

# The Illusion of Defeat: Egyptian Strategic Thinking and the 1973 Yom Kippur War

A Monograph

by

LTC Steven R. Meek  
USA



School of Advanced Military Studies  
United States Army Command and General Staff College  
Fort Leavenworth, Kansas

2016

Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

The public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing the burden, to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

**PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.**

<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 06-04-2016	<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> SAMS Monograph	<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> Jun 2015 - May 2016
--	---	--

<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> The Illusion of Defeat: Egyptian Strategic Thinking and the 1973 Yom Kippur War	<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>

<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Steven R. Meek, LTC, U.S. Army	<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>
	<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>
	<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>

<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301	<b>8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER</b>
--	---

<b>9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>	<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>
	<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>

**12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT**  
Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited

**13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES**

**14. ABSTRACT**  
The 1973 Yom Kippur War was a landmark event in the oft-troubled history of Arab-Israeli relations. Anwar Sadat conducted a war for limited objectives to discredit the myth of Israeli vulnerability, jump-start a stalled political process, reclaim the Sinai Peninsula, and ultimately achieve peace with Israel. Egypt had lost tactically, but won strategically. As a result, Sadat is widely believed to be a master strategist. But was he? This monograph explores Egyptian strategic thinking leading to the 1973 October War through the lens of Dolman's Pure Strategy. Specifically, Dolman's notions that strategy is not about winning in the traditional sense, but about achieving a position of relative advantage, and that the strategic purpose of war is to attain a better condition of peace.

**15. SUBJECT TERMS**

<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b> (U)	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b> 56	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b> (U)	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b> (U)	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b> (U)			<b>19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code)</b>

Monograph Approval Page

Name of Candidate: LTC Steven R. Meek  
Monograph Title: The Illusion of Defeat: Egyptian Strategic Thinking and the 1973 Yom Kippur War

Approved by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Monograph Director  
Anthony E. Carlson, PhD

\_\_\_\_\_, Seminar Leader  
Randall S. Hoffman, LtCol, USMC

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, School of Advanced Military Studies  
Henry A. Arnold III, COL, IN

Accepted this 10<sup>th</sup> day of May 2016 by:

\_\_\_\_\_, Director, Graduate Degree Programs  
Robert F. Baumann, PhD

The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other government agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

Fair use determination or copyright permission has been obtained for the inclusion of pictures, maps, graphics, and any other works incorporated into this manuscript. A work of the United States Government is not subject to copyright, however further publication or sale of copyrighted images is not permissible.

## Abstract

The Illusion of Defeat: Egyptian Strategic Thinking and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, by LTC Steven R. Meek, USA, 56 pages.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War was a landmark event in the oft-troubled history of Arab-Israeli relations. Anwar Sadat conducted a war for limited objectives to discredit the myth of Israeli vulnerability, jump-start a stalled political process, reclaim the Sinai Peninsula, and ultimately achieve peace with Israel. Egypt had lost tactically, but won strategically. As a result, Sadat is widely believed to be a master strategist. But was he? This monograph explores Egyptian strategic thinking leading to the 1973 October War through the lens of Dolman's *Pure Strategy*. Specifically, Dolman's notions that strategy is not about winning in the traditional sense, but about achieving a position of relative advantage, and that the strategic purpose of war is to attain a better condition of peace.

## Contents

Acknowledgements .....	v
Acronyms .....	vi
Figures .....	vii
Introduction .....	1
What is Strategy? .....	3
Methodology .....	11
Complex Adaptive Systems .....	11
1967 Six Day War .....	13
UN Security Council Resolution 242 .....	17
Khartoum Conference .....	19
War of Attrition .....	22
Israeli Security Theory .....	28
Bounding the System .....	30
Anwar Sadat .....	31
1973 Yom Kippur War .....	40
Conclusion .....	43
Bibliography .....	47

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank several people for their time, assistance, and their patience as I prepared this monograph. Dr. Anthony Carlson provided both invaluable advice and countless revisions to various drafts while I tackled this project, and has undoubtedly made me a better writer. Mr. John Dubuisson at the Combined Arms Research Library at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas provided me with an endless list of reference materials that proved to be critical as I started this endeavor. Most of all, I would like to thank my wife, Hayley, for allowing me to use her as a sounding board as I pontificated about strategy, complexity, and the Middle East.

## **Acronyms**

AMAN	Directorate of Military Intelligence (Israel)
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CoS	Chief of Staff
DIA	Defense Intelligence Agency
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IC	Intelligence Community
INR	US State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research
KIA	Killed in Action
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
POW	Prisoner of War
SAM	Surface-to-Air Missile
UN	United Nations
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

## Figures

1	Territories captured by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War .....	14
---	--	----



## Introduction

“I used to tell Nasser that if we could recapture even four inches of Sinai territory (by which I meant a foothold, pure and simple), and establish ourselves there so firmly that no power on earth could dislodge us, then the whole situation would change – east, west, all over.”

—Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity*

The 1973 Yom Kippur War (known as the Ramadan War, or the October War) was a landmark event in the oft-troubled history of Arab-Israeli relations. On 6 October 1973, Egyptian and Syrian forces conducted simultaneous attacks on Israeli forces in the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights, respectively. Israel failed to take into account the numerous indicators that war was imminent and was taken by surprise. Over a span of two and a half weeks, Israel suffered at least 2,569 killed in action and another 7,500 wounded, a staggering amount considering the relatively small population of the country.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, the 1973 Yom Kippur War had a profound impact on international relations by testing the durability of US-Soviet détente, causing the United States to place the Arab-Israeli conflict on the top of its foreign policy agenda.<sup>2</sup> For the United States, the war threatened to destabilize the region, harm American interests therein, and provoke a superpower showdown with the Soviet Union. As such, its involvement in the 1973 Yom Kippur War was unavoidable.

The event had far-reaching consequences: it discredited the so-called “Israeli security theory,” forced United States political intervention to cease hostilities, and led to an eventual post-war break in relations with the Soviet Union. Ultimately, the Yom Kippur War paved the way for closer Egyptian-American relations, best exemplified with the 1978 Camp David Peace

---

<sup>1</sup> Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 1990), 95.

<sup>2</sup> William Burr, ed., “The October War and U.S. Policy,” The National Security Archive at The George Washington University, October 7, 2003, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/index2.htm>.

Accords. Egyptian President Anwar Sadat is widely believed to have used the 1973 Yom Kippur War to force the Israelis back to the negotiation table and ultimately regain control of the Suez Canal. In this context, Sadat conducted a limited war in which Egyptian military operations on the Sinai Peninsula that generated favorable post-conflict conditions.

In spite of Egypt's tactical defeat in 1973, history generally awards Sadat the title of "strategist," as he used the Egyptian armed forces (means) throughout the conduct of the October War (ways) to ultimately achieve a specific political aim (ends). On the other hand, Israel's strategic outlook in 1973 was dysfunctional, based on faulty assumptions and premised on the belief that tactical success translated into strategic triumphs. True, Israel emerged tactically victorious from the 1973 Yom Kippur War; however, the war inflicted such a shock to the Israeli psyche that it remains a topic of discussion even today. For example, in marking the 42nd anniversary of the 1973 October War at the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem in 2015, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin stated that the war continues to be an "open wound" for the nation.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the Yom Kippur War was the most traumatic war that Israel has experienced to date, and continues to leave deep scars to this day.<sup>4</sup> Both Egypt and Israel experienced friction between the political and military leadership over the course of the war, especially concerning the role of military objectives in support of achieving political aims. The question is often asked, "How did Israel, who won tactically, fall short strategically?"

---

<sup>3</sup> Stuart Winer, "Marking '73 War, President Calls for Scrutiny of Today's Leaders," *The Times of Israel*, September 24, 2015, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/marking-73-war-president-calls-for-scrutiny-of-todays-leaders/>.

<sup>4</sup> Israel Today Staff, "The Yom Kippur War - 42 Years On..." *Israel Today*, September 24, 2015, accessed September 24, 2015, <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/27431/Default.aspx>.

## What is Strategy?

Before evaluating the aforementioned questions, it is important to address the concept of strategy. What, exactly, is strategy, and what is its contemporary significance? Compounding this question is the fact that there seems to be a strategy for everything these days, thus watering down the term. Much has been written on this subject, especially within the last ten years as both the Iraq and Afghanistan wars embroiled the United States. Specifically, of particular relevance today is the challenge of translating tactical victories into strategic success. Indeed, the United States has experienced numerous tactical successes in both of these countries, yet the threat of Islamic extremist terrorist attacks against the homeland remains, and the political futures of both Iraq and Afghanistan remain in doubt. Thus, the United States' tactical successes in these countries have not translated into strategic success. Furthermore, US ground operations against the Islamic State would be undoubtedly successful, but to what strategic, political end?

Hew Strachan, one of the world's leading military historians, argues that both Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom lacked a coherent strategy. More importantly, he posits that the United States' "Global War on Terror (GWOT)," first articulated in September 2001, is profoundly astrategic, and while it does shape military means to political objectives, it conceptually remains devoid of strategic insight and of political context. Moreover, Strachan asserts that the GWOT is a statement of policy rather than one of strategy.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, over the last few decades the terms "strategy" and "policy" have become so comingled that the cognitive distinctions are muddled, further confusing efforts to construct viable strategy. As a result, strategy and policy have become synonymous, which confuses their proper roles in national

---

<sup>5</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Modern History* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 65, 68.

security decision making.<sup>6</sup> This begs yet more questions: is strategy necessary and, if so, is it possible?

Richard Betts's 2008 essay, "Is Strategy an Illusion?," investigates this problem. Betts argues that just because strategy is necessary, it does not mean that it is possible. Betts, a senior fellow on the Council on Foreign Relations, identifies skeptics' concerns that effective strategy is often an illusion because what happens in the gap between policy objectives and war outcomes is too complex and unpredictable to be manipulated to a specific end. Like Strachan, Betts posits that politicians often conflate strategy with policy objectives, while soldiers often conflate strategy with operations (thus assuming that tactical victories equal strategic success). Betts lists ten critiques of strategy that pundits often make and offers a defense of each. In the end, however, Betts acknowledges that except for the least difficult military challenges, there is no alternative but to engage in strategy unless one is willing to give up the use of force as an instrument of policy.<sup>7</sup> Strachan agrees, stating that due to strategy failing to recover from losing its way during the Cold War, one might conclude that it is dead. Doing so, he says, would be historically illiterate.<sup>8</sup> Thus strategy, while difficult, amorphous, and sometimes messy, is necessary. This takes us back to the original question, what exactly is strategy?

Before one delves into this question, it is important to make two points. First, Clausewitz's definition of war has continued to hold true from the 1973 Yom Kippur War to this day. For Clausewitz, war was not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means. Specifically, Clausewitz asserts that, "the political object is the goal, war is the means of reaching it, and means can never be

---

<sup>6</sup> Mark Roberts, "Review of *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*," *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 98-99.

<sup>7</sup> Richard K. Betts. "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5-50.

<sup>8</sup> Strachan, 41.

considered in isolation from their purpose.”<sup>9</sup> Unsurprisingly, all of the following definitions of strategy align with this theory of war. Second, the definition of strategy is difficult to nail down. Several military theorists have offered compelling definitions; including Baron von Clausewitz, Antoine Jomini, Alexander Svechin, and Edward Dolman. While all of these interpretations of strategy are worthy of consideration when examining the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the latter is important, as Dolman’s views on strategy constitute a crucial framework for understanding Sadat’s strategic thinking prior to and during the 1973 October War.

The Prussian theorist Carl von Clausewitz defined strategy as, “the use of engagements for the purpose of the war.”<sup>10</sup> Later, Clausewitz asserted that although strategy is concerned only with battles, its theory should also consider the strategy’s chief means of execution, the army. Critics claim that this definition is too narrow for contemporary warfare, while supporters retort that Clausewitz’s depiction continues to serve as the lens that relates military power to political purpose.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, what does it mean?

Under Clausewitz’s definition of strategy, there is no such thing as victory. Victory belongs to the realm of tactics. In contrast to contemporary views on strategy, Clausewitz’s definition acts as nothing more than an enabler, setting the conditions for and later exploiting tactical victories. Strategy links tactics in a purposeful way. Contemporary views tend to require tactics to find a way to succeed within the parameters set by strategy. The essential difference, then, is that under Clausewitz’s concept, strategy facilitates tactical success, while contemporary definitions, influenced in part by the doctrine of limited war, tend to circumscribe it.<sup>12</sup> In sum,

---

<sup>9</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 87.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>11</sup> Antulio J. Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 126.

Clausewitz's definition of strategy certainly remains applicable today, especially in taking the liberal view of the purposeful linking of tactics via strategy. However, to truly understand strategic thinking during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, one must look even broader.

The French military theorist Antoine Jomini provided a second definition of strategy. Here, strategy is the art of making war on the map, and it encompasses the whole theater of operations. Jomini further argued that strategy decides where to act, logistics brings the troops to this point, and grand tactics decides the manner of execution and the deployment of troops.<sup>13</sup> To Jomini, strategy was the sphere of activity between the political, where decisions were made about who to fight, and the tactical, the sphere of actual combat. By arguing that strategy was the art of making war upon the map, Jomini evaluated how the commander conceived both the theater of operations as a whole as well as moves against the enemy, all while taking advantage of the spatial awareness made possible by modern cartography. Unfortunately, different principles govern both politics and tactics, and Jomini had surprisingly little to say about either.<sup>14</sup> In other words, while Jomini's definition of strategy identifies the adversary (the "who"), it makes no mention of the political aims that drive the conflict (the "why"), and as such is unsuitable for understanding strategic thinking during the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

Third, the Soviet military theorist Alexander Svechin defines strategy as, "the art of combining preparations for war and the grouping of operations for achieving the goal set by the war for the armed forces."<sup>15</sup> Here, Svechin asserts that strategy decides issues associated with the employment of the armed forces and all the resources of a country for achieving ultimate war

---

<sup>13</sup> Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini, *The Art of War*, intro. Charles Messenger (London: Greenhill Books, 1992), 69.

<sup>14</sup> Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Alexander A. Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992), 69.

aims, and that strategy must not be disassociated from military activity. In other words, strategy cannot be separated from military operations and its ensuing tactics, or the ends cannot be disconnected from the ways and means. This is true. However, Svechin mistakenly posits that strategy is the art of military leaders, primarily the art of those persons called on to resolve the basic problems set forth by a wartime situation and to transmit their strategic decisions for execution by commanders who arrange military operations in time and space. Moreover, Svechin argues that politicians should only be familiar enough with strategy when identifying the political aim.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, Svechin omits an essential aspect of strategy, which is the continuous civil-military dialogue that occurs throughout both the development of strategy and its execution. Strategy is not just the domain of military leaders; political leadership is required as well. Thus, Svechin's definition of strategy does not apply to the 1973 October War.

So what is an appropriate definition of strategy when examining the 1973 Yom Kippur War? Everett Dolman's *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* provides an appropriate lens to evaluate Sadat's strategic thinking. Here, Dolman contends that strategy is not about winning. In fact, he asserts that states may even choose to go to war with strategic aims that rule out the possibility of tactical victory, as a loss may be accepted in order to achieve an advantageous standing in a larger community. Moreover, Dolman maintains that the purpose of strategy is to continue to exert influence, and that the strategic purpose of war is to attain a better condition of peace. Thus, military campaigns may be waged to gain leverage at the peace table. Specifically, strategy is about manipulating the physical, socio-political, and temporal boundaries in in order to influence states' discourse in such a way that it will go forward on favorable terms. Simply put, Dolman defines strategy as a plan for obtaining continuing

---

<sup>16</sup> Svechin, 73-74.

advantage.<sup>17</sup> This monograph argues that Anwar Sadat did all of these things in prosecuting the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As a result, Dolman's definition and corresponding views of strategy are entirely applicable and will form a crucial segment of the theoretical framework used in this study.

Dolman offers two key concepts. First, he posits a rather radical notion that strategy is not about winning in the traditional sense, and that strategists must redefine what the term means. Generally, the notion exists that tactical victories easily translate into strategic success. Of course, this is not true, as was the case with the United States in the Vietnam War. In particular, the now-famous April 1975 conversation between United States Army Colonel Harry Summers and his counterpart, Colonel Tu, of the People's Army of Vietnam. Here, Colonel Summers politely informed Colonel Tu that the North Vietnamese never defeated the United States on the battlefield, to which Tu replied that while Summers was correct, in the end it is irrelevant.<sup>18</sup> In this context, a strategist must be prepared to seek battle without the possibility of victory. Furthermore, Dolman asserts that a strong showing against a superior opponent demonstrates resolve, may provide bargaining power in subsequent negotiations, and that defeat could occur as part of a larger plan to attain future or continuing advantages. More importantly, Dolman states that knowingly agreeing to fight when the probable outcome is defeat is strategic by definition.<sup>19</sup>

As this monograph will show, Anwar Sadat led Egypt to war with Israel in October 1973 neither advancing a war of annihilation (the destruction of the state of Israel) nor with the intent of seizing the entire Sinai Peninsula, which was lost during the 1967 Six Day War. His political aim was to seize bridgeheads on the eastern side of the Suez Canal, defeat ensuing Israel

---

<sup>17</sup> Everett C. Dolman, *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age* (New York: Taylor and Francis Group, 2005), 5-15.

<sup>18</sup> Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013) 23-38.

<sup>19</sup> Dolman, 8.



counterattacks, and force Israel into a war of attrition (which it could not sustain). Doing so would discredit the widely-held “Israeli Security Theory” or “The Conception” and force Israel back to the negotiation table.<sup>20</sup> The Israeli Security Theory was a widely-accepted mythos that Israeli security forces would have advanced notice of any impending attack and that until certain conditions were met, including the necessity of Egyptian air superiority and pan-Arab cooperation, Egypt would not dare to go to war against Israel.<sup>21</sup>

Recognizing the capability of the Egyptian armed forces as compared to the Israelis and that a full-scale offensive to retake the entire Sinai would end in tactical failure, Sadat pursued a limited war for limited objectives. Sadat was willing to accept the risk of tactical defeat as long as the Egyptian armed forces had a strong showing against Israel, Israeli perceptions regarding security were disrupted, and the political process was restarted with Egypt having enhanced bargaining power. Indeed, while the Egyptians were defeated on the battlefield, Sadat ultimately used his tactical defeat to enable strategic success, concluding with the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords and a 1979 peace treaty with Israel.

The second key concept of Dolman’s perspectives on strategy concerns the manipulation of boundaries. Boundaries consist of social, historical, geographical, and technical characteristics that further provide the context of conflict, and offer a structure for actions taken.<sup>22</sup> Ideas and perceptions can also constitute boundaries, such as the general acceptance of the Israeli Security Theory. Indeed, Dolman contends that the strategist who does not have a firm grounding in the events and lessons of the past is doomed to fail. Specifically, the future that the strategist seeks to shape is as much a product of the events and perception of events that have already occurred.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> P.R. Kumaraswamy, “Revisiting the Yom Kippur War: Introduction,” in *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War*, ed. P.R. Kumaraswamy (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 7.

<sup>21</sup> Cohen and Gooch, 100.

<sup>22</sup> Dolman, 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 74.

This study will show that Anwar Sadat possessed a keen historical understanding of the conflict between Egypt and Israel and that the Egyptian armed forces at the time were a learning organization who took to heart the lessons learned from both the 1967 Six Day War and the War of Attrition during their preparations.

In addition, Dolman argues that a strategist manipulates boundaries in order to influence states' discourse with one another in such a way that it can go forward on favorable terms. Moreover, a strategist understands how boundaries determine the means and ends chosen in conflict and to manipulate the processes that transform them. As such, strategic planning attempts to manipulate these boundaries in order to enable action, and to establish the framework for either the next war or the conditions for a lasting peace.<sup>24</sup> Sadat manipulated the geopolitical boundaries with the Soviet Union, Israel, other Arab nations, and the United States, restarting the political dialogue with Israel and eventually moving away from the Soviet orbit and forging closer relations with the United States.

It is important to note that not everyone shares the view that Sadat was a strategist. In particular, Saad el-Shazly, former Chief of Staff of the Egyptian Armed Forces during the Yom Kippur War, believed that Sadat was an egotist and specifically blamed him for the Egyptian defeat during the October War. In other words, El-Shazly viewed victory in purely tactical terms rather than achieving a position of strategic advantage. His 1980 book, *The Crossing of the Suez*, praised the actions of the Egyptian military during the war and offered a scathing attack on Sadat's management of the conflict. In fact, el-Shazly specifically called the Yom Kippur War a disaster for the country. Furthermore, el-Shazly contends that Sadat destroyed not only the greatest army Egypt had ever assembled, but also the greatest collaborative effort the Arabs had achieved in a generation. He wrote: "I believe that we could have done much better than we did

---

<sup>24</sup> Dolman, 6-7, 11.

during the war if Sadat had not so frequently interfered in military decisions.... the military was let down by their political leaders.”<sup>25</sup> General el-Shazly regards the Yom Kippur War as not only a tactical defeat but a political one as well, the outcome of which set in motion a series of concessions culminating in the ‘neutralization’ of Egypt through the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords.

## Methodology

The purpose of this monograph is to examine strategic thinking as it relates to the use of war to achieve political aims. While this monograph is focused on Sadat and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, one must also examine the events that affected Egypt since 1967, as these formed the conditions and the boundaries of the complex system that Sadat inherited when he assumed power in 1970. Most of the major actors involved in the October War will be examined (Egypt, Israel, the United States, and the Soviet Union); however, this monograph will primarily focus on Egyptian strategic thinking, particularly that of Anwar Sadat. Moreover, Sadat’s ability to garner support from the oil producing Gulf States for his war with Israel via use of the oil weapon will also be discussed. Complexity theory will provide an analytical lens to judge the belligerents’ actions. However, the primary means used in investigating the October War will be Dolman’s definition of strategy, specifically how Sadat manipulated the boundaries associated with the Arab-Israeli complex adaptive system to attain a position of relative advantage.

## Complex Adaptive Systems

Robert Axelrod and Michael Cohen’s *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier* provides prescient insight into the realm of both complexity

---

<sup>25</sup> Saad el-Shazly, *The Crossing of the Suez* (San Francisco, CA: American Mideast Research, 1980), 1, 3, 4, 271, 306.

theory and complex adaptive systems. The authors define complex adaptive systems as an amalgam of three major concepts: agents, strategies, and populations. First, agents can be many things: a person, an institution, a nation-state, a non-state actor, or even a computer. Agents interact with other agents, and how they both respond to changes in the system and pursue their goals constitute the second concept of a complex adaptive system: strategy. Populations constitute the final component of a complex adaptive system. They consist of agents, strategies, or both. Complex adaptive systems adjust in order to survive via the interactions between populations, the outcomes of which are typically unpredictable and heavily influence later events. These interactions and associated unpredictable outcomes are termed “emergence,” and this concept is what makes the system “complex.” The authors further posit that we all participate in complex adaptive systems whether we know it or not.<sup>26</sup> This is key, as a common view among some is that the perceived bipolar world of the Cold War was a much simpler time, when actually it was a complex adaptive system, much like the multipolar world of today.

Robert Jervis also imparts excellent wisdom regarding complex systems. Jervis states that a system consists of a set of interconnected elements where changes in their relationships produce changes in other parts of the system. Like Axelrod and Cohen, Jervis insists that relationships within a system are nonlinear and that the results of actions by actors within the system are multiple and often unintended. More importantly, Jervis states that the system is driven by the behavior of individual actors who are moved by their own incentives, goals, and calculations. Therefore, actors who attempt to trigger change within a complex, unpredictable system are required to conduct multiple actions. In other words, actors can never just do one thing.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Robert Axelrod and Michael D. Cohen, *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of a Scientific Frontier* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 1-19.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Jervis, *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998), 6, 10, 16.

## 1967 Six Day War

In May 1967, Egyptian President Gamal Nasser, acting as the de facto leader of the Arab world, engaged in a series of belligerent acts directed towards Israel. Specifically, in May, Nasser flooded the Sinai Peninsula with approximately 100,000 Egyptian troops, facilitated the withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, and announced that the time had come for the eradication of Israel. Other Arab nations joined the hysteria, committing troops and material to their fellow Arab states bordering the fledgling Jewish nation. Before long, Israel faced an Arab force 250,000 strong, with over 2,000 tanks and approximately 700 attack aircraft.<sup>28</sup>

In response, on 5 June 1967, Israel launched a preemptive, surprise attack against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria that transformed the Middle East almost as radically as the 1948 Jewish War of Independence. Rarely in modern times had so short and localized a conflict had such prolonged, global consequences. During the 132-hour war, one of the shortest in recorded history, Egypt lost between 10,000 and 15,000 men. Thousands were wounded and an additional 5,000 Egyptians were listed as missing. Egyptian Prisoners of War (POWs) numbered at least 5,000, including 21 general officers. Egyptian material losses were equally severe: all but fifteen percent of their military hardware – approximately \$2 billion worth – was destroyed. To add insult to injury, 320 tanks, 480 guns, 2 Surface-to-Air (SAM) missile batteries, and 10,000 other vehicles were captured by Israel. Territorially, Israel had conquered 42,000 square miles and was now three and a half times its original size.<sup>29</sup> Included in the vanquished territory were the Sinai Peninsula and the Suez Canal. In short, the 1967 Six Day War was an absolute calamity for the Arabs, and Egypt in particular.

---

<sup>28</sup> Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars* (New York: Random House, 1982), 149.

<sup>29</sup> Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 305-307.



Figure 1. Territories captured by Israel during the 1967 Six Day War

Source: Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 308.

The war had a profound impact on the Arab world. No sooner had the shooting stopped than the Arab community embarked on a rather painful campaign of introspection in order to understand how the small, relatively new state of Israel had seized giant chunks of land and defeated much larger Arab armies.<sup>30</sup> In particular, Egypt paid a heavy economic price for Israel’s occupation of the Sinai and the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, contributing to the country’s despondency.<sup>31</sup> The canal’s closure and the loss of the Sinai’s oil fields wrested major economic

<sup>30</sup> Oren, 310.

<sup>31</sup> Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004), 13.

resources from Egypt, curtailed its foreign currency input, and increased its dependency on other Arab nations as well as the Soviet Union.<sup>32</sup> For example, the capture of the Abu Rudeis oil wells in the Sinai supplied Israel with over half its oil needs.<sup>33</sup> The blocking of the Suez Canal, the complete cessation of tourism, and the loss of vital oil fields crippled the Egyptian economy to the tune of approximately \$750 million. Reliance on massive Soviet aid to the country, as well as aid from oil-rich Arab countries, which totaled approximately \$250 million per year, enabled Egypt to withstand some of the economic turmoil.<sup>34</sup>

Literature and song reflected a deep sense of humiliation and helplessness. Painful examinations would be made of Arab society, its inherent propensities and weaknesses, and of the Arab personality and psyche. Conversely, Arab politicians persisted in avoiding any responsibility for the defeat, and President Gamal Abdul Nasser blamed perceived insubordinate Egyptian officers and an Anglo-Israeli “cabal” for the catastrophe.<sup>35</sup> In particular, Nasser’s deputy Field Marshal, Mushir Abd al-Hakim, received most of the blame, committing suicide afterward.<sup>36</sup> Although Nasser largely escaped accountability for the calamity, sardonic jokes about the Egyptian armed forces and its national leadership were pervasive. The situation was exacerbated by the realization that the precedent set by the 1956 Suez War, where superpower intervention compelled Israel to withdraw from the peninsula, would not occur a second time.<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> Dani Asher, *The Egyptian Strategy for the Yom Kippur War* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009), 14.

<sup>33</sup> George W. Gawrych, “The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: The Albatross of Decisive Victory,” *Leavenworth Papers*, no. 21 (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College Combat Studies Institute, 1996), 5.

<sup>34</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 199.

<sup>35</sup> Oren, 310.

<sup>36</sup> Asher, 18.

<sup>37</sup> Yoram Meital, *Egypt’s Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977* (Gainesville, FL: The University of Florida Press, 1997), 22.

Undoubtedly, the Arabs, and in particular Egypt, were humiliated. In the years preceding the 1967 Six Day War, the Egyptian armed forces underwent a substantial modernization campaign courtesy of the Soviet Union. On the eve of the war, Egyptian forces in the Sinai included seven divisions, totaling approximately 100,000 troops and 930 tanks, along with abundant artillery.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, they were armed with some of the latest Soviet T-54 and T-55 tanks as well as sophisticated MiG-19 and MiG-21 aircraft.<sup>39</sup> Nasser, and by extension the Egyptian armed forces, tended to underestimate the Israeli Defense Forces and exaggerated its own strength. Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Defense Minister during the 1967 Six Day War, speculated that Nasser was blinded by the apparent strength of the vast Soviet aid he received. Dayan further asserted that Egypt's mastery of sophisticated modern equipment had caused Nasser and his generals to place more emphasis on the equipment rather than on the personnel who used it.<sup>40</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Egyptian populace blamed their armed forces for the debacle of the 1967 Six Day War. For many, the experience was worse than that of 1948 or 1956 because they had been led to believe that any and all deficiencies that had been corrected.<sup>41</sup> Low morale also undermined the services, especially in the army. El-Shazly stated, "In their confusion and distress after the Six-Day War, the Egyptian people vented their feelings on the ordinary soldier. Anyone in uniform was ridiculed. Morale fell to near-suicidal levels.<sup>42</sup>" Worse, the outcome of the 1967 Six Day War gave rise to the so-called "Israeli Security Theory." Thus, by 1973, the

---

<sup>38</sup> T.N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars 1947-1974* (Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1984), 240.

<sup>39</sup> Richie Ovendale, *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, Inc., 1992), 200.

<sup>40</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 190.

<sup>41</sup> Asher, 9-13.

<sup>42</sup> Shazly, 61.



revamped Egyptian military eagerly awaited the chance to redeem themselves in battle, regain their honor, and bloody Israel.

#### United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 242

On 22 November 1967, after much deliberation, the UN Security Council unanimously approved a resolution that adopted the principles for a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. UNSCR 242 stated that the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the region included two principles. The first concerned Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories since the end of the Six Day War. The second principle called for an acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries.<sup>43</sup> In other words, the resolution traded Israeli occupation of territories seized during the Six Day War for an official Arab recognition of the Jewish state.

In many ways, UNSCR 242 was a diplomatic success, as it balanced Israeli security concerns with Arab desires to recover territory lost during the Six Day War. The resolution, deemed acceptable by the international community, provided a framework for political dialogue to resolve the issue of Israeli occupation. Unfortunately, UNSCR 242 was ambiguous.<sup>44</sup> The language in the resolution specifically called for an Israeli withdrawal from occupied lands, but did this mean *all*, or merely *some*, of the occupied territories? Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, in her memoirs, best captured this ambiguity: “it will be noted that it [UNSCR 242] does *not* say that Israel must withdraw from all territories, nor does it say that Israel must withdraw from *the*

---

<sup>43</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 242 (1967), United Nations, November 22, 1967, accessed January 4, 2016, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/242\(1967\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/242(1967)).

<sup>44</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 49.

territories; but it does say that every state in the area has a right to live in peace within ‘secure and recognized boundaries’ and it *does* specify the termination of belligerency.”<sup>45</sup>

The Soviet Union and the Arab states argued for the former, while the United States and Israel opted for the latter.<sup>46</sup> The Swedish diplomat Gunnar Jarring, appointed as a special representative by the United Nations to implement the provisions in the resolution, spent the next few years shuttling between the various capitals in the Middle East attempting to do just that, and failed.<sup>47</sup> As such, UNSCR 242 never solved anything related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as its opacity was necessary to secure approval from the international community. More specific demands of, or harsher language directed towards, either the Arab states or Israel would have resulted in the resolution being vetoed. However, in spite of the resolution's initial failure, UNSCR 242 did lay the foundation for an eventual peace treaty between Egypt and Israel in 1979.

In essence, UNSCR 242 proposed that Israel trade territory in exchange for a peace settlement. For the Arab states, doing so within the framework of the resolution would in effect recognize Israel, which for some was unacceptable. Complicating matters was the September 1967 Arab League summit called the Khartoum Conference, the outcome of which established the basis for a unanimous Arab policy towards Israel with the “three noes” resolution: no negotiations, no recognition of, and no peace with Israel.<sup>48</sup> This gathering of Arab states and their resulting conclusion has long been viewed as taking a rejectionist stance towards the possibility of a political solution with Israel, but was it?

---

<sup>45</sup> Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975), 372.

<sup>46</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, *The Yom Kippur War* (New York: Ibooks, inc., 2002), 17.

<sup>47</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 207.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

## Khartoum Conference

Branded as belligerent and uncompromising, the 1967 Khartoum Conference reinforced Israel's belief that their eradication remained the primary goal of the Arab community. In her biography, former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meier stated that from the Arab point of view, nothing had changed, and that the outcome of the Khartoum Conference was simply a continued call to destroy Israel.<sup>49</sup> Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger agreed, opining that the conference was a sign of Arab extremism in the aftermath of the Six Day War.<sup>50</sup> These views, while understandable, missed a fundamental shift that occurred during the conference: the realization of the importance of the political process to regain occupied lands.

The destruction of the Arab armies during the 1967 Six Day War resulted in a collective understanding among the Arab states (particularly Egypt) that military means alone would not suffice in reclaiming the lost territory. Replacing Nasser's bombastic rhetoric prior to the war was a sober reality that a military solution could not solve a political problem. More importantly, the war's aftermath caused Egypt to restructure its national priorities and decouple the issue of the Sinai from the Palestinian problem, which Nasser had long combined. In Cairo, official spokesmen drew a distinction between the urgent need to recover the occupied lands by Israel and the future need to solve the Palestinian problem.<sup>51</sup> As self-interest took over, Nasser's immediate priority became recovering the Sinai, and while Egypt remained cognizant of the plight of the Palestinians, a solution to the Palestinian problem was delayed to a future unknown moment.<sup>52</sup> Regarding the Egyptian armed forces, Nasser did not abandon the use of military force altogether; rather, he concluded that the most effective course of action would be for both diplomacy and the

---

<sup>49</sup> Meir, 370.

<sup>50</sup> Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), 344.

<sup>51</sup> Yoram Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy After the 1967 War: A Reexamination," *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 71.

<sup>52</sup> Asher, 23.

military to work in tandem in order to achieve an Israeli withdrawal from the peninsula. The fact that the Egyptian military was a shell of its former self undoubtedly aided his decision.

Nevertheless, Nasser used the Khartoum Conference as a platform to garner the broadest possible Arab consensus in support of his policy of combined political and military action.<sup>53</sup> Nasser succeeded, and the Khartoum Conference actually marked a turning point in Arab-Israeli relations, as the attendees promoted a political solution and the use of diplomatic measures (led by the United States and the Soviet Union, of course) to solve the crisis.<sup>54</sup> Thus, beneath the veneer of bellicosity, the Khartoum Conference was actually anti-rejectionist.

Israel accepted UNSCR 242; however, Arab states such as Syria, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia rejected it outright. To gain the international community's approval, Egypt accepted the resolution, yet domestically Nasser reiterated the "three noes" stance from the Khartoum Conference. Nasser engaged the Egyptian political-military elite, informing his National Assembly, "That which was taken by force will be regained by force," and told his generals, "you don't need to pay any attention to anything I may say in public about a peaceful resolution."<sup>55</sup> The reason for this apparently contradictory stance is clear: a segment of the Egyptian populace, including the armed forces, were in no mood for a political solution to what they believed was a military problem. Egyptian public opinion oscillated between those proponents who argued for using the political process to regain the Sinai and those who viewed war as the only solution.<sup>56</sup> Many Egyptians wanted their lost territories returned, but not through negotiations. In a great example of two-level game theory, where national governments seek to satisfy domestic

---

<sup>53</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 41.

<sup>54</sup> Meital, "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination," 65.

<sup>55</sup> Oren, 326.

<sup>56</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 16.

pressures while minimizing adverse consequences within the international community, Nasser pandered to both audiences.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, Israel's lopsided victory in 1967 and its associated outcomes heightened the possibility of future conflict. Due to its advantageous position, Israel argued for direct, bilateral negotiations with Egypt and Syria to politically solve the crisis. From Israel's perspective, outside mediation by either the United States or the Soviet Union was unnecessary. Knowing that they possessed little to no leverage in direct negotiations with Israel, the Arab states took a belligerent stance via the Khartoum Conference (that ironically acknowledged the role of the political process to resolve the crisis with Israel) and opted for discussions led by the two superpowers. In particular, Nasser concluded that any political dialogue in the future would only be used to maintain the status quo in the Sinai. Furthermore, Nasser also determined that Israel's stronger negotiating position made it virtually impossible for him to engage in bilateral discussions with the Jewish state, and that any attempt to do so would have the same result the Germans experienced at Versailles in 1919.<sup>58</sup> As such, he felt that he had no choice but to insist that the Soviets represent Egypt in the political arena. The United States and the Soviet Union took a passive approach, reluctant to use their clout to resolve the crisis, as each had significant interests in the region and therefore did not want to disrupt the status quo. Lastly, while UNSCR 242 was a step in the right direction towards achieving a peace settlement in the Middle East, the ambiguous nature of the resolution resulted in confusion as to how it was to be carried out, and as such was unenforceable.

---

<sup>57</sup> Robert D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer, 1998): 434, accessed January 26, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2706785>.

<sup>58</sup> Mohamed Heikal, *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978), 190-191.

## War of Attrition

Between 1967 and 1973 there were a series of military engagements between Egypt and Israel known as the “War of Attrition.” Largely disregarded by researchers, the War of Attrition was formally announced by Egypt in March of 1969 (some say it began a year earlier, in 1968) and lasted until August 1970. In fact, while perceived as a passing event, the War of Attrition was a major confrontation for both Egypt and Israel. Refusing to accept the humiliation of 1967, Egypt launched the War of Attrition to destabilize the Sinai and prove to Israel that continued occupation of the peninsula was not worth the price in lives and material. Egypt sought to take advantage of the static military situation along the Suez Canal and also negate Israeli superiority in armored maneuver warfare, as the canal impeded large-scale movements by Israeli forces.<sup>59</sup> Still recouping their losses from the debacle in 1967, both the Egyptian armed forces as well as their civilian leadership understood that they were in no position to conduct major offensive ground operations. The War of Attrition gave President Nasser the political cover to show the Egyptian people, and the Arab world writ large, that he was still committed to fighting Israel and ultimately reclaiming the land lost during those fateful days in June 1967. More importantly, the War of Attrition was Nasser’s attempt to change the conditions created by the outcome of the Six Day War. In short, Egypt sought to change the status quo.

Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov’s work, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969-1970*, provides excellent insight into the War of Attrition. Bar-Siman-Tov asserts that a belligerent generally adopts the strategy of a war of attrition when it possesses limited military capabilities and an inability to develop any other political-military strategy.<sup>60</sup> The outcome of the 1967 Six Day War created a set of conditions that Egypt, for economic, political, and military reasons,

---

<sup>59</sup> Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement: October 1973* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1975), 7-8.

<sup>60</sup> Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969-1970* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 30.

could not accept. Israel's gains during the conflict and the strategic depth they provided resulted in little desire for them to engage in fruitful political dialogue with any of the Arab nations who had participated in the war, particularly Egypt. As long as Israel held the Sinai and the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, there was no need for them to engage in serious political negotiations with Egypt. In possessing a position of advantage, Israel sought to enforce the ceasefire and keep the status quo intact. In his memoirs, Field Marshal Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, commander of the Egyptian Second Army during the War of Attrition, stated that hostilities were initiated by Egypt in order to ensure that the military situation on the Suez Canal did not lapse into a standstill.<sup>61</sup> Nasser had no intention of allowing the military situation on the Suez stagnate, so once his armed forces regained part of their operational strength, Egypt commenced a campaign of prolonged limited fighting consisting of artillery duels, raids, and ambushes against Israel in an attempt to pierce its perceived Achilles Heel – its limited manpower resources.<sup>62</sup>

In late 1968, Egypt reached its decision to renew hostilities via the War of Attrition after concluding that diplomatic initiatives had failed, and that the country's armed forces had been reconstituted to the point where they could conduct limited military operations.<sup>63</sup> Adding to Nasser's predicament was the disenchantment felt by both the Egyptian populace and the military over his perceived inaction. Therefore, on 1 May 1969, Nasser informed dismayed United Nations officials that the Suez Canal could no longer be considered a cease-fire line, and shortly thereafter authorized Egyptian strikes on Israeli positions in the Sinai.<sup>64</sup> To their credit, the United Nations unsuccessfully attempted to prevent an escalation of hostilities on the peninsula. The War of Attrition had begun.

---

<sup>61</sup> Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt* (Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 1993), 135.

<sup>62</sup> Asher, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 44.

<sup>64</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 28.

Egypt's aims in the War of Attrition were to compel Israel to withdraw from the Sinai. Egypt did not intend to evict Israeli armed forces from the peninsula in their entirety, but through a series of limited military operations meant to convince Israel that continued occupation of the Sinai was unsustainable. Nasser's aims were not to defeat Israel outright but to improve his bargaining position by inflicting pain on the Jewish state and to garner international attention.<sup>65</sup> Composed of three phases (defensive rehabilitation, offensive defense, and liberation), these limited military operations, conducted over a prolonged period of time, were the main characteristic of the Egyptian military's operational approach.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Egypt believed that a drawn out military confrontation with Israel ran counter to the latter's preference of conducting short, swift wars and would also have severe impacts on the Israel's limited resources of men and material, as a continued mobilization of reserves was unsustainable for Israel.<sup>67</sup>

Complementing the military component of the Egyptian strategy for the War of Attrition against Israel was its political counterpart. In keeping with the policy that was codified during the Khartoum Conference, the Egyptians wanted to create and then sustain the threat of destabilization in the Sinai in order to promote foreign superpower intervention. Both the United States and the Soviet Union had a vested interest in preventing the situation in the Sinai from escalating. Thus, Egypt's political strategy relied on manipulating the aforementioned superpowers interests in the region as well as their commitment to the clients, Israel and Egypt, respectively. The Egyptians calculated that the fear of a possible superpower clash would accelerate diplomatic activity and thus bring about a change in the status quo.<sup>68</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> David W. Lesch, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 216-217.

<sup>66</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 197.

<sup>67</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 54.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid*, 50.



The important political component in Egypt's strategy for the War of Attrition is the attention it placed on changing the behavior of the United States. Firmly committed to its relationship with the Soviet Union at the time, Egypt recognized that it needed to create a condition where the United States had no choice but to either directly intervene or influence Israeli participation at the negotiating table (or both). Egypt calculated that the United States wanted to maintain the status quo in order to protect its regional interests and to prevent a confrontation with the Soviet Union. As such, Egyptian strategy intended to persuade the United States that Egypt was prepared to risk war in order to achieve its political objective of reclaiming the Sinai, and that only a change in US policy, in the form of either a direct intervention to solve the crisis or a reduction in support for Israel, could prevent a violent, if limited, conflict from developing into a situation threatening American interests in the region.<sup>69</sup> Thus, the War of Attrition was an acknowledgement by Nasser that the only way to modify the post-1967 status quo was to get the United States involved, as they had the most leverage over Israel.

For the Egyptians, the War of Attrition was characterized by artillery strikes and commando operations (raids, ambushes) targeting Israeli positions on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. Egyptian artillery soon took a toll. As a result, Israel constructed a string of fortifications along the Suez in order to protect the soldiers stationed there. Approximately ninety-three miles long, the Bar-Lev Line was named for the Chief of Staff of the Israeli armed forces at the time, General Haim Bar-Lev. The fortification consisted of a series of small, isolated forts, each with garrisons manned by 20-30 men.<sup>70</sup> The outposts were conceived as a early warning system with the express purpose of enabling a counterattack by Israeli armored brigades positioned in the rear of the fortification.<sup>71</sup> Saad el-Shazly stated that the Bar-Lev Line consisted

---

<sup>69</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 51.

<sup>70</sup> Rabinovich, 17.

<sup>71</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 201.

of 35 self-contained forts, spaced three miles apart, and protected by minefields and barbed wire. He further assessed that manning these forts required only one infantry brigade reinforced by three armored brigades, or 360 tanks total.<sup>72</sup>

Ever mindful of operational overreach, Egypt targeted the Bar-Lev Line with artillery strikes, small-scale raids, and ambushes due to the inability of the Egyptian Air Force to attack throughout the depth of Israeli positions in the Sinai.<sup>73</sup> More importantly, Egyptian designs for the War of Attrition intended to exploit the one advantage that they possessed over Israel: overwhelming artillery. Despite being outnumbered in artillery, Israel opted to strike military targets both deep into Egypt as well as military positions in the vicinity of the Suez Canal. In addition to engaging in the tit-for-tat artillery duels with Egypt along the canal, Israeli Defense Forces administered a series of successful operations well behind Egyptian lines.<sup>74</sup> However, despite these achievements, the stalemate along the Suez Canal continued.

Israel's decision to embark on a sustained air campaign marked a turning point in the War of Attrition. From January to April 1970, the Israeli Air Force conducted a series of air strikes deep within Egypt. Conducted in two phases, the first focused on Egyptian military positions near major Egyptian population centers. The second phase concentrated on surface-to-air missile (SAM) batteries and early warning radar installations in the Nile Delta.<sup>75</sup> Here, the Israeli Air Force acted as de facto "flying artillery" and compensated for the Israeli Army's lack of long-range artillery.<sup>76</sup> Knowing that the Egyptian Air Force was no match against their Israeli counterparts, Nasser decided to increase his air defenses and appealed to the Soviet Union for

---

<sup>72</sup> Shazly, 8.

<sup>73</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 208-209.

<sup>74</sup> Asher, 29.

<sup>75</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 132.

<sup>76</sup> Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 210.

help. The Soviets obliged, and not only sent their latest SAM system, the SA-3, but the advisers and technicians to man and then train the Egyptians on the use of them.<sup>77</sup> As a result, by the time of the conclusion of hostilities in 1970, the Egyptians had achieved a degree of parity with their air defense system against the Israeli air threat. Nasser would later violate the ceasefire imposed at the end of the War of Attrition and move numerous anti-aircraft missile batteries closer to Egyptian positions on the Suez Canal. This action would have grave consequences for Israel at the outset of the Yom Kippur War.

Ultimately, the War of Attrition ended in a stalemate. Israeli airstrikes deep into Egyptian territory and near population centers demolished factories and power plants, rendered cities along the Suez Canal uninhabitable, and brought the war home to the Egyptian populace.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless, both the Egyptians and the Israelis remained entrenched on both sides of the Suez Canal. Israeli casualties in the war were not enough to convince its policymakers that continued occupation of the Sinai was untenable. Egyptian aims to destroy the Bar-Lev Line failed. Israel's deep penetration strikes failed to achieve the political aim of aggravating and potentially overthrowing the Nasser regime. Nasser exploited the raids to reinforce Egyptian solidarity and strengthen popular identification with his regime.<sup>79</sup> In consequence, Egyptians had rallied around Nasser. Egyptian political aims went equally unfulfilled, and Nasser concluded that the War of Attrition, in particular the manner in which it was fought, was insufficient to change the status quo and had perhaps even worsened Egypt's political position.<sup>80</sup> Thus, Nasser was unable to change the status quo vis-à-vis Israel, and his War of Attrition was a failure.

---

<sup>77</sup> Asher, 33.

<sup>78</sup> Cohen and Gooch, 99.

<sup>79</sup> Bar-Siman-Tov, 140.

<sup>80</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 68.

Egypt's goal to destabilize the region via the War of Attrition and thus invoke superpower intervention, particularly the United States, in deadlocked negotiations with Israel was partially successful. In the summer of 1970, United States Secretary of State William Rogers successfully proposed an initiative that entailed a three-month cease-fire by both Egypt and Israel and future negotiations between the two countries mediated by the United Nations within the framework of UNSCR 242.<sup>81</sup> Nasser saw the ceasefire as "breathing space" for the deployment of surface-to-air missile batteries to the Suez Canal.<sup>82</sup> The US plan, named the "Rogers Initiative," was eventually accepted by both Israel and Egypt, and on the 7 August 1970, the War of Attrition came to an end.<sup>83</sup>

### **Israeli Security Theory**

Perhaps the biggest outcome of the 1967 Six Day War was the emergence of the "Israeli Security Theory." The lop-sided conclusion of this conflict, the cumulative experience against Egypt in the War of Attrition, and the Israeli air force's command of the skies had left Israel with an exaggerated sense of self-confidence.<sup>84</sup> From the Egyptian viewpoint, this theory consisted of five propositions. First, Israeli military and technological superiority rendered Arab designs to recover lost territories by force unachievable. Second, Israeli mobilization of reserves and use of internal lines of communication, coupled with Arab disunity, allowed Israel to concentrate her forces against one opponent at a time. Third, Israel must immediately move a war into Arab

---

<sup>81</sup> Lesch, 218.

<sup>82</sup> William B. Quandt, *Decade of Decision: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 101.

<sup>83</sup> The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 39.

<sup>84</sup> Aryeh Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment before the Yom Kippur War: Disentangling Deception and Distraction* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 26.

territories. Fourth, a war could not be permitted to last more than a week. Fifth, Israel could not tolerate mass casualties.<sup>85</sup>

Likewise, the Israelis termed this theory “The Conception.” According to the Agranat Commission, the investigative body formed to examine Israel’s failures leading to and during the Yom Kippur War, The Conception comprised two fundamental premises: Egypt would not go to war against Israel unless it first ensured the capability to conduct airstrikes deep into Israeli territory, and Egypt would only launch a large-scale attack on Israel in conjunction with another Arab country, namely Syria.<sup>86</sup> While not specifically mentioned, Israel also assumed that they would receive advance warning of any impending attack via extensive intelligence collection operations in Arab countries by their Directorate of Military Intelligence, AMAN. As a result, both Israeli political and military leaders concluded that the earliest Egypt could go to war against Israel was 1975.

Israel was not alone in their assessment of Egypt’s ability to wage war. The United States’ intelligence community (IC) held similar views. In the years preceding the 1973 Yom Kippur War, assessments from the various US intelligence services concluded that Egypt did not possess a military option against Israel.<sup>87</sup> Henry Kissinger stated that the intelligence assessment at the end of 1972 determined that Sadat had few, if any, military options and even if he was capable of a limited attack, there was no rational purpose for it. As such, Egypt’s only recourse is to wait for American diplomacy to intervene.<sup>88</sup> Despite frequent statements throughout 1973 by Sadat and his National Security Advisor, Hafez Ismail, that Egypt intended to go to war against Israel, the United States did not take their threats seriously. In May 1973, the United States also

---

<sup>85</sup> Cohen and Gooch, 100.

<sup>86</sup> Shalev, 34.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 158.

<sup>88</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval: The Second Volume of His Classic Memoirs* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1982), 206.

dismissed warnings from Soviet president Leonid Brezhnev and his foreign minister, Andrei Gromyko, regarding the possibility of future Egyptian hostilities as “psychological warfare.”<sup>89</sup> US State Department INR reports in 1973 regarding the possible resumption of hostilities by Egypt were countermanded by assessments from both the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA).<sup>90</sup> Thus, the United States fell victim to confirmation bias and refused to believe that war between Egypt and Israel was possible.

### **Bounding the System**

The organizational theorist Jamshid Gharajedaghi states that to understand complex systems, one must think holistically and appreciate the structure, function, and process of the system simultaneously. In this context, structure defines the components and their relationships, function defines the outcomes produced, and process defines the sequence of activities conducted within the system.<sup>91</sup> As such, the actors, their interactions, and the outcomes from the 1967 Six Day War and the War of Attrition comprise the major components of the complex system that Anwar Sadat inherited when he became the president of Egypt upon Nasser’s untimely death on 28 September 1970. Taken together, these elements represent the structure and boundaries of the Egyptian-Israeli system. Likewise, the status quo on the Sinai along with the perceived Israeli vulnerability constituted the self-governing rules and principles that the actors operated by. Dolman states that strategists seek to manipulate the structure of rules and principles associated with a system when seeking to achieve a position of relative advantage.<sup>92</sup> Nasser’s attempts to

---

<sup>89</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval: The Second Volume of His Classic Memoirs*, 461.

<sup>90</sup> Shalev, 161-162.

<sup>91</sup> Jamshid Gharajedaghi, *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture* (Burlington, MA: Elsevier, 2006), 110.

<sup>92</sup> Dolman, 101.

shift the boundaries of the system, as well as redefine its rules and principles, was left wanting. Thus, while beloved by many Egyptians, Nasser was no master strategist.

### **Anwar Sadat**

Upon becoming president in September 1970, Anwar Sadat was an enigma. Born on 25 December 1918 in the peasant village of Mit Abu al-Kum to an Egyptian father and a Sudanese mother, Sadat was one of thirteen brothers and sisters in a poor family. Sadat's humble beginnings resulted in the opinion that he was never destined for greatness. A 1938 graduate from the Royal Military Academy, Sadat was commissioned a signal officer in the Egyptian Army. Early in his military service, he befriended Gamal Abdul Nasser, a relationship that would undoubtedly change Sadat's life forever. An ardent nationalist and decidedly anti-British, Sadat co-founded the Free Officers Movement along with Nasser, seeking to end both the British occupation of Egypt as well as the corruption of the Farouk dynasty.<sup>93</sup> Sadat spent the better part of World War II in and out of confinement due to his Axis sympathies and desire for Germany to remove the British from Egypt.<sup>94</sup> Upon his release from jail, Sadat rejoined the Free Officers Movement and later became an integral part of the Revolutionary Command Council that came to power in Egypt in a July 1952 coup that deposed the Farouk monarchy.<sup>95</sup> In fact, Sadat delivered news of the coup to the Egyptian people via radio at daybreak on the 23 July 1952.<sup>96</sup> Following the revolution, Sadat maintained a low profile and served in a series of posts within the Egyptian government. He was serving as Vice President at the time of Nasser's death in 1970.

---

<sup>93</sup> Alistair Horne, *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 320.

<sup>94</sup> Raphael Israeli, *Man of Defiance: A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat* (Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1985), 18.

<sup>95</sup> Lesch, 239.

<sup>96</sup> Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 107.

Sadat's legitimacy as the leader of Egypt was immediately questioned. Despite being elected on the 15 October 1970, Sadat was generally held in low esteem by many within Egyptian power circles, who viewed Sadat as an interim solution until a more charismatic individual with a stronger personality took over. Visible support from Nasser's former colleagues concealed a strong opposition to his succession from a substantial clique within the oligarchy, with many looking to Ali Sabri, a former Vice President, to eventually replace Sadat.<sup>97</sup> Saad el-Shazly posited that Nasser never intended for Sadat to succeed him. Sadat thus came to power by mere chance. Furthermore, Shazly contended that Sadat's weakness as a leader was acceptable at the time because it was believed that he was pliable and easily manipulated.<sup>98</sup> To many within the Egyptian ruling elite, Sadat was little more than a placeholder.

The United States, Soviet Union, and Israel also shared this view. At the time of Sadat's election, neither of these countries knew much about him personally. In October 1970, Western analysts not only believed that Sadat was a safe choice who would not last particularly long in power, but that he was not the type of leader to do something dramatic.<sup>99</sup> Likewise, Israeli intelligence generated a personality assessment of Sadat and concluded that the president's character was colorless, weak, and narrow-minded. Based on this evaluation, analysts concluded that Sadat would not go to war with Israel.<sup>100</sup> Not to be outdone, US envoy Elliot Richardson, sent to Egypt by President Richard Nixon to offer condolences on Nasser's death, submitted a report stating that Sadat would not survive in power for more than six weeks.<sup>101</sup> The Soviets attempted to influence Egypt's transfer of power by sending a delegation to Cairo one day after

---

<sup>97</sup> Dupuy, 372.

<sup>98</sup> Shazly, 91-92.

<sup>99</sup> Lesch, 239.

<sup>100</sup> Shalev, 132.

<sup>101</sup> Sadat, 215.



Nasser's death. Distrustful of Sadat's nationalistic tendencies, they favored the man they had determined would undoubtedly support continued Soviet influence in Egypt, Ali Sabri.<sup>102</sup>

Sadat was fully cognizant of his challenges. More importantly, Sadat understood the complex system that he operated in much more than Nasser. Sadat recognized that in order to manipulate the boundaries of this system, change its associated rules and principles, recover Egyptian honor, and gain a position of relative advantage vis-à-vis Israel, he would have to maintain some of Nasser's policies while reversing others. Specifically, Sadat determined three things. First, although he ultimately desired closer relations with the United States, being as they were the only ones who could break the diplomatic stalemate between Egypt and Israel, Sadat relied on Soviet arms.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Sadat would need to establish relations with the United States while maintaining Egypt's relationship with the Soviets in the interim, until a time when Sadat judged that their assistance was no longer required. Second, Sadat knew that in order to apply pressure on Israel he would have to engage the international community more effectively than his predecessor. Third, Sadat needed to redefine his military's objectives for the upcoming war with Israel while manipulating Egyptian public opinion, which was dissatisfied with their leader and demanded that he do what was necessary to reclaim the Sinai.<sup>104</sup> In other words, Egypt would have to conduct a limited war for limited gains.

As previously discussed, some within the Egyptian ruling elite were not pleased with Sadat's rise to power. In particular, one faction led by the pro-Soviet Ali Sabri sought to undermine Sadat and eventually supplant him. Tensions were compounded when Sadat decided to extend the Rogers Initiative-induced ceasefire by three months, until February 1971. That same month, Sadat further extended the ceasefire until March and proposed a peace initiative, which

---

<sup>102</sup> Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 49.

<sup>103</sup> Lesch, 240.

<sup>104</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 103-104.

essentially called for renewed negotiations to resolve the situation on the Sinai.<sup>105</sup> In doing so, Sadat acknowledged that the Egyptian military was not yet prepared to conduct major offensive operations against Israel. More importantly, Sadat judged that any takeover of the Sinai would require adept political and military maneuvering,

These measures did not sit well with Sadat's naysayers, who clamored for war and favored no negotiations with Israel. Indeed, Sadat's refusal to go to war with Israel at the time, as well as his diplomatic initiative, confirmed his detractor's belief that he was a weak leader. Thus, in May 1971, Sadat faced a power struggle with the so-called "Ali Sabri Group," who conspired to overthrow him. As part of this effort, six ministers and several senior members of the Arab Socialist Union, the country's only legal political party, resigned.<sup>106</sup> This opposition bloc further coalesced around Sabri, and in effect openly challenged Sadat's legitimacy to rule. Faced with a possible coup, and obtaining evidence to the same, Sadat arrested Ali Sabri along with his alleged co-conspirators. The conspirators were tried and sentenced to death; however, Sadat later converted some of these punishments into long prison terms. Sadat also worried that the Soviet Union supported Sabri's effort to overthrow him.<sup>107</sup> Nevertheless, Sadat survived the first challenge to his presidency, and had demonstrated that he was not as inept as his opponents asserted.

The break-up of the Ali Sabri Group, extension of the ceasefire, and renewed diplomatic efforts within the international community enabled Sadat to move Egypt closer to the United States while maintaining his country's ties with the Soviet Union. At the time of Sadat's ascension to power, Egyptian foreign policy was in disarray. Nasser's meddling in other Arab

---

<sup>105</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 86.

<sup>106</sup> Edgar O'Ballance, *No Victor, No Vanquished: The Yom Kippur War* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978), 4.

<sup>107</sup> Israeli, 64.

state's affairs, along with his belligerent attitude towards the West, particularly the United States, had alienated Egypt from the international community. Furthermore, Egyptian aims during the War of Attrition acknowledged the important role of the United States in mediating the conflict, but Nasser never developed a productive relationship with the United States, as it would jeopardize his alliance with the Soviet Union. The United States reciprocated Nasser's lack of interest in developing a relationship between the two countries, and viewed him with mistrust.

Sadat understood the diplomatic climate that he had inherited in 1970. In fact, Sadat stated in his memoirs that Nasser's statecraft was pitiable, that Egyptian foreign policy was in shambles, and that the country had no productive diplomatic relations other than the Soviet Union.<sup>108</sup> More importantly, Sadat's low profile liberated him from his predecessor's baggage. As such, Sadat's first departure from Egyptian policies of old involved removing the mistrust between the two countries. Sadat understood the importance of establishing amicable relations with the United States. Beginning with US envoy Elliot Richardson's visit for Nasser's funeral in 1970, Sadat exploited his diplomatic clean slate and commenced formal and back-channel communications with the United States. Moreover, Sadat quickly learned to appreciate Henry Kissinger.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the relationship between Sadat and Henry Kissinger played a crucial role during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, and would last until his assassination by Muslim extremists in 1981.

A second departure from Nasser's policies involved Sadat's engagement with the international community. Whereas Nasser's bellicosity had undermined Egyptian foreign policy, Sadat proactively engaged international bodies such as the UN in the ongoing effort to get the international community involved in settling the Sinai problem. Early in 1971, Sadat's decision to

---

<sup>108</sup> Sadat, 210.

<sup>109</sup> Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1975), 199.

engage the international community reflected his conclusion that the Egyptian armed forces were not ready for war with Israel. Instead, Sadat extended the cease-fire, combined it with an Egyptian peace initiative, and broadcasted it to international audiences in an attempt to garner sympathy for his cause.<sup>110</sup> Not only was Sadat's February 1971 initiative directed towards Israel, it was also meant for the international community writ large, in particular the United States. Sadat understood that working with the UN would attract broad media coverage and empower Egypt to disseminate its message to the widest possible audience.

Sadat's February 1971 peace initiative aimed to put Israel in an uncomfortable position. Sadat's proposal not only extended the previous ceasefire for one month, but his offer to clear the Suez Canal and reopen it for shipping was contingent on an eventual full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Sinai in accordance with UNSCR 242. Furthermore, Sadat's emphasis that this initiative was entirely of his own and bereft of Soviet influence demonstrated to the international community that he was not as beholden to the Soviet Union as his predecessor had been.<sup>111</sup> Sadat's proposal, in particular the reopening of the Suez Canal to maritime shipping in exchange for concessions, deviated from Nasser. Thus, the February 1971 initiative constituted an attempt to solve the situation on the Sinai diplomatically. It also communicated Sadat's exasperation with Israel and sought to put Israel in an untenable position. It worked.

Ultimately, Sadat's February 1971 initiative rejected by Israel, and the status quo on the Sinai Peninsula persisted. Nonetheless, Sadat's proposal captured the United States' attention, who urged Israel to give it serious consideration. Israel, aware of the damage it would incur internationally if it ignored Sadat's overture, had no other option but to examine it and provide a

---

<sup>110</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 86.

<sup>111</sup> Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, 116.

response.<sup>112</sup> Hence, Sadat's initiative demonstrated that Israel was not solely in the driver's seat when it came to Egyptian-Israeli relations. Egypt would have a say in the matter as well.

A third departure from Nasser's policies was Sadat's redefinition of Egyptian military objectives for the upcoming 1973 Yom Kippur War. Following the 1967 Six Day War, Nasser shifted Egyptian political aims from the destruction of Israel to a more pragmatic goal of reclaiming the Sinai. Nasser wished to persuade the United States that Egypt was willing to risk war over the Sinai, and that only a change in US policy towards Israel would prevent tensions in the region from escalating out of control. Where Nasser presumed that the risk of war would suffice in pressuring both the United States and Israel to vacate the Sinai, Sadat concluded that war was necessary for Egypt to achieve her political aims.<sup>113</sup>

Egypt's goals for the impending war with Israel were unique. Sadat was not interested in the eradication of the state of Israel, nor was he particularly interested on regaining territory lost in 1967. Instead, Egypt would be going to war with the aim of changing the existing political and military balance in the Middle East. Sadat's plan included two stages: The first stage included a large-scale military offensive with limited objectives to jumpstart the political process. The second stage consisted of an aggressive and sustained diplomatic offensive, ultimately culminating with the return of the Sinai.<sup>114</sup> Specifically, Sadat's instructed his Minister of War, General Ahmed Ismail Ali, to prepare an offensive operation that would break the political stalemate.<sup>115</sup> In sum, Sadat led Egypt to war to achieve the limited objectives of reactivating

---

<sup>112</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 89.

<sup>113</sup> Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 46.

<sup>114</sup> Asher, 59.

<sup>115</sup> Hassan el Badri, Taha el Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia el Din Zohdy, *The Ramadan War, 1973* (Dunn Loring, VA: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978), 17.

diplomacy by awakening the superpowers from their deep slumber and improving, if possible, Egypt's bargaining position with Israel during the subsequent negotiations.<sup>116</sup>

Key to Sadat's strategy was repudiating the Israeli Security Theory. According to Egyptian general officers involved in the planning and execution of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, nullifying this theory was a primary objective.<sup>117</sup> In a directive to General Ali on the eve of the October War, Sadat stated that the strategic political and military objective set for the Egyptian armed forces was, "to challenge the Israeli Security Theory and aim to inflict the heaviest losses on Israel and convince them that continued occupation of the Sinai would exact a price too high for them to pay."<sup>118</sup> Sadat maintained that the seizure of just a few kilometers of territory from Israel in the Sinai would completely change the political situation on the peninsula.

Egyptian military objectives now called for the seizure of territory just a few kilometers into the peninsula. Specifically, the Egyptian military was to cross the Suez Canal, seize the Bar-Lev Line, establish a foothold of ten to fifteen kilometers deep east of the canal, and then fend off expected Israeli counterattacks.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, the Egyptian operation, later named Operation BADR, would be planned and executed within the capabilities that Egypt's military possessed. Sadat would no longer wait for long-range bombers to arrive from Soviet Union; Egypt would go to war with what she had.<sup>120</sup> To their detriment, Israel never conceived that Sadat would go to war with only limited objectives in mind. Thus, while the Israeli strategy in the Sinai remained the same, the Egyptian one completely changed.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Lesch, 243.

<sup>117</sup> Badri, Magdoub, and Zohdy, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Sadat, 327.

<sup>119</sup> Badri, Magdoub, and Zohdy, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Asher, 60.

<sup>121</sup> Lesch, 243.

Sadat's fourth, and perhaps biggest divergence from Nasser, concerned Egypt's relationship with the Soviet Union. Nasser had committed Egypt to a relationship with the Soviet Union, especially regarding the training and equipping of the Egyptian armed forces. The Soviet Union was all too happy to accommodate this arrangement, as they sought to counter the United States' influence in the region while expanding their own.<sup>122</sup> Nasser's belligerence towards the West, particularly the United States, amplified Egypt's dependency on its Soviet patron. Cracks in the Egypt-Soviet relationship formed following the Six Day War, when the latter questioned the performance and competence of the lavishly-equipped Egyptian armed forces.<sup>123</sup> The Egyptians were taken aback, but Nasser judged that it was necessary for Soviet military aid to continue in order to rebuild his military. Likewise, the Soviet Union toned down its negative rhetoric, but tensions lingered as a result of perceived Soviet arrogance and high-handedness towards their Egyptian counterparts.

Sadat came to power cognizant of the fact that Soviet support was needed for the rehabilitation of Egypt's armed forces. Ever the nationalist, Sadat swallowed his pride and signed the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship in May 1971.<sup>124</sup> However, Sadat also understood that the United States was the only superpower capable of resolving the dispute over the Sinai Peninsula due to its relationship with Israel. Sadat's decision to expel the approximately 15,000-20,000 Soviet advisers from Egypt in July 1972, just one year after Egypt signed the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, constituted an attempt to solicit positive feedback from the United States that could be parlayed into negotiations with Israel. The United States, dealing with

---

<sup>122</sup> Sadat, 187.

<sup>123</sup> Heikal, *The Sphinx and The Commissar*, 191.

<sup>124</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 96.

internal political issues such as Watergate and not wanting to jeopardize détente with the Soviet Union, did not respond.<sup>125</sup>

The expulsion of the Soviets led both the United States and Israel to believe that Egypt possessed no option to go to war, when in fact it served Sadat's designs perfectly. In fact, it actually made going to war easier for Egypt.<sup>126</sup> The removal of Soviet personnel from the country allowed Egyptian preparations to go unhindered and denied the Kremlin the advanced notice necessary to prevent Egypt from going to war. The move also appeased the Egyptian military, which had long despised Soviet arrogance in the country. Sadat could now act with more independence if need be to reactivate diplomacy through military action.<sup>127</sup>

### **The 1973 Yom Kippur War**

On 6 October 1973, five Egyptian army divisions, organized into the Second and Third Armies, simultaneously conducted five river crossings and attacked the formidable Israeli Bar-Lev Line located on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. From 6 to 13 October, Egyptian forces seized the Bar-Lev Line and established a foothold ten to twelve kilometers deep into the Sinai. Egypt's initial success benefitted from a brilliant whole-of-government deception that confirmed the Israeli Security Theory and surprised the Israelis. Expectedly, Israel conducted piecemealed counterattacks against Egyptian infantry who, armed with the latest Soviet anti-tank weapons and supported by tanks, repulsed them. The Israeli Air Force also was unable to provide adequate air support for the counterattacks due to the Egyptian air defense umbrella first deployed at the end of the War of Attrition.<sup>128</sup>

---

<sup>125</sup> Lesch, 240.

<sup>126</sup> Sadat, 230-231.

<sup>127</sup> Lesch, 241.

<sup>128</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 119-120.



The war went swimmingly well for Egypt until 14 October, when Sadat, for political reasons, ordered Egyptian forces to conduct further attacks east of the bridgehead (and outside of the SAM umbrella) to seize the Midi and Gitla passes. The attack was a disaster. Momentum shifted to the Israelis and on 16 October they conducted a successful counterattack, which split Egyptian forces and eventually surrounded the Egyptian Third Army. With the situation quickly escalating out of control, both the United States and the Soviet Union hurriedly resupplied their clients while attempting to enact a ceasefire. Continued Israeli ground operations against the Egyptian Third Army intensified tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union to the point of superpower confrontation. Fortunately, this did not occur and, on 25 October, Israel agreed to a ceasefire in accordance with UNSCR 339, which called for an immediate cessation of hostilities, a withdrawal to pre-war lines, and a resumption of negotiations based on UNSCR 242.<sup>129</sup> Egyptian casualties numbered approximately 8,000 killed. Israel lost 2,523 killed, more than twice the number they had incurred during the Six Day War.<sup>130</sup> After only three weeks, the Yom Kippur War was over.

### **The Oil Weapon**

One of the important events that unfolded over the course of the Yom Kippur War concerned the use of oil as a weapon. Sadat understood that cutting off the flow of oil to the United States would have an immediate and negative impact on the country. Therefore, prior to the war Sadat journeyed to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, reconciled with King Faisal and the oil sheiks, and solicited their support to employ the “oil weapon” in support of his attack on Israel. King Faisal, skeptical of success (the tactic had never worked before) and reluctant to use

---

<sup>129</sup> Lesch, 249-251.

<sup>130</sup> Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, 450.

the oil weapon for fear of upsetting his patron in Washington, acquiesced.<sup>131</sup> The pledge by the Gulf States to employ the oil weapon would force the United States to intervene either to save the Arabs from total destruction (if things turned for the worse) or to enter the conflict as an active mediator to pressure Israel to make the necessary concessions for peace – or both.<sup>132</sup>

Such a move, thought Sadat, would demonstrate Arab solidarity during the Yom Kippur War, influence the United States to intervene in the conflict (as Americans were heavily dependent on Arab oil), and improve Egypt's bargaining position during the subsequent superpower-brokered negotiations with Israel.<sup>133</sup> Led by Saudi Arabia, Arab states of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) did just that, and on 19 October initiated an embargo of oil exports directed toward countries supporting Israel. The embargo had a devastating effect, the results of which led to a fourfold increase in the price per barrel of oil, a global recession, and the largest transfer of wealth in world history from the oil-consuming nations to the oil-producing ones.<sup>134</sup> The Arab oil embargo threw the American economy into chaos. Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger even broached the idea of using the US military to commandeer Saudi Arabia's oil fields.<sup>135</sup> Thus, domestic concerns created from its dependency on Arab oil also served to jar the United States into action.

---

<sup>131</sup> Harvey Sicherman, *The Yom Kippur War: End of Illusion?*, vol. 1, *The Foreign Policy Papers* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976), 22.

<sup>132</sup> Lesch, 245.

<sup>133</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 123-124.

<sup>134</sup> Lesch, 244.

<sup>135</sup> Ted Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 271.

## Conclusion

The end of the 1973 Yom Kippur War witnessed the beginning of a series of American-brokered negotiations between Egypt and Israel and a gradual warming of relations between the two countries. In a historic visit to Israel in November 1977, Sadat addressed the Knesset, where he implicitly recognized the Jewish state (the first Arab head of state to do so), and conveyed the message to cynical Israelis that Egypt was serious about peace.<sup>136</sup> Indeed, Sadat's recognition of the state of Israel was unprecedented at the time, and acted as a catalyst for other Arab nations to do the same. Despite initial Israeli skepticism, talks continued, eventually culminating in the 1978 Camp David Peace Accords and a formal, bilateral peace treaty in 1979. While tactically defeated, Egypt discredited the myth of Israeli invulnerability, and used its newly achieved position of advantage in negotiations to wrest control of the Sinai Peninsula, captured in the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty signed on 26 March 1979. Egypt successfully moved toward the United States' orbit and away from the Soviet Union, and for years would remain as the second largest recipient of US foreign aid, behind only Israel.<sup>137</sup> More importantly, Sadat changed U.S. policy in the region from an Israel-only, status quo approach to a more objective view where Egyptian concerns were addressed in negotiations as well.<sup>138</sup>

Sadat's use of the 1973 Yom Kippur War to manipulate the boundaries of the complex system that comprised Egyptian-Israeli relations to achieve an advantageous position and reclaim the Sinai prove that he was a master strategist. In shattering the Israeli Security Theory, Sadat achieved his fundamental objective of shaking belief in Israel's invincibility and thus transformed the status quo. Kissinger admitted as much after the war and stated, "Once war had started, it was

---

<sup>136</sup> Lesch, 260.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, 264.

<sup>138</sup> Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*, 140.

plain that the diplomatic stalemate would be broken.”<sup>139</sup> Sadat possessed a keen understanding of the nuances of the Arab-Israel conflict, and he concluded that not only was the United States the true powerbroker in the region. In desiring an Egyptian pivot to the United States, Sadat understood the convergence of interests between the two countries. Indeed, one of Kissinger’s primary goals in the Middle East had been to eliminate Moscow’s military presence in the region. Sadat had sent a signal by expelling the Soviets in 1972, and Kissinger was resolved to prevent the Soviets from getting back in.<sup>140</sup> Furthermore, Dolman states that the structure of the system allows independent agents to act in the aggregate to positively transform the system, and that the strategic purpose of war is to attain a better condition of peace.<sup>141</sup> Sadat’s successful manipulation of the system’s boundaries established the conditions for a lasting peace between Egypt and Israel, which manifested itself in 1979.

A gifted orator, Sadat engaged the international community, and communicated his intentions through the skillful matching of actions and words. Indeed, according to Kissinger, “Sadat boldly all but told what he was going to do and we did not believe him.”<sup>142</sup> Sadat was free of the baggage that had plagued his predecessor, and used his clean slate to develop a relationship with the United States; something that Nasser would never had been able to accomplish. Sadat established a relationship with the United States where they would not only be the mediator, but also treat Egypt’s claims on par with Israel’s, which was a stunning conception after Nasser’s two decades of hostility.<sup>143</sup> Moving Egypt closer to the United States and away from the Soviet Union

---

<sup>139</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1982), 460, 468.

<sup>140</sup> Walter Issacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 529.

<sup>141</sup> Dolman, 15, 95.

<sup>142</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 459.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 482.

proved invaluable during the post-conflict negotiations, and aided Sadat in achieving his political aims.

More importantly, Sadat demonstrated that strategy is not about winning in the traditional sense. Dolman posits that states' may even choose to go to war with strategic aims that rule out the possibility of tactical victory.<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the Israelis learned from Egyptian POWs after the war that Egypt had no serious expectations of even reaching the Mitla and Gidi passes.<sup>145</sup> They were to just seize a bridgehead into the Sinai and hang on. Thus, Sadat went to war not for territorial gain but to create a crisis that would disrupt the status quo, open the way for negotiations, and increase Egypt's diplomatic flexibility.<sup>146</sup> Golda Meier acknowledged as much in her memoirs, where she conceded that Sadat's conduct of the war and overtures to the United States put Egypt in a far stronger position diplomatically than Israel.<sup>147</sup> While Egypt had lost tactically, they won politically. Negotiations for the return of at least some of the territories Israel had captured in 1967 were inevitable.<sup>148</sup>

Finally, it is worth noting that the highest praise regarding Sadat as a master strategist came from another adept statesman, Henry Kissinger. The biographer Henry Issacson wrote that one of the most significant personal bonds Kissinger forged while he was Secretary of State was with Anwar Sadat. Issacson stated that Kissinger often referred to Sadat reverently as, "a prophet" and that no other statesman he had dealt with, other than Zhou Enlai, is accorded anything near this respect in Kissinger's mind, and that none had elicited the same affection.<sup>149</sup> Kissinger

---

<sup>144</sup> Dolman, 16.

<sup>145</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 459.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, 460.

<sup>147</sup> Meier, 439.

<sup>148</sup> Issacson, 537.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 552.

himself stated that Sadat's ability from the very first hours of the Yom Kippur War to never lose sight of his political aims convinced him that he was dealing with a statesman of the first order.<sup>150</sup>

Unfortunately, not everyone within Egypt shared Kissinger's view. Fundamentalist Muslims were enraged with Sadat's acknowledgement of the state of Israel and the ensuing normalization of relations between the two countries. Ironically, Sadat's strategic thinking would contribute to his own death, as Muslim extremists assassinated him during a military parade to commemorate the 1973 Yom Kippur War on the 6th of October 1981. Would Sadat have continued his strategic brilliance? Sadly, one will never know.

---

<sup>150</sup> Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, 482.

## Bibliography

- Asher, Dani. *The Egyptian Strategy for the Yom Kippur War*. Translated by Moshe Tlamim. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009.
- Axelrod, Robert and Michael D. Cohen. *Harnessing Complexity: Organizational Implications of A Scientific Frontier*. New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Badri, Hassan, Taha el Magdoub, and Mohammed Dia el Din Zohdy. *The Ramadan War, 1973*. Dunn Loring, VA: T.N. Dupuy Associates, Inc., 1978.
- Bar-Siman-Tov. *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969-1970*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Betts, Richard K. "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 5-50.
- Burr, William, ed. "The October War and U.S. Policy," The National Security Archive at The George Washington University, October 7, 2003, accessed January 13, 2016, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB98/index2.htm>.
- Cohen, Eliot A. and John Gooch. *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*. New York: Free Press, 1990.
- Dolman, Everett C. *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*. New York: Frank Cass, 2005.
- Dupuy, T.N. *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars 1947-1974*. Fairfax, VA: Hero Books, 1984.
- Echevarria, Antulio J. *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Freedman, Lawrence. *Strategy: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Gamasy, Mohamed Abdel Ghani El. *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt*. Cairo, Egypt: American University in Cairo Press, 1993.
- Gawrych, George W. "The 1973 Arab-Israeli War: The Albatross of Decisive Victory." *Leavenworth Papers*, no. 21. Fort Leavenworth, KS: US Army Command and General Staff College Combat Studies Institute, 1996.
- Gharajedaghi, Jamshid. *Systems Thinking: Managing Chaos and Complexity: A Platform for Designing Business Architecture*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier, 2006.
- Heikal, Mohamed. *The Road to Ramadan*. New York: The New York Times Book Company, 1975.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Sphinx and the Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East*. New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

- Herzog, Chaim. *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East*. New York: Random House, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The War of Atonement: October, 1973*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1975.
- Horne, Alistair. *Kissinger: 1973, The Crucial Year*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009.
- Israel Today Staff. "The Yom Kippur War, 42 Years On..." *Israel Today*, September 24, 2015. Accessed September 24, 2015. <http://www.israeltoday.co.il/NewsItem/tabid/178/nid/27431/Default.aspx>.
- Israeli, Raphaeli. *Man of Defiance: A Political Biography of Anwar Sadat*. Totowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1985.
- Issacson, Walter. *Kissinger: A Biography*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992.
- Jervis, Robert. *System Effects: Complexity in Political and Social Life*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Jomini, Baron Antoine Henri de. *The Art of War*. Introduction by Charles Messenger. London: Greenhill Books, 1992.
- Kissinger, Henry. *The White House Years*. Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1979.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Years of Upheaval*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Company, 1982.
- Kumaraswamy, P.R., ed. *Revisiting the Yom Kippur War*. Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2000.
- Lesch, David W. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: A History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Meir, Golda. *My Life*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975.
- Meital, Yoram. *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change, 1967-1977*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "The Khartoum Conference and Egyptian Policy after the 1967 War: A Reexamination." *Middle East Journal* 54, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 65.
- O'Ballance, Edgar. *No Victor, No Vanquished: The Yom Kippur War*. Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1978.
- Oren, Michael B. *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Ovendale, Ritchie. *The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Wars*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman, 1992.
- Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (Summer, 1998): 427-460.



- Quandt, William B. *Decade of Decision: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977.
- Rabinovich, Abraham. *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter that Transformed the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 2004.
- Roberts, Mark. "Review of *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*," *Journal of Strategic Security* 7, no. 3 (Fall 2014): 98-99.
- Sadat, Anwar. *In Search of Identity*. New York: Harper and Row, 1978.
- Shalev, Aryeh. *Israel's Intelligence Assessment Before The Yom Kippur War: Disentangling Deception and Distraction*. Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2010.
- Shazly, Saad el. *The Crossing of the Suez*. San Francisco, CA: American Mideast Research, 1980.
- Sicherman, Harvey. *The Yom Kippur War: End of Illusion? Vol. 1, The Foreign Policy Papers*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1976.
- Simpson, Emile. *War from the Ground Up*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Steinberg, Ted. *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Strachan, Hew. *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Svechin, Alexander A. *Strategy*. Edited by Kent Lee. Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992.
- The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*. *The Yom Kippur War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002.
- United Nations Security Council. Resolution 242 (1967). United Nations, November 22, 1967. Accessed January 4, 2016. [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/242\(1967\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/242(1967)).
- Von Clausewitz, Carl. *On War*. Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989.
- Winer, Stuart. "Marking '73 War, President Calls for Scrutiny of Today's Leaders." *The Times of Israel*, September 24, 2015. Accessed September 24, 2015. <http://www.timesofisrael.com/marking-73-war-president-calls-for-scrutiny-of-todays-leaders/>.