

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

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**DTIC**  
**SELECTED**  
**MAY 24 1994**  
**S B D**

|   |  |   |                         |
|---|--|---|-------------------------|
| 1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION<br><b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>   |  | 1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS  |                         |
| 2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY   |  | 3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT<br>DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: APPROVED FOR PUBLIC RELEASE; DISTRIBUTION IS UNLIMITED. |                         |
| 2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE<br><b>MAY 24 1994</b>   |  | 5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER<br><b>AD-A279 681</b>  |                         |
| 4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER  |  | 7a. NA<br>                               |                         |
| 6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION<br>OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT  | 6b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)<br>C | 7b. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)   |                         |
| 6c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)<br>NAVAL WAR COLLEGE<br>NEWPORT, R.I. 02841   |  | 9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER   |                         |
| 8a. NAME OF FUNDING / SPONSORING ORGANIZATION   | 8b. OFFICE SYMBOL (if applicable)      | 10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NUMBERS   |                         |
| 8c. ADDRESS (City, State, and ZIP Code)   |  | PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.   | PROJECT NO.             |
|   |  | TASK NO.  | WORK UNIT ACCESSION NO. |
| 11. TITLE (Include Security Classification)<br>The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: An Operational Study <sup>of the Sinai Campaign</sup> (Unclassified)  |  |   |                         |
| 12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S)<br>LCDR Paul S. Grossgold, USN   |  |   |                         |
| 13a. TYPE OF REPORT<br>FINAL  | 13b. TIME COVERED<br>FROM TO           | 14. DATE OF REPORT (Year, Month, Day)<br>1994 Feb 8   | 15. PAGE COUNT<br>27    |
| 16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy. |  |   |                         |
| 17. COSATI CODES  |  | 18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)   |                         |
| FIELD   | GROUP                                  | OPERATIONAL ART; OFFENSIVE; MASS; MANEUVER/<br>SURPRISE; SECURITY; FORCE  |                         |
|   |  |   |                         |
| 19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)<br>War aims of each side are discussed with respect to military objectives. An operational study of the Sinai Campaign follows focusing on Principals of War. Conclusion evaluates how well each side tied strategic to operational.   |  |   |                         |
| 20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT<br><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNCLASSIFIED, UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> DTIC USERS  |  | 21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION<br>UNCLASSIFIED  |                         |
| 22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL<br>CHAIRMAN, OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT  |  | 22b. TELEPHONE (Include Area Code)<br>841-3414  | 22c. OFFICE SYMBOL<br>C |

NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.

THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR:  
AN OPERATIONAL STUDY OF THE SINAI CAMPAIGN

by

Paul S. Grossgold  
LCDR USN

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

Signature:



June 1994

94-15304



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Abstract of  
THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR:  
AN OPERATIONAL STUDY

War aims of the major belligerents are discussed as well as how those aims drove the military objectives on the strategic level. An operational analysis of the Sinai campaign follows, weighted heavily on the Israeli side. The Principals of War, as listed in Joint Pub 0-1, are used to evaluate each side's ability to employ operational art.

The conclusion shows how each side tied the operational levels of war to the tactical and strategic, in light of their adherence to the Principals of War.

Finally, a brief review of the problems the Israelis had in the Yom Kippur War of 1973 is conducted.

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| DTIC TAB                  | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
| Unannounced               | <input type="checkbox"/>            |
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| By _____                  |                                     |
| Distribution/ _____       |                                     |
| <b>Availability Codes</b> |                                     |
| Dist                      | Avail and/or<br>Special             |
| A-1                       |                                     |

## PREFACE

An analysis of operational art in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War is challenging due to the unique command structures of the belligerents, and to the paucity of information written from the Arab perspective. Due to Israel's stunning victory it is all too easy to crown them as world-class operational artists without adequate study. This paper purposely attempts to downplay that victory in order to objectively analyze the operations.

The flip side of this study will show that the Arab defeat flowed from a failure to effectively employ operational art. There is, in fact, very little that can be held up in a positive light on the Arab side. To their credit, however, they learned their painful lessons well and came startlingly close to turning the tables on the Israelis in 1973.

When reading accounts of the war and its causes, there are often prejudicial inconsistencies that arise. For example, the Israelis claim they were provoked by an imminent Arab attack. The Arabs claim they were reacting to Israeli aggression toward Syria. Every effort is made here to avoid the pitfalls of rhetoric and base theses on known facts.

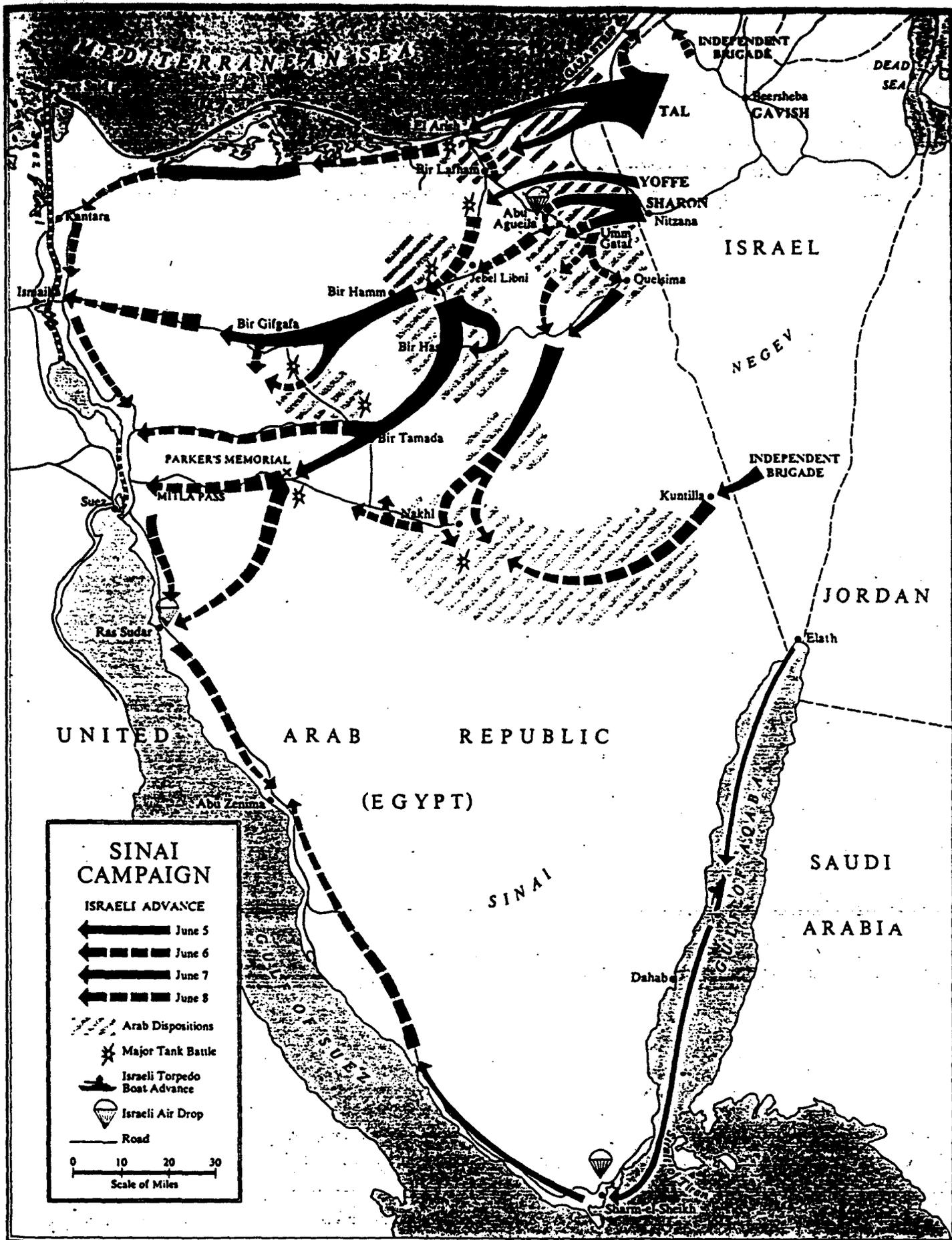
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THE 1967 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR:  
AN OPERATIONAL STUDY OF THE SINAI CAMPAIGN

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: REMATCH ROUND 3

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War was the third in a series of clashes between two peoples, two cultures, two worlds. Before judging the operational performance of each belligerent, we must first identify what they were fighting for. We can then examine how each side derived military objectives from their strategic aims.

Israel

There were several layers to Israeli war aims. First and foremost, they were fighting for self-preservation. On 28 May, Egypt's President Gamel Abdel Nasser announced at a press conference that "we intend to open a general assault on Israel. This will be total war. Our basic aim is the destruction of Israel."<sup>1</sup> These words represented the intent, but what about capabilities. Egypt alone had a sizable military force, and taken *in toto*, the combined forces of the Arabs dwarfed the Israelis in manpower and hardware. On 22 May Egypt blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba, and were massing forces in the Sinai. Clearly, Arab capabilities were formidable.

The military objective to achieve the strategic aim of continued existence was to defeat all enemy forces quickly, and deep in his territory. That defeat would presumably remove the Arab threat to Israel for some number of years, partially

satisfying their next strategic objective - improved national security. Besides having well-armed, hostile neighbors, there were other security issues that plagued Israel since its emergence in 1948. Being a long, narrow nation with no natural borders (mountains, rivers, etc.), they enjoyed no strategic depth.<sup>2</sup> Selective expansion then, would complete their quest for increased security.

The Golan Heights in the north, from which the Syrians launched frequent border attacks, would have to be taken. Ancient Sumaria to the east, which invited a thrust that threatened to cut the country in two, would also have to change hands. Finally, possession of the Sinai would give Israel a much needed buffer with Egypt. Those three objectives would significantly increase the strategic depth they sorely lacked.

The final objective was less strategic than symbolic, but the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba had to be broken. This was an issue of freedom of navigation, and Israel's right to be viewed as a legitimate, sovereign nation.

### Arabs

If Israel's annihilation was the strategic objective of the Arabs, was it achievable? Prevailing rhetoric aside, the Arab leadership knew that it was not. For the Arabs, Egypt was the linchpin in this conflict. Possessing the most powerful military, the eyes of Islam focused on Gamel Abdel Nasser. It has been argued, with merit, that Nasser was attempting to achieve his goals without a fight. Nasser's influence in the

Arab world was waning, with Syria emerging as his chief rival. For him the threat of war became a vehicle by which he could regain Egyptian preeminence. By taking heightened tensions with Israel to the brink of war, he believed he could consolidate the Arab world under his leadership.<sup>3</sup>

Egypt had a military plan to defeat Israel in the Sinai. They would absorb a first strike, then counterattack once Israel passed her culminating point. Further, Egypt would lead an Arab coalition Army on the Jordanian Front in the hopes of driving a wedge through Israel's narrow center.

CHAPTER II  
OPERATIONAL ART

The focus of this analysis will be the Sinai Campaign. To varying degrees, the concepts discussed here are also applicable to the Central and Northern theaters. The war, however, was won and lost in the Sinai.

To measure each side with a common yardstick, we will examine the degree to which the Principals of War were adhered to. *Objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity* are the Principals of War as listed in Joint Pub 0-1, pp. I-30 through 32.

**OBJECTIVE:** "Direct every operation toward the achievement of an objective that is clearly defined, attainable, and decisive."<sup>4</sup>

Israel. The Israeli military (Zahal) had little difficulty focusing its troops on the military objective. That objective was virtually unchanged from that of the 1956 Campaign, and had permeated pre-war exercises and war games. This intense preparation and training served to clearly define the objective (destroy the Egyptian military) and prove its attainability.

The decisive nature of the objective is arguable, since the long-term elimination of the Egyptian threat was not achieved. This was not an Israeli military failing, but rather the result of a major Soviet rebuilding effort. From the perspective of the Israelis in 1967, however, the assumption that the military objective would produce the strategic objective was reasonable.

"Adherence to mission" is one of Zahal's bedrock principals. Captain Aharon, a Centurion company commander in the 7th Armored Brigade, exemplified the degree to which this principal filtered through the army. "Aharon had lost touch with higher authority during the hard fight down the length of the Rafah North position, but, like all Israeli sub-unit commanders, he had been fully briefed on his brigade's intermediate and long-range objectives."<sup>5</sup> (*italics mine*)

"If you resort to dogfights you have failed, for you should get them on the ground."<sup>6</sup> These words were delivered by the chief of the Israeli Air Force (IAF), General Mordechai Hod, to his pilots in the pre-strike brief. Each pilot understood his part in the upcoming battle.

Egypt. As Arabs, every Egyptian soldier understood the over-arching mission to liberate Palestine. The military objective to accomplish this, however, was not as clearly grasped. Part of the problem was that the standing Sinai campaign plan, Operation Kahir, was changed by Nasser shortly before hostilities broke out. Even so, the plan called for the destruction of the Israeli Army, but stopped short of describing how Israel itself would be eliminated.

The Egyptians failed in meeting any of the three aspects of the *objective principal*. Since the plan was not clearly defined, it could neither be deemed attainable nor decisive.

**OFFENSIVE:** "Seize and exploit the initiative to set the terms of the engagement. Military victory requires decisive use of offensive action. The aim is to attain an operational momentum to which enemies cannot successfully react, depriving them of

freedom of action."<sup>7</sup>

Israel. Intrinsic to the Israeli war plan was the need for a preemptive attack to gain the initiative. This they attained in both the air and ground phases, launching near-simultaneous *offensives*.

In the air phase, freedom of action was denied to the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) by not only destroying aircraft, but bombing runways to prevent remaining jets from launching. This enabled the IAF to maintain their momentum, and to revisit and destroy remaining aircraft.

On the ground, the Israelis pressed their *offensives*, without letup, with the effect of defeating the Egyptians before they themselves reached their culminating point. Initial successes resulted in a general withdrawal by Egyptian forces hoping to fall back and regroup. Momentum, however, remained with the Israelis. Now in the open and vulnerable, the Egyptian escape was denied.

Egypt. Though some tactical *offensives* took place, operational *offensive* never materialized. The entire campaign was spent reacting to Israeli initiatives, and finally succumbing to them. In short, they never arrived at the *offensive* phase of their plan.

**MASS**: "Concentrate sufficient combat power at the correct time and place to achieve decisive results. At the same time, force the enemy to dissipate their strength so that they cannot concentrate."<sup>8</sup>

Israel. The EAF outnumbered the IAF approximately two to one in combat aircraft. Similarly, Egyptian ground forces

enjoyed significant numerical superiority. The Israelis were nonetheless able to focus combat power to achieve local superiority in key locations.

The only hope the IAF had to quickly destroy a numerically superior air force, was to destroy it on the ground. Air power was *massed* by first having almost every aircraft in a combat ready status. Second, only four jets were held in reserve to defend Israeli airspace.<sup>9</sup> Third, in-depth intelligence of the Egyptian air order of battle led to strikes on only operationally significant targets. Finally, ground turnaround times were held below ten minutes on average, yielding more sorties per aircraft than the Egyptians expected.

Decisive power was focused on the ground by carefully choosing where and when each fight would occur. Though contrary to conventional wisdom, the Israelis would often break through, rather than completely destroy, non-critical strongholds. This risked a counter attack by forces that were now in their rear. It was more important, however, to keep moving in order to achieve *mass* at the key areas that lay ahead.<sup>10</sup>

Egypt. The few roads that traverse the Sinai represent the only way to move large numbers of mechanized forces. Those roads, and more important, the major intersections, are the key control points of the peninsula. Egypt had invested heavily in *massing* defensive positions at several of these key locations such as the Rafah Junction and Abu Ageila.

Trusting to the advantage of the defense over the offense,

the Egyptians felt that the Israelis would not succeed in breaking these positions. Further, they assumed that building several of these fortified positions would keep the Israelis from massing their forces causing them to dissipate their strength.

**ECONOMY OF FORCE:** "Allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts in order to dissipate enemy strength and to achieve superiority in the area where decision is sought."<sup>11</sup>

Israel: Economy of force was planned with the intent of fighting holding actions with minimal forces on the Central and Northern Fronts, while the offensives in the Sinai were being prosecuted.<sup>12</sup> As Germany understood in both World Wars, simultaneous offensives on multiple fronts were to be avoided by a numerically inferior army. The Schlieffen Plan of World War I had marked similarity in concept to the plan the IDF executed in 1967, its failure notwithstanding.

Jordan's unexpected entry into the war on 5 June caused some concern with respect to allocation of forces. The effect on the Sinai Campaign was a reduced number of IAF support missions. General Sharon's mission to take Umm Katef in his drive to Abu Ageila was jeopardized when an air strike was cancelled just minutes before its scheduled time. Those aircraft were needed on the Jordanian Front. Though he was able to compensate, this incident illustrates the difficulties Israel would have faced against simultaneous Arab offensives on all three fronts.<sup>13</sup>

Egypt: Estimates put Egyptian troops in the Sinai at approximately 170,000, with 100,000 in front-line units. It was apparently felt that this number was adequate, since there were

many more available out-of-theater. The remaining 300,000-plus troops estimated to be under arms were divided as follows: one force was sent to augment the Jordanian Army on the Central Front, another was deployed to Yemen, and the remainder were in security posts throughout the country. The 50,000 deployed to Yemen included some of Egypt's best trained units.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, Egypt had underestimated the strength required in the Sinai; *economy of force* was not achieved.<sup>15</sup>

**MANEUVER:** "Place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible use of combat power."<sup>16</sup>

Israel. *Maneuver* was a pillar of *Zahal* doctrine, and it was so out of necessity. Numerically inferior, a stand-up fight with an entrenched enemy would have been suicidal. High casualties were unacceptable to Israeli society. Employing *maneuver* to put the enemy off balance was one way to keep casualties to a minimum and win quickly.

This principal is exemplified by the events following the general Egyptian retreat of 6 June. It was the Egyptian intent to cross the Suez Canal, knowing the Israelis would not pursue into Egypt proper. The Israelis, therefore, had to overtake and beat the Egyptians to the key passes through which they had to move. Deep interdiction air strikes were used to slow the retreating columns that were initially well ahead of *ugdahs* Tal and Yoffe.<sup>17</sup> With the western escape routes sealed off, and other Israeli units closing from the east, the Egyptians were caught in killing fields between the two and annihilated.

*Israeli Mobility* put a severe strain on logistics. They

outran their supply of gasoline, water, ammunition, and food. Knowing this would occur, several Egyptian air fields in the Sinai were purposely left serviceable for air resupply.<sup>18</sup> The limitations of logistics was yet one additional reason that a short war was imperative.

Egypt. As Israel was driven to maneuver by doctrine, so was Egypt driven from it. The Russian defensive tactics adopted essentially turned their tanks into field artillery pieces. One explanation for this was the success Egyptian artillery enjoyed in the 1956 Campaign. There was no reason to employ maneuver; they would simply decimate the approaching enemy with accurate fire from fixed positions. Unfortunately, by trading mobility for defensive strength, they made themselves vulnerable to flanking maneuvers by an agile enemy. Further, their tightly packed formations made inviting targets for the IAF.

There were some bright spots for the Sinai Field Army. The 4th Egyptian Tank Division contained some of the best led, trained, and spirited fighters in-theater. Not only were they able to withdraw across the Suez intact, they also dealt out punishment to their pursuers along the way. To accomplish this, they employed maneuver to effectively screen their lead elements. Their successes were not lost on Egyptian war planners of the Yom Kippur War six years later.

UNITY OF COMMAND: "For every objective, ensure unity of effort under one responsible commander. Other components of unity of effort are common objectives, coordinated planning, and trust."<sup>19</sup>

Israel. The Israelis built their military from the British

model. All service commanders served in the General Headquarters (GHQ) under the Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin. The three permanent district commanders - Northern, Central and Southern, were part of the GHQ as well. At the theater level, true *unity of command* did not exist, although *unity of effort* did. The commander of the Southern District was BrigGen Yeshayahu Gavish, who had all IDF ground forces in-theater assigned to him. He had no direct control, however, of naval or air assets which belonged to their respective service chiefs, and ultimately to Rabin.

The all-important air phase was run by Gen Mordechai Hod who had recently taken command of the IAF from Ezer Weizman, who now ran operations in GHQ. Hod had worked for Weizman for years, so the transition had been a smooth one.

Evidenced by the seamless transition from bombing airfields to ground support missions (flying artillery), *unity of effort* was achieved. IAF pilots often flew to known Egyptian strong points and supply routes, and essentially selected targets of opportunity. This was not Combat Air Support in the American sense, since forward air controllers were seldom employed and the strikes were rarely in direct support.<sup>20</sup>

The engine that drove the Sinai ground campaign was the *trinity*: BrigGen Yisrael Tal (*ugdah Tal*), BrigGen Avraham Yoffe (*ugdah Yoffe*), and BrigGen Ariel Sharon (*ugdah Sharon*). All three reported directly to Gavish, but often operated autonomously. The *ugdah* is essentially a tactical task force that is tailored for the specific missions assigned, vaguely

analogous to an American division. Each *ugdah* shared the overall objective of destroying the Egyptians and taking the Sinai, but had different enabling objectives. *Unity of effort* and trust were bolstered by extensive pre-war planning and exercises.

Egypt. Any discussion of the Egyptian command structure in 1967 must begin with Abdel Nasser, who controlled the military very tightly. Below Nasser, the structure was somewhat top-heavy. Nasser's Minister of War was Field Marshal Abdel Hakim Amer, who employed himself as the operational commander. The Sinai Front Commander was Gen Abdel Moshen Mortagui, who had only recently come to his post, and had a seemingly minimal role in the war. The Sinai Field Army Commander was LGen Salah el-Din Moshen.

Moshen had under him a formidable combination of infantry, tank and mechanized divisions. Even the remotely located force at Sharm el-Sheikh fell under his purview. It is unclear how the Egyptian Air Force was to integrate with ground forces; however, the question became moot with its destruction three hours into the war.

*If unity of command existed, unity of effort did not.* The blame for this must start at the top. Operation *Kahir*, the campaign plan for the Sinai, was completed in 1966 by the Egyptian General Staff. It was to be a mobile defense in-depth aimed at drawing the Israelis deep into the peninsula. Once inside a triangle defined by Jebel Libni, Bir Gifgafa, and Suweitma, Egyptian forces would envelop and crush the invaders.

Though thought to be achievable by the General Staff, the plan was never gamed nor even disseminated to division commanders to be exercised. Nevertheless, Egyptian forces were deployed in accordance with *Kahir*, but the plan was never put to the test. As Hitler had altered his general's plans for Operation *Barbarossa*, so had Nasser changed *Kahir* shortly before the war.

At a last minute briefing. Nasser learned for the first time the specifics of *Kahir*.<sup>21</sup> Not prepared to yield any territory to Israel for political reasons, he ordered Amer to move his forces forward to meet the Israelis at the border. Armed now with a poorly conceived plan in which the military leaders had no ownership, *unity of effort* was impossible.<sup>22</sup>

An additional problem was a prevailing peacetime mentality among the senior leadership, even while Nasser was conducting his verbal barrages. Many commanders were not even with their units on the morning of 5 June - they were commuting to work! Some didn't get to their duty stations until the evening of the 5th. With the absence of so many key decision makers, a coordinated response was impossible.

Field Marshal Amer himself was guilty of compromising *unity of effort*. He was late getting to his headquarters due to his extended flight. After arriving, he delayed passing bad news from the battlefield to Nasser until after 1600. Further, Amer had a reputation as an alcoholic and drug user, and it was said he kept himself well fortified with those substances throughout the war. If true, his effectiveness as the key operational

commander, along with his ability to foster *unity of effort*, is highly suspect.<sup>23</sup>

**SECURITY:** "Prevent the enemy from achieving an unexpected advantage. Take continuous, positive action to prevent surprise, to retain flexibility, and to preserve freedom of action."<sup>24</sup>

Israel. As a nation with no strategic depth, and with its major cities literally just minutes from enemy airfields, security was a matter of national survival. The Israeli solution came in two parts: intelligence and operational security (OPSEC).

The Israeli intelligence apparatus was vaunted as among the world's finest. For a nation that depended on preemptive attack, they needed a first-class intelligence service that could discern an imminent attack, as well as provide detailed enemy force disposition information.<sup>25</sup> Though little is written on the specifics of the system, it appears that intelligence information was adequately disseminated to the operational level.

One example of an Israeli intelligence breakdown was General Tal's battle at Khan Yunis. Elements of *ugdah* Tal were to sweep around what was thought to be a lightly defended point in their drive toward the real objective of Rafah Junction and al-Arish. The buildup of Palestinian forces was almost at brigade strength, as opposed to the expected battalion, and Tal's drive to al-Arish was nearly halted.<sup>26</sup>

At all levels, OPSEC was employed by the Israelis. To execute a preemptive war of maneuver, freedom of action was imperative. When Prime Minister Levi Eshkol decided to launch the war, he delegated to his defense minister, Moshe Dayan, the

exact day and time of execution. This would reduce the number of people that knew this critical information, and made its compromise nearly impossible.<sup>27</sup>

On the operational level, intentions were kept as close hold as possible; Israeli units maintained strict radio silence until just prior to the attack.

Egypt. Egyptian intelligence capability in 1967 was nearly non-existent. That Nasser would play brinkmanship with such a deficiency equated to diplomatic negligence. The most serious miscalculation was the underestimation of the IAF. This single mistake cost the army their air cover, and with it, the freedom of action they expected to have. In short, Nasser failed to recognize that his own center of gravity was his air force; this cost him the war.

They were also unable to deny information of their battle plans to the enemy. Years of defensive build-up in the Sinai served to telegraph Egyptian war intentions.

**SURPRISE:** "Take action against enemies at times, places, and in manners for which they are neither prepared nor expect."<sup>28</sup>

Israel: "This was the best demonstration yet of the strategy of *indirect approach* . . .exploiting the *line of least expectation*".<sup>29</sup> Disciples of Liddell-Hart, *Zahal* believed fervently in these concepts. *Surprise* would be achieved initially by a preemptive attack, dubbed "Anticipatory Counter-Attack"<sup>30</sup> by some leaders. Liddell-Hart's concepts would then be employed to maintain *surprise* and *deception*.

Opening the war, the IAF utilized the concept of *lines of*

least expectation with run-in headings that were out of the north. This was achieved by a wave-top sweep over the Mediterranean. By the time detections were made, it was too late for the EAF to react.

The flights that left Israeli airfields that morning began as they did every day, causing no undue concern for the enemy. While airborne in his Il-14 transport fitted out as a command post, Egyptian Field Marshal Amer received a ground controller report that the skies of Sinai were clear of traffic, except for the daily Israeli mission over the Mediterranean.<sup>31</sup>

Egyptian combat air patrol (CAP) missions were on station at dawn that morning, as they were every morning from 0400 until 0735. If an attack would come, they reasoned, it would come at first light. Predictably, the last CAP had recovered when, at 0745, Israeli jets were diving below Egyptian radar coverage, commencing their attack runs.<sup>32</sup>

Surprise was also achieved by incredibly fast ground turnaround times. This was so successful that the Egyptians accused the Americans and British of assisting in the strike due to the fact that the IAF was incapable of so many sorties.<sup>33</sup>

Deception was employed to the south, at Kuntilla, to reinforce an Egyptian expectation of an attack there, as had occurred in 1956. Dummy tanks were used to enhance the small deception force. Since the coast road to Rafah was a more formidable obstacle for the Israelis, the Kuntilla option was expected. Instead, General Tal took his entire force to Rafah.<sup>34</sup>

Although operationally direct, *Ugdah Sharon's* assault of Abu Ageila was tactically indirect utilizing three axes of approach. Included in Sharon's plan was operational deception. A reduced force was sent south to Qusaymah in an attempt to draw Egyptian forces away from Abu Ageila. It worked, as it was in consonance with the theater deception plan in Kuntilla.<sup>35</sup>

*Ugdah Yoffe* used the desert to his advantage. His first brigade traversed sixty miles of sand dunes in nine hours, avoiding contact with the enemy. The Egyptians believed these dunes to be *impassable*. Yoffe used light aircraft to spot conditions for his lead elements. He also devised a method of tamping down the sand and laying chicken wire with light APVs, which allowed the heavier tanks to traverse the worst areas.<sup>36</sup>

Egypt. *Surprise* was simply not part of the initial phase of the Egyptian war plan. Since they never got to the counter-offensive phase of operations, it is unknown whether *surprise* would have been employed.

**SIMPLICITY**: "Issue clear, concise, uncomplicated plans, orders, and/or guidance."<sup>37</sup>

Israel. The overall Sinai Campaign plan was simple in concept, but many of the key ground battles were complicated, requiring a great deal of coordination. The devil lay in the details.

The air phase had *simplicity* built in. There were no complicated, synchronized target area maneuvers. Each four plane section was to get in and get out as quickly as possible, while inflicting the necessary level of damage. To destroy the

aircraft on the ground, ordinary cannon was used vice bombs that would need to be fused properly, and would add fuel-robbing weight to the jets. Finally, clocks and compasses were used for navigation. In some of the newer aircraft, modern navigation gear had been removed to save weight and maintenance requirements.<sup>38</sup>

*Ugdah* Sharon's attack on Abu Ageila was so complex that it was nearly rejected by Rabin. The plan called for a simultaneous night attack by infantry, armor and paratroopers converging from three axes. Precise coordination was essential.<sup>39</sup>

Sharon's confidence and thoroughness convinced Rabin to accede to the plan, but his reservations turned out to be well founded. Sharon's paratroopers got into some early difficulty that threatened the entire operation. Gavish ordered reinforcements from *ugdah* Yoffe, which were brought up to stabilize the situation. This lack of *simplicity* was compensated for by an unambiguous command and control system, and exhaustive pre-war training and preparation.

Egypt. Fog and friction in war is expected, but for the Egyptians it set in so quickly that the senior leadership was thrown into a chaotic state. *Simplicity* of guidance and direction was non-existent.

Field Marshal Amer's lengthy morning flight, followed by difficulty obtaining ground transportation, brought him late to his command post. He learned early on that his air force was gone, but news of the ground campaign was coming in piece-meal.

By the afternoon of that first day Amer was desperately trying to salvage the war. He personally issued orders to division, and even brigade, commanders. Unfortunately, this barrage of orders was confusing, and at times contradictory. By this time, the chain of command was a mockery.<sup>40</sup>

The following morning saw Amer order the withdrawal of all forces back across the Suez Canal. That afternoon some members of his staff convinced him that his army was still largely in tact, and that the *Kahir* Plan could still be salvaged. He now reversed himself and ordered a new line of defense from Bir Gifgafa to Bir el-Thamada. The army, however, could not comply; by then it was a confused, demoralized mob with little internal leadership. ". . . many of the Sinai Field Army's highest ranking commanders had literally abandoned their units, and many mid-ranking officers followed their example."<sup>41</sup>

## CHAPTER III

### CONCLUSION: FINAL JEOPARDY

Israel. As shown in the previous chapter, the IDF pitched a shut-out against the Egyptians in each Principal of War. They also won the war in convincing fashion. However, were their strategic objectives met by the operations they undertook?

Survival was part one of Israeli war aims, and survive they most certainly did.

Part two was the easing of various security issues. Their success here was more problematical. Extending their borders did give them a measure of strategic depth, but also brought them an unexpected problem: occupation, from which emerged three major problems.

First, there was enormous territory to control - three times the size of pre-war Israel! Defense lines would have to be constructed along three fronts, using active duty troops that did not exist before the war in sufficient numbers.

Second, a million hostile Arabs in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip now lived under Israeli rule. Though not citizens, the Israelis would still have to bear a measure of responsibility for them, while at the same time maintaining security.

Finally, the Israelis knew that the world community would take a dim view of her territorial gains, and that a long political and diplomatic struggle had just begun.<sup>42</sup>

As discussed earlier, the huge shift to Israel in military

balance of power was short lived. The Soviets quickly restored Egyptian ground and air forces. By 1969 Egypt's strength was sufficient to launch a war of attrition on Israeli forces on the Sinai.

Part three of Israeli war aims was the reopening of the Gulf of Aqaba, which they achieved. Sharm el-Shaik was occupied without a shot fired; Egypt had abandoned the position on 8 June.

The final tally shows two of the three major war aims as decisively achieved, with the third neutral at worst. Israel has been accused by some of not going far enough, that they should have driven across the Suez Canal toward Cairo itself. Only then could it have really achieved long-lasting security. Some Israeli leaders, Ezer Weizman to name one, were in agreement with this line of thinking.<sup>43</sup> The argument ignores the enormous outcry from the international community that would inevitably have ensued. Even United States opinion may have swung against them, and this they could not have afforded.

Egypt. Egypt's failure across the board in adhering to the Principals of War was a reflection of poor leadership, and not on the Egyptian soldier. Considering the dismal leadership he received, especially at the highest levels, the troops in the field performed admirably.

In sum, Egypt's poor operational performance stemmed from a military objective that its leaders knew was unachievable. Without a clear sense of mission, proper planning or training, the effort was doomed at the outset.

## CHAPTER IV

### ROUND 4: WHAT WENT WRONG IN 1973?

In 1973, on the holiest of Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur, the Egyptians crossed the Suez Canal in a surprise attack on the Israeli occupied Sinai. After bitter fighting, Israel reversed its early setbacks and repulsed the Egyptians - but just barely. How did this happen?

For once, the Israeli Intelligence branch got it wrong in a big way. They viewed the Egyptian mobilization as yet another round in a series of sabre-rattling demonstrations. The most recent crisis had been in May of '73, when the Israelis mobilized their forces against an attack that didn't come. This occurred despite an intelligence assessment that the Egyptians lacked the capability to attack. The expense incurred was not trivial, and that factor influenced events in October. When intelligence again assessed that an attack was not imminent, the decision was made not to react - above the objections of the new Israeli Chief of Staff, Gen Davis Elazar.<sup>44</sup>

Israel has been accused of harboring contempt for Arab military capabilities based on the Six-Day War. This is not easy to prove, one way or the other. Yitzhak Rabin states in his memoirs, ". . . We had earned the right to feel confident in our military prowess without denigrating the virtues of our adversaries or falling into the trap of arrogance."<sup>45</sup> Those who accept this argument feel that the Israelis sat on their laurels

in the inter-war period instead of learning those lessons they should have. Further, a new leadership crop caused a loss of corporate memory.

Arab advances more than Israeli failings, however, likely had the greatest impact on the Yom Kippur War. This paper opened by stating that these two peoples were worlds apart. Israel was led predominately by the *Ashkanazi*, Jews of European heritage, from which they derived a technological and military advantage. The Arabs, since 1948, were playing catch-up ball. They had modern weaponry, but lacked the cultural base to use it effectively.

As the Japanese had proved to the Russians in 1905, things change. The Arabs, and primarily the Egyptians, had taken aboard hard lessons in 1967. The premier lesson was that the IAF had to be dealt with. A significant investment in Surface-to-Air missile and gun systems would make a repeat performance by the IAF impossible. Further, effective anti-tank weapons were severely lacking in '67, and that gap was filled.

More important than weaponry, however, was a fundamental change in the strategic objective. 1967 had been a wake-up call that Israel was here to stay. The objective shifted from annihilation to Israel's complete withdrawal from the occupied territories. On 28 September in a speech commemorating Nasser's death, Sadat said, ". . .I only say that the liberation of our land is the first and main task facing us."<sup>46</sup> This would prove a far more attainable goal. Sadat would eventually fulfill most of

that objective through a combination of military and political means.

One other element at play in 1973 was less so in 1967 - superpower involvement. Support for the Arabs by the Soviet Union was constant and formidable. Israel enjoyed no such support at the outset. Only after several days, when logistical problems were causing serious concern, did the U.S. begin airlifting supplies. Once a stalemate was obvious, a cease-fire was imposed.<sup>47</sup>

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pp. 1-4

3. Hammel, Eric Six Days in June pp. 29

4. Joint Pub 0-1 pp. I-30

5. Hammel, Erik pp. 202

6. Shoemaker, R.L. "The Arab-Israeli War" pp. 60

7. Joint Pub 0-1 pp. I-30/31

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9. Weizman, Ezer "On Eagle's Wings" pp. 223

10. Weller, Jac "Breakthrough at Rafa" pp. 176

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13. Hammel, Erik pp. 237

14. Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim pp. 53

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- 17.Hammel, Eric pp. 248
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- 22.Hammel, Eric pp. 146-147
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41. *ibid*, pp.246

42. Rabin, Yitzhak "The Rabin Memoirs" pp. 118

43. Weizman, Ezer On Eagle's Wings pp. 257

44. Ben-Porat, Yoel "The Yom Kippur War: A Mistake in May Leads to a Surprise in October" pp. 60-61

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46. Palit, D.K. Return to Sinai pp. 48

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