the front, which was contrary to the traditional method of attacking fortified areas.
- Initial Bridgehead: The conduct of battle to support the lodgment for the bridgehead would be critical, the attacking infantry soldiers with limited capabilities would have to fight enemy tanks for at least six hours before the Egyptian tanks and heavy weapons could cross the Canal.

- Israeli Defense of the Suez Canal: The Israeli concept of defense was based on making maximum use of defense in depth to dislodge any footholds. If penetrated, the orders called for organizing counterattacks on any established bridgeheads with armored forces closely supported by the Air force.
- Israeli Mobilization: Israeli military and its national economic policy was based on a policy of rapidly transitioning manpower from the private sector to military operations. In support of this policy, a meticulously detailed, lightning mobilization plan, reportedly the most efficient of any armed forces in the world, had been devised by the Israeli General Staff. For that reason the GHQ in Cairo assessed that in the event of crossing the Suez Canal, the Israeli's would adhere to its 48-hour mobilization plan, launching its deliberate counteroffensive as soon as possible. If the Egyptians captured and retained territory after that period, the Israeli's would be panicked into abandoning their carefully worked out mobilization schemes and commit their reserves early. [20]

HOW SURPRISE WAS ACHEIVED

The outcome of October 1973 Campaign hinged on achieving complete surprise at all levels. It was essential that Israel should not suspect Egyptian Armed Forces were preparing for an assault across the Suez Canal. This was the most fundamental problem preoccupying the Egyptian General Command. The detailed plan of strategic deception in Egypt and Syria involved all levels of the Governments. Its aim was to deceive the enemy as to the possibility of the offensive by of our armed forces, while maintaining complete secrecy, and to conceal the timing of attack. To lull the enemy into complacency, the deception plan included all preparations for defensive operations, whereas the staging of troops for the offensive was conducted over a period of four months. Included in the operations plan was how to preposition key components of crossing equipment along the front. The plan called for the mobilization of reserves at regular intervals in a way that would allow having the greatest part of the reserves ready and standing by for action at the zero hour for the offensive.

The criteria for selecting the time of the offensive included the most suitable month of the year, the most convenient day, and the best possible hour for launching the attack. [21] The month of October was chosen because Israel would be preoccupied with the general elections, scheduled for October 28. October coincided with the month of Ramadan and the Israelis would not expect an offensive during the Muslim Holy month. The October nights were long enough to provide roughly 12 hours of darkness, covering the movement of Egyptian forces. It was also the last month before the winter snow in Syria was expected. Essentially this month was the earliest time at which the Armed Forces could guarantee to be fully prepared. The sixth day of month was selected because it coincided with the day of Yom Kippur (Saturday), when activities in Israel would be at a standstill; the moon was full from sunset until it set at midnight. This allowed sufficient moonlight for the construction of bridges and ferries to use them in the darkness. It was determined that the tidal characteristics of the Canal would be most suitable at this time.[22]1400 hours was chosen as time for H hour, permitting the crossing of the Canal and assault of the

Bar-Lev line before darkness. There were five hours of daylight allotted for the crossing, followed by six hours of moonlight, during which the bridging of the Canal was completed, followed by six hours of total darkness during which the tanks and other armored vehicles were to be brought across the canal. The assault schedule included two waves of air strikes during daylight hours. The daylight activities included bringing forward engineer equipment to breach the sand barrier with water pumps, and the airdrop of airborne forces to the rear of the Israeli defensive zone just before nightfall. Conducting offensive operations at this time would provide us the initial tactical benefit of attacking out of lowering sun with obvious disadvantage to the Israelis who would have the setting sun in their eyes.

This plan also supported the requirements of the first phase of the Syrian attack on the Golan Heights, and it would give Israel no time to concentrate its air force during daylight and would not be able to retaliate until the morning of the second day.[23] Secret preparations and plans were mixed in a way that would insure absolute secrecy. The "successive planning" method was chosen, so that requirements for action gradually were shifted from one level to a lower level in accordance with a fixed time scheme.

CONDUCT OF OPERATIONS

FIRST PHASE; SMASHING THE MYTH

On D-day, Oct 6 the Egyptian Armed Forces launched the strategic offensive in cooperation with the Syrian Forces comprising two strategic thrusts, one in Sinai and the other in the Golan Heights.[24] The strategic offensive was preceded by extensive operational deployment of the Egyptian Armed Forces, which was concealed by deceptive measures taken at the highest level. These measures were so successful that the attackers achieved full strategic surprise. Two hundred and fifty Egyptian planes participated in the initial strike conducted at 1405 hours. They headed for carefully selected targets: three air bases and airfields, ten Hawk SAM missile sites, major command posts, and electronic jamming and monitoring centers. They were to strike at a number of radar stations, two long-range artillery positions, three administrative areas, and a fortified strongpoint east of Port Fuad. At the same time Egyptian artillery units opened fire all along the Suez Canal. More than 2,000 artillery pieces and one tactical surface-to-surface rocket brigade participated in this preliminary bombardment. The artillery continued its fire preparation for fifty-three minutes, hitting the Bar Lev Line and its strongpoints, tank concentration areas, and command posts.

Two thousand guns-including many tank guns deployed on the rampart west of the canal began shelling enemy concrete pillboxes on the banks of the canal. Under cover of this dense fire, Ranger groups and tank hunting detachments crossed the Suez Canal to plant mines in tank platforms, paralyze tank action by ambushes, and prevent Israeli armored units from interfering with Egyptian troops crossing the Suez Canal. At 1420 hours the first waves of five infantry divisions and the Garrison of Port Said started crossing the Suez Canal, using approximately 1,000 rubber assault rafts. A few minutes later,

Eight thousand soldiers reached the eastern bank and began climbing the Israeli rampart thus successfully seizing the Bar-Lev Line. Within 6 hours, more than 80,000 Egyptian infantry troops had

crossed the canal, on a front of 170 kilometers. Within 24 hours four additional infantry and armored divisions occupied a 5- kilometer depth zone east of Suez Canal. The first echelon formations of the Second and

Third armies (the five infantry assault divisions) enlarged their assigned bridgeheads. They succeeded in repelling and destroying enemy counter attacks. By the end of October 9, the bridgeheads of the divisions were unified so that they were continuous on each army front to a depth of ten to twelve kilometers. Moreover, all approaches leading to the bridgeheads from the east were under control of Egyptian Army.

The first echelons of the second and third field armies accomplished their assigned mission on schedule despite all difficulties and obstacles. The crossing of Suez Canal and the assault of the Bar Lev line, as well as the occupation and firm control of the bridgeheads were a fine manifestation of the combined arms battle. In this every arm accomplished its mission according to a plan that would require the coordination of the highest order.

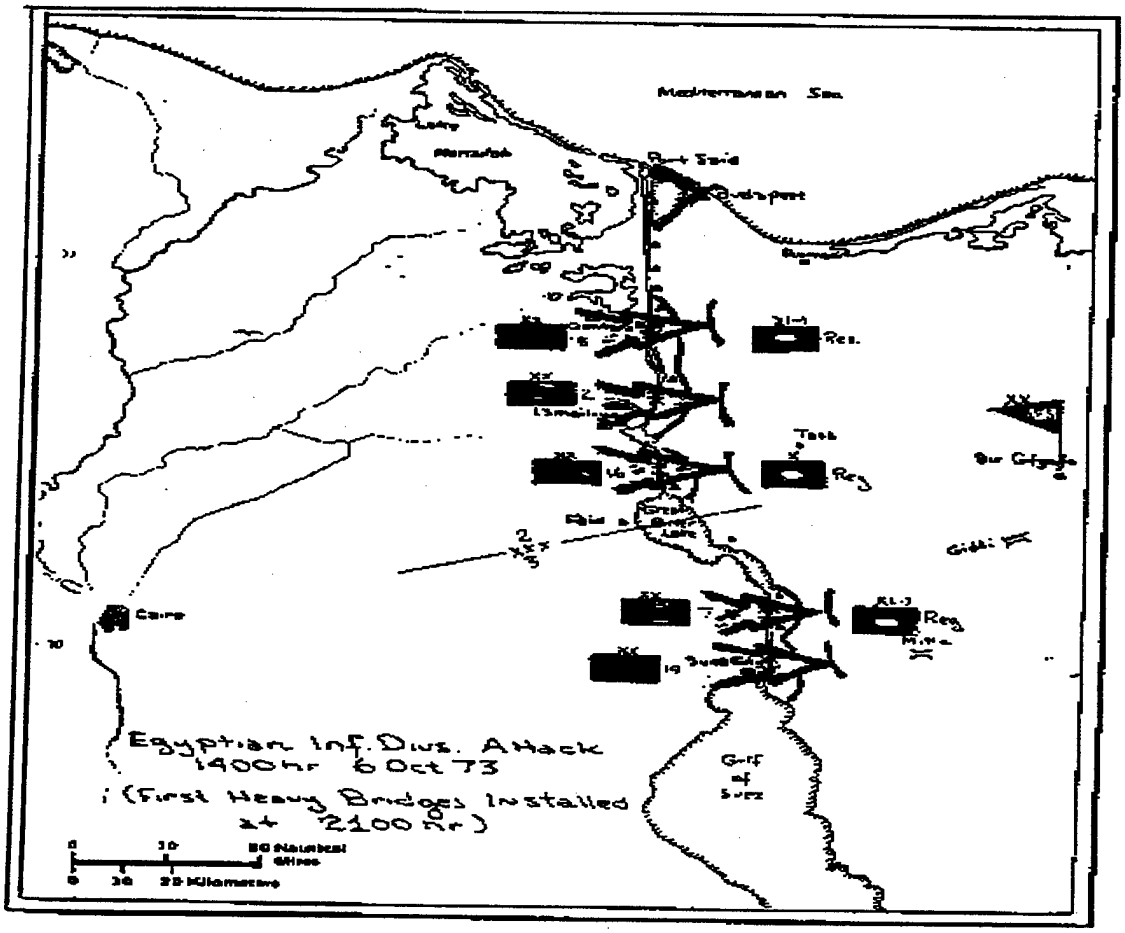

FIGURE 1- PHASE 1: SMASHING THE MYTH [25]

SECOND PHASE: OPERATIONAL PAUSE AND BRIEF ANALYSIS OF BATTLE

The forces conducted an operational pause (October 10 to 13), to reinforce the occupied lines, ensuring the security of the army's bridgeheads, and consolidating the crossing sites over the Suez Canal. The pause had several objectives that served the Egyptian offensive such as, to ensure the security, stability, and consolidation of the captured bridgeheads, which could be used as a firm base on developing the offensive eastward. During this pause, there were many enemy counterattacks against the bridgeheads. The enemy carried out successive air attacks against the forces and bridges, using great numbers of aircraft. The enemy was able to generate all those efforts because of the flow of arms that poured out of the American arsenal and were directly unloaded at El Arish Airfield, starting on the tenth of October.

To carry out air defense of the bridgeheads it was necessary to destroy the greatest possible number of enemy aircraft, and to protect own forces through use of air defense assets. In addition it was necessary to achieve a strategic balance within the theater of operations by forming the second echelons for the field armies and the general command reserves west of the Suez Canal. Additionally reorganizing the forces in the bridgehead areas and establishing the required logistical and technical support was needed to develop the attack eastward. [26]

It appeared from the course of battle in the first stage of the strategic offensive that the main effort of the enemy had concentrated on stopping the attack of the Syrian Forces. There were several reasons for this, the most obvious being the fact that the fighting there was close to Israeli territories and directly threatened the Israeli interior. Israel concentrated its main effort in the North pushing a substantial part of its operational and strategic reserves toward the Syrian front. It was also clear to the Egyptian Command that the enemy would be content with the stabilization of the Egyptian front temporarily until the Syrian threat was eliminated, after which he would shift the main effort toward the Egyptian front. This was obvious by the decrease in enemy counterattacks on the Egyptian front.

To foil this plan, the Commander-in-Chief decided to compel the enemy to shift efforts toward Sinai to lessen the pressure on the Syrian forces.[27] It was decided that the Second and Third armies should attack eastward with their forces at the same time clinging to the bridgeheads with the original forces that had been there since the beginning of the crossing, that is, the five-infantry divisions. The plan had many risks, the most serious of the which was the fact that the attacking forces would leave the protected area covered by antiaircraft defense missiles stationed west of the canal. They would be exposed to enemy air attacks, whose density and violence had increased since October 10, due to the arrival of American reinforcements for Israel. It was also necessary to hold firm to the bridgeheads on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal without weakening the main forces stationed there or west of the canal. For these forces guaranteed the preservation of the operational and strategic balance of the armed forces during this critical stage of the battle.

THIRD PHASE, EASTWARD DEVELOPMENT OF OPERATIONS AND ISRAELI COUNTER STROKE

At 0615 hours on the fourteenth of October under the cover of the air force and the artillery fire, Egyptian armored and mechanized detachments started the attack. Despite the stiff resistance, the Egyptian forces managed to penetrate into enemy positions for a distance varying between twelve to fifteen kilometers, inflicting heavy losses and even occupying some positions. By the end of the day the Egyptian stratagem paid off, as the enemy's attention and main strength shifted toward the Egyptian front, releasing pressure on the Syrian front. The Egyptian General Command estimated that the attack eastward had served its purpose and issued orders for the strike forces to return to the bridgeheads for reorganization.

On the same day our air forces waged their most successful battles, and also attacked enemy troops that opposed our attacking forces. The Air Defense Forces continued to provide efficient air cover for the land forces and air bases in the face of a concentrated enemy air effort against the Egyptian front. The Navy continued to carry out its assigned tasks of bombing enemy positions and anchorage's south of Sinai. Submarines and destroyers continued to secure our positions and cut off enemy naval lines of communications. During the four-day period between October 15 to 19 more than four armored brigades consisting of 400 to 450 tanks were sent to the northern end of the Bitter lakes. Finally the Israeli counter-attacks succeeded in pushing small forces across the lake and to the abandoned Diversior airfield. From October 19 to 21, Israel troops could not succeed in any other counter-attack, on the western bank of the Canal, while our forces succeeded in destroying many enemy tanks in the process.

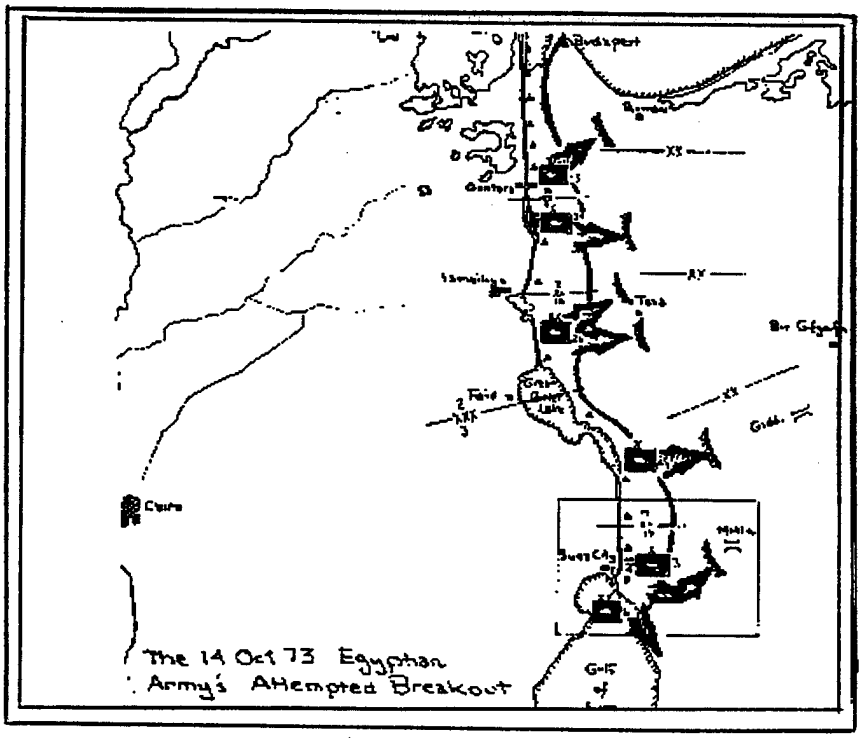

FIGURE 2 - PHASE 3: EASTWARD DEVELOPMENT [28]

FOURTH PHASE, POST CEASE FIRE HOSTILITIES

Egyptian Armed Forces besieged the enemy forces that had succeeded in crossing the canal and destroyed elements that had approached Ismailia, aiming at occupying the city. Egyptian Armed Forces, in cooperation with local defense elements succeeded in surrounding the enemy troops in a narrow sector of the Bitter Lakes. Egyptian forces were ready to deliver the final blow and began violent attacks on both sectors along the Sinai front, until the UN Security Council issued its cease fire resolution at 18:50 time October 22, 1973. The cease fire resolution provided for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories to the June 4,1967 borders. This was agreed to and complied with by Egypt and Israel on the same day and by Syria on October 24,1973. The enemy accepted the cease-fire resolution because of staggering losses.

Brink of Defeat: There was a deliberate attempt to snatch away victory from the Arabs and play down the Egyptians' successes. To achieve this, the enemy continued to press in the direction of Ismailia to seize it and project it as a political and military victory of some sort, but Egyptian soldiers fought with full determination and denied success to the enemy. During the twenty-first and twenty-second of October, the enemy continued its attempt to infiltrate southward (in the rear of the Third Army), but to no avail.[29] At 1852 hours on the twenty-second of October the cease-fire came into effect. The Egyptian forces in the bridgeheads east of the canal held their positions, Egyptian forces west of the canal occupied the second defense zone with Ismailia well under their control. They had successfully encircled the enemy forces on the western bank of the canal and north of the Bitter Lakes.

Advancing under the Protection of the Resolution: Despite the cease-fire, small enemy groups continued to pour to the South and West, bypassing Egyptian resistance and trying to spread out over the largest possible area, positioning soldiers where they had not been when the initial cease fire went into effect. The Israeli objective was to get behind our forces to sever our lines of supply and disrupt communications. Active combat operations stopped with Israel's announcement of acceptance of the second cease-fire. Although limited fighting continued in the southern sector of the Suez Canal front up to 1123 hours on October 28, when the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) began to arrive at points overlooking Suez City to separate the belligerents. The fighting died for a time. At this time the Israeli Command decided to undertake a dangerous operation,[30] to turn the tide of war in favor of Israel. To this end they wanted to exploit the gap between the two Egyptian Armies and secure cities of Ismailia or Suez on the West Bank with a view to diverting attention from the setback that the Israeli army had suffered.

In order to achieve the above, Israelis started to deploy small forces to the south over the mountain trails and roads, avoiding any clashes with Egyptian forces. During October 23 and 24, the enemy forces continued to disperse to the south toward Suez City and the main communications and supply route linking with Cairo. During October 25, the Israeli command continued to strengthen its troops west of the canal and to mobilize major forces to attack the small pockets of Egyptian resistance that were intermixed with its forces. Early in the morning on October 28 the enemy tried again to move into the city of Suez, but this attempt failed. In this manner the Israeli forces were able to expand their

pocket, west of the canal under the protection of the cease fire resolution. This way they were able to increase their territorial gains by more than double than what they had occupied when the cease-fire went into effect on October 22.

At 1123 hours the advance parties of the UNEF began to arrive, and they took up their positions between the opposing forces on the outskirts of the city at 1230 hours on October 28. This action, however, put Israeli forces in a very vulnerable position.

After the resolution: The situation of the Israeli troops in the enclave was potentially disastrous. The Israeli command had, in fact, mobilized seven full brigades in the enclave, according to Haim Bar Lev, the previous Chief of the General Staff. They could easily be captured by a concentrated attack of the Egyptian forces when new infantry, armored, and artillery forces were mobilized to complete the blockade around this flimsy pocket. The position of these troops became more critical due to long lines of communication to their bases in Israel, passing between the Second and the Third armies, and the unfavorable tactical situation west of the canal.

The situation of the Israeli troops on the whole Egyptian front, not just in the pocket, was odd. Fearing that Egyptian pressure would be brought to bear upon them and to protect the approaches to their positions, the Israeli command had reinforced the troops in the enclave to the point that they had reached the strength of seven full brigades. Five other brigades had the mission of holding open the gap at Deversoir, the entrance to the enclave. This was in addition to ten brigades facing the bridgeheads of the Second and Third armies and the strategic reserve that Israel had continued to hold mobilized and ready, in complete contradiction to its military theories or what its national economy could sustain. Israel therefore had about twenty-five to thirty fully mobilized brigades in the Sinai.[31]

The Israeli forces were unable to destroy the Egyptian operational and strategic reserves west of the canal, and those reserves continued to surround the Israeli forces and to prevent them from advancing to the west, south, or north. To force the Egyptian command through confusing it strategically or through upsetting the strategic balance to pull back forces in significant numbers from the bridgeheads in the east. The Israelis could not seize any major cities in the canal area (Ismailia or Suez), and did not have the resources to encircle or destroy or even to threaten the elements of the Second and Third Armies. During more than thirteen days of bloody fighting, the Israeli forces were unable to recover vital portions of the Suez Canal except for a small part of the eastern shore about ten kilometers long. The foregoing shows clearly that the Israeli forces failed to achieve any strategic success west of the canal, although they did have some tactical successes, particularly after the issuance and abuse of the first UN cease-fire resolution. The strategic conditions were clearly unfavorable for Israel as its large forces (six or seven brigades) were boxed in a limited area, surrounded by either natural or artificial barriers or by Egyptians troops, which could have been divided easily into small parts and destroyed. In addition, the Israeli forces faced difficulties of supply, evacuation, communication, and the daily attrition of men and materiel.[32]

Then the "war of the generals" began in Israel, and charges began to be hurled. Everyone learned the truth about that gamble and how much Israel had lost. Most military analysts agree that the battle of the

Israeli pocket west of the canal was, in essence, nothing more than a Zionist propaganda campaign. The most accurate label that has been given to it is " the television battle."[33]

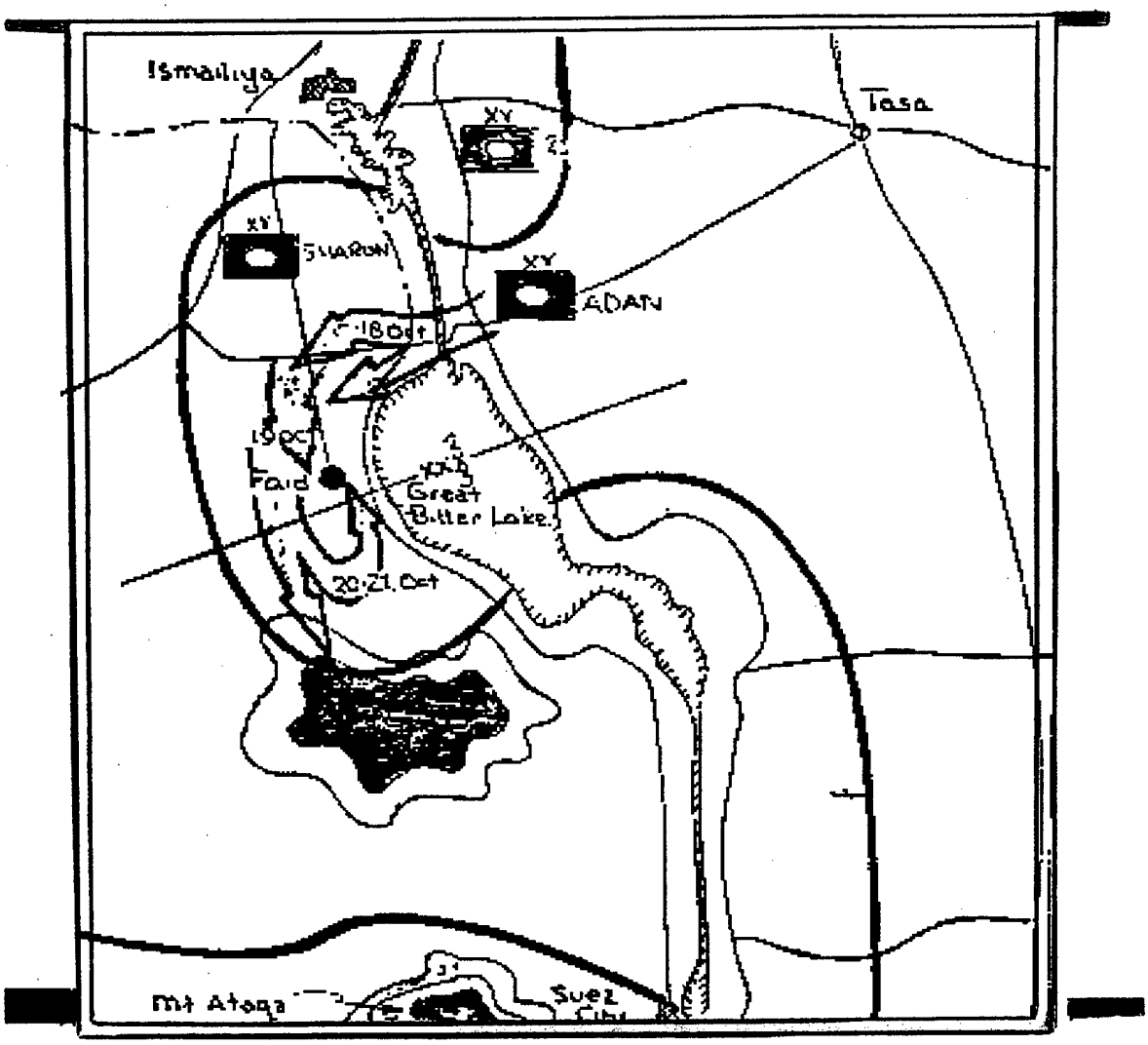

FIGURE 3 - PHASE 4: POST CEASE FIRE HOSTILITIES [34]

FINAL EFFECTS ACHIEVED AS THE RESULT OF THE OCTOBER WAR

The war put an end to the state of no peace, no war, as well as the stalemate, which had prevailed since 1967.This constituted a major goal for Egypt, and regained its leading position. The war provided a proof of the efficiency and the high combat capability of the Egyptian army, which emerged from the war as one of the most powerful military institution in the world. It reflected a good image of Arab solidarity that later used oil as a weapon to achieve the Arab cause. The war gave a severe psychological shock to the Israeli people and convinced them that peace in the Middle East is the only way to guarantee the security of Israel, and caused the superpowers to give serious consideration to the question of peace in

the Middle East. A most important outcome of the October war was that it paved the way for achieving a peace based on justice. Accordingly, Egypt launched its efforts for peace until the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Accord was signed on March 26, 1979. On May 26, 1979, the first phase of Israeli withdrawal was completed on May 25, 1982.The issue of Taba was resolved through arbitration of International Arbitration Tribunal on September 29, 1988, adjudging Taba as a purely Egyptian territory.

As the General Commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces noted, the October (Ramadan) War had achieved several results. Most important are:

- It led to a total Arab unity, never before achieved.
- It confirmed national unity in a way never experienced before in Egypt.
- It restored confidence of the Egyptian Armed Forces and also restored the Egyptian people's faith in their Army.
- It changed military planners all over the world to reevaluate their strategies. Military staffs of the major powers studied and analyzed the October War. Some countries stopped producing weapons that the war proved outdated.
- It substantially modified world military equilibrium.
- It brought the Middle East crisis to the forefront, encouraging the world leading powers, to inquire about and solve the Palestinian problem.[35]
- It led to a tremendous victory of the Egyptian and Arabs, as well as to the liberation of entire territories of Sinai, which was occupied by Israel after the 1967 war.
- That victory was the starting point for Sadat's peace initiative in 1977 and the peace agreements between Egypt and Israel in "Camp David." It proved to be a new international philosophy to solve armed conflict.
- Also it is considered the main reason for the peace movements taking place now between the Arabs and Israel, and it was one of the main reasons behind the reevaluation of the U.S. strategy towards the Middle East. U.S. is playing the main role in the peace process as a complete partner.

LESSONS LEARNED

GENERAL LESSONS

- It was the first modern battle fought on equal terms between the Arab and Israeli forces. Arabs fought for peace based on a justice, while Israel sometimes mentioned peace, with quite a gap between actions and stated intentions. It was clear that given a commitment and justification in cause, the Arabs could rally behind the cause and fight it out successfully.
- This war clearly demonstrated that war is a dynamic phenomenon. It demands developments and changes in organization, tactics, and equipment in accordance with the operation dictates. Failure to remain abreast of the situation and environmental perspectives will often lead to failure. Mind set developed by Israeli leadership about the Arab inferiority cost them dearly. It also teaches that when confronted with a state which enjoys the support of a super power, the objectives have to be kept

limited in accordance with ones physical capabilities and should avoid high sounding goals which cannot be achieved.

- Arabs successfully exploited their strength while working from exterior lines of operations. This strategy forced Israel, for the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli struggle, to disperse its forces and divide its efforts between different fronts. As a result of this Israel suffered on all levels: strategic, operational, and tactical. This shocked the military brain of Israel and paralyzed its field formations from putting up a coordinated response. [36]
- Israel intelligence failed to estimate the military situation despite clear indicators and the flow of information from reliable sources about the imminent Arab offensive. The main cause of this failure was the self-deception and complacency of the Israeli military establishment and the belief by the Israeli hawks of the technological disparity between them and their adversaries.
- In the fourth conflict, the technological standard of the war was very advanced. Many new weapons and equipment were tried and tested for the first time. The results, in addition to their importance, will have a great effect on the conduct of future battles.
- SAMs proved their effectiveness against the Phantoms, and antitank missiles cut the tank down to its actual size, after the Israeli propaganda in the third conflict had portrayed it as a super weapon. Infantrymen were successful in hitting enemy tanks with portable antitank grenade and missile launchers.
- The Egyptians had solved many logistical problems successfully and effectively in the worst and most complicated fighting conditions. Throughout the days of war, all demands of all formations and units were effectively, promptly, and abundantly supplied. Their adversary, in the meantime, was suffering from the lack of materiel and technical supply despite the Air Bridge through which the U.S. arsenals were pouring materiel. [37]Also they succeeded in adhering to the principles of war such as surprise, initiative, cooperation, security, economy of effort, and above all sound logistics.
- Military experts are in agreement regarding the wisdom of the Arab planners in choosing the method of fighting. This is mainly with regard to the attack on a wide frontage, which insured capture of the whole Bar Lev Line with its fortifications in one go.

MILITARY LESSONS AS DRAWN BY FRENCH GENERAL ANDRE BEAUFRE

The military lessons of the war were summed up by French General Andre Beaufre in a seminar at Nasser High Military Academy in Cairo on November 15, 1973.[38]

- The Antiaircraft and antitank guided missiles proved their exceptional efficiency and power. Thanks to these rockets, the Israeli tanks and planes were unable to gain the upper hand, and the balance shifted in favor of the Arabs.
- The Ramadan War proved that battlefield technology would increase in complexity since every new technological measure will be followed and opposed by another countermeasure. Accordingly technological supremacy will greatly influence the course of battle.

- Israel was paralyzed in the first part of the war until it obtained some highly developed American equipment, and yet the Israelis were unable to achieve that complete supremacy obtained by them in 1967 war.
- From the operational point of view, the most important lesson of the Ramadan War is the one drawn from the Arab air forces, which were very cleverly dispersed and protected. This enabled them to continue action, thus depriving the foe of enjoying one great advantage, namely that of air supremacy and control. The availability of SAMs assured effective protection to land forces, even in the absence of aerial cover.
- The land battle confirmed that no matter how strongly defense lines may be fortified, as in the case of the Bar Lev Line, they will always be vulnerable to a breakthrough assault and destruction as long as the attacking forces are sufficiently strong, massed, and determined.
- It should also be noted that it is essential to be able to fight night actions despite difficulties. But if the soldier is self-confident, night can become his friend and his enemy's foe. It's a matter of habit and morale.
- We must always remember that security and peace lie in a continuity of motion and maneuver. Forces must constantly change positions, for if they become static they are lost, especially against an enemy like Israel. Should you have to stop, let that be near an obstacle much stronger than the Suez Canal, or after you have defeated your enemy in such a way as would allow you to master the whole situation.
- On the strategic level, the present international situation, the presence of the two great powers, and the threats of nuclear warfare imposed limits on war between small nations, in terms of objectives, timing, and terrain. The October War was a limited one, and that is because the armed struggle is in fact no more than being part of a game that requires dense propaganda, economic, diplomatic, and political campaigning; for it is then that the game would be complete. The Egyptian-Syrian assault on the sixth of October was a wonderful job, for it melted the ice that had frozen the political situation. It created a better understanding of the fact that "should Israel not accept a compromise solution then she will have to face other wars.
- On October 23 the Israelis violated the cease fire agreement, and pushed ahead armored raids against Suez and the west, I believe that their objective was merely psychological for they expected the advance of their troops to be protected by the cease fire from total annihilation. Thus it cannot be considered a military operation but merely a television spectacle. This shows that Egypt's war plan should have extended to provide for the cease fire stage to prevent the enemy from exploiting it in order to improve his position. The Arabs will have to remedy this problematic situation, for it is one of Israel's tricks.

CONCLUSION

A national security strategy should seek to actualize the national interests of the Nation. One of the main national interests of any nation is to protect and defend its borders against foreign aggressions. To successfully execute this objective, the leadership of the state should perfectly assess the ends, ways and means through accurate evaluation to the enemy, theatre of operations, capabilities, intentions, timing and any other problems. The October War 1973 (Ramadan War) was a good example of the Egyptian process in evaluating every point of the situation. They skillfully understood how far their ends could be and what were the ways and means to achieve. The suffering of six years after their defeat in 1967 was the spark of their success. Because of the no war-no peace situation after August 1970 the case was frozen. The Egyptians decided to solve the problem in their own way.

The aim was to cross the Suez Canal and seize decisive objectives in order to create a favorable environment for a peaceful solution. At that time the only way to reach these ends was a well-planned successful assault to the Suez Canal supported by well-prepared armed forces. In cooperation with the Syrians, the Egyptian planners faced many difficult problems. The element of surprise was essential to ensure their success and to overcome all those problems. Also during the October War, deception proved itself one of the most effective principles of war and can be considered the foremost one. The Egyptians and Syrians succeeded in achieving a brilliant deception plan, in which all principles were accomplished in a very integrative, balanced and comprehensive way.

The deception plan, the operational security, the qualitative improvements in Egypt's forces since 1967, the advanced weapons and the cohesive Egyptian/Syrian strategy, all these factors certainly contributed to Israeli confusion and defeat. On the other hand, they did not consider the Arabs might hold a different definition of victory. This hubris and inflexibility of the Israelis created self-deception and a false sense of security.

The decision to make war began with President Sadat, who played every card in his hand with skill and an extraordinary confidence in his own judgement. The most important single strategic result of the war was the accomplishment of the basic objective; the condition of (no peace-no war) was dramatically ended. The result of the political struggle that had happened after the war, is clear evidence of the success of the Egyptian strategy.

It was clearly demonstrated the high importance of having a strategy in which the armed forces played a main role supported by other sources of national power, to achieve specific goal. This paved the way for the diplomatic instruments to achieve the national goals. Battlefield strategy during October reflects the possibility of surprise in open desert lands, the development and use of modern means of surveillance and intelligence, demonstrating that when commanders have spirit, resolve and practical capability, success will follow.

The October war was an outstanding landmark in contemporary military thought. It reversed many military theories, which remained rigid for many years, and proved it was possible to make a surprise

attack, across the most difficult water barriers, represented in the Suez Canal and cut through the strongest defense fortifications, such as Bar-Lev Line.

Most important, the October war proved that the combat soldier is the most significant element in the battlefield, given that the Egyptian soldier successfully managed to overcome what was called the technological gap between armies.

The Egyptians succeeded in defining and reaching both the strategic and operation centers of gravity of Israel, achieving the main objective of the war. It was difficult for the Israelis to support their national security strategy, despite of their success in achieving some operational objectives.

TOTAL WORD COUNT: 9, 308.

ENDNOTES

[1] Hassan El-Badri, Taha El-Maagdoub and Mohamed Dia El-Dein Zohdy, The Ramadan War 1973 (Dunnloring, Virginia: T.N.Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1973),p 4

[2] Ibid, p. 3

[3] Ibid, p. 5

[4] Ernest R. Dupy and Trevor N. Dupy, The Encyclopedia of Military History (New York: Harper and now, 1986), p. 1221

[5] Ibid, p. 1221-1222

[6] Badri, The Ramadan War 1973, p.6

[7] Joseph F. Dunford, The 1973 War: Deception and Surprise (research paper, Politics 219, Fall 1991), p.3

[8] Ibid., p. 4

[9] Ernest, The Encyclopedia, p. 1227

[10] Ibid., p. 1231

[11] Joseph, 1973 War, p. 4-5

[12] Ibid., p.9

[13] The Roger's initiative is a reference to the U.S. initiative of 1970 which attempted to achieve an Israeli withdrawal from the east bank of the Canal to 20 miles in the Sinai, and to allow Egypt to reopen the Suez Canal for navigation, but Israel refused to accept it.

[14] Ibid. p.10-13

[15] Ibid, p 14

[16] Ibid, p. 15

[17] Ibid, p. 16

[18] Ibid., p. i7

[19] El-Badri, The Ramadan War, p.9

[20] D.K. Palit, MG, V.C. FRGs, Return to Sinai, the Arab Offensive, October 1973 (Palit& Palit Publishers, Dehra Dun, New Pelhi, Aprit 1974), p. 44-45

[21] El-Badri, The Ramadan War, 1973, p. 47

[22] Ibid, p. 49

[23] Ibid, p.50

[24] Arab-Israeli War, October 1973: Case study, 1988. Army War College (U.S.), Dept. of military Strategy, p.41-42

[25] Arab-Israeli War, October 1973, 129.

[26] Ibid, P. 45

[27] Yom Kippur War: conflict resolution through combat 1979. Jarjura, Sana, p 65-66

[28] Arab-Israeli War, October 1973, 131.

[29] Ibid, p. 68

[30] The Ramadan War, 1973, El- Badry, p.116

[31] Ibid, p. Ibid, p.124

[32] The Crossing of the Suez/ Shazly Saad. P.86-87

[33] Ibid, p. 88

[34] Arab-Israeli War, October 1973, 136.

[35] Ibid, p. 202

[36] Four- Arab -Israeli wars, and the peace process/ 1990 Bailey, Sydney Dawson, p. 96-97

[37] Ibid, p 98

[38] El-Badri, The Ramadan War, 1973, p.209-211

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