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SIX DAYS IN 1967 ... OPERATIONAL ART IN THE SINAI

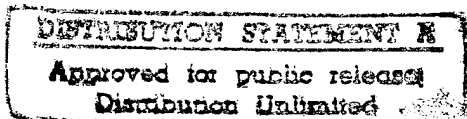
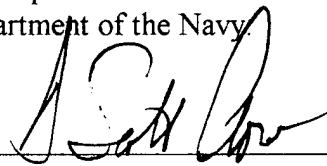
by

D. Scott Crow
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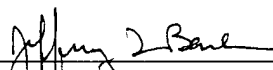
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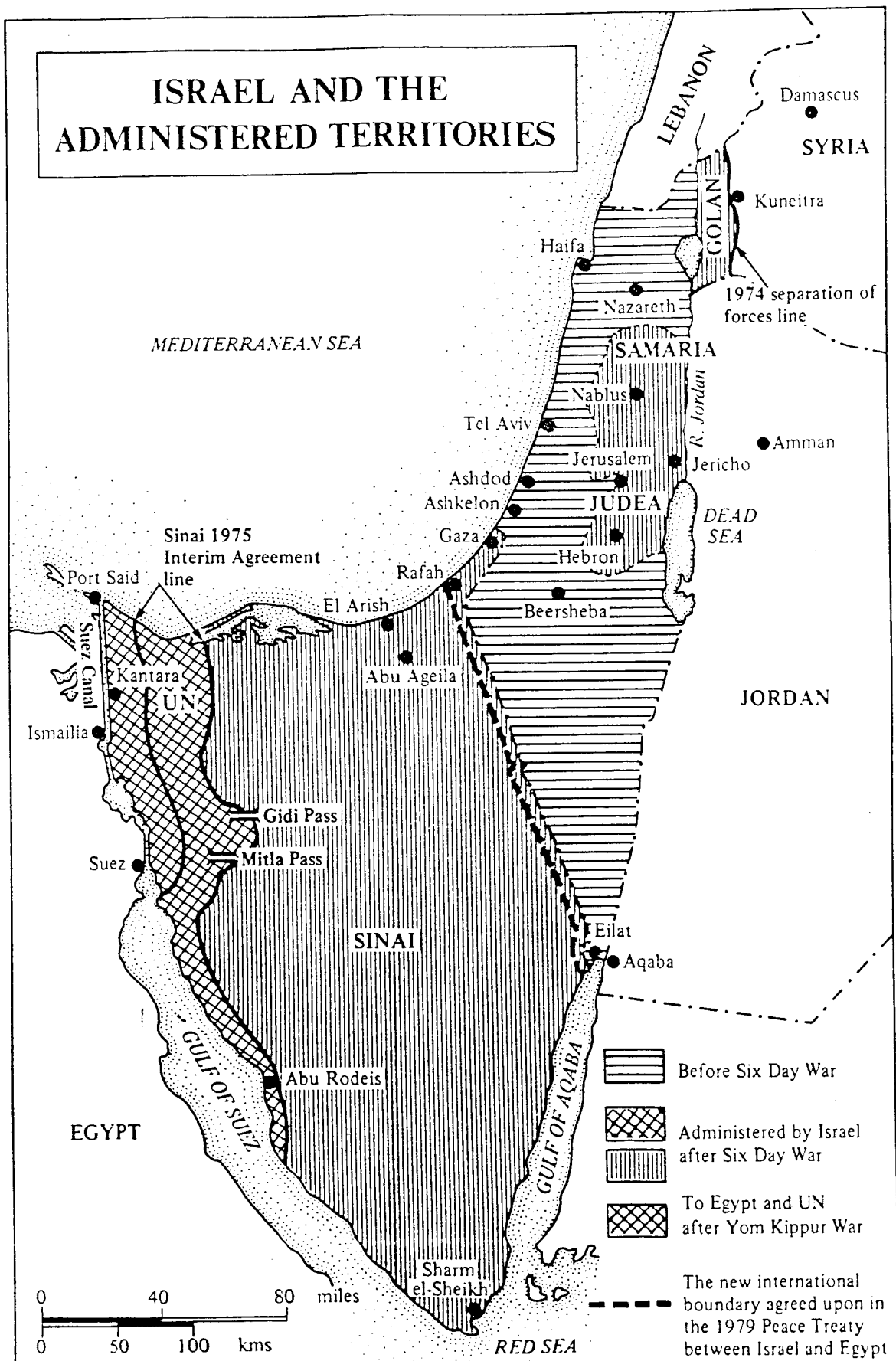
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Abstract of

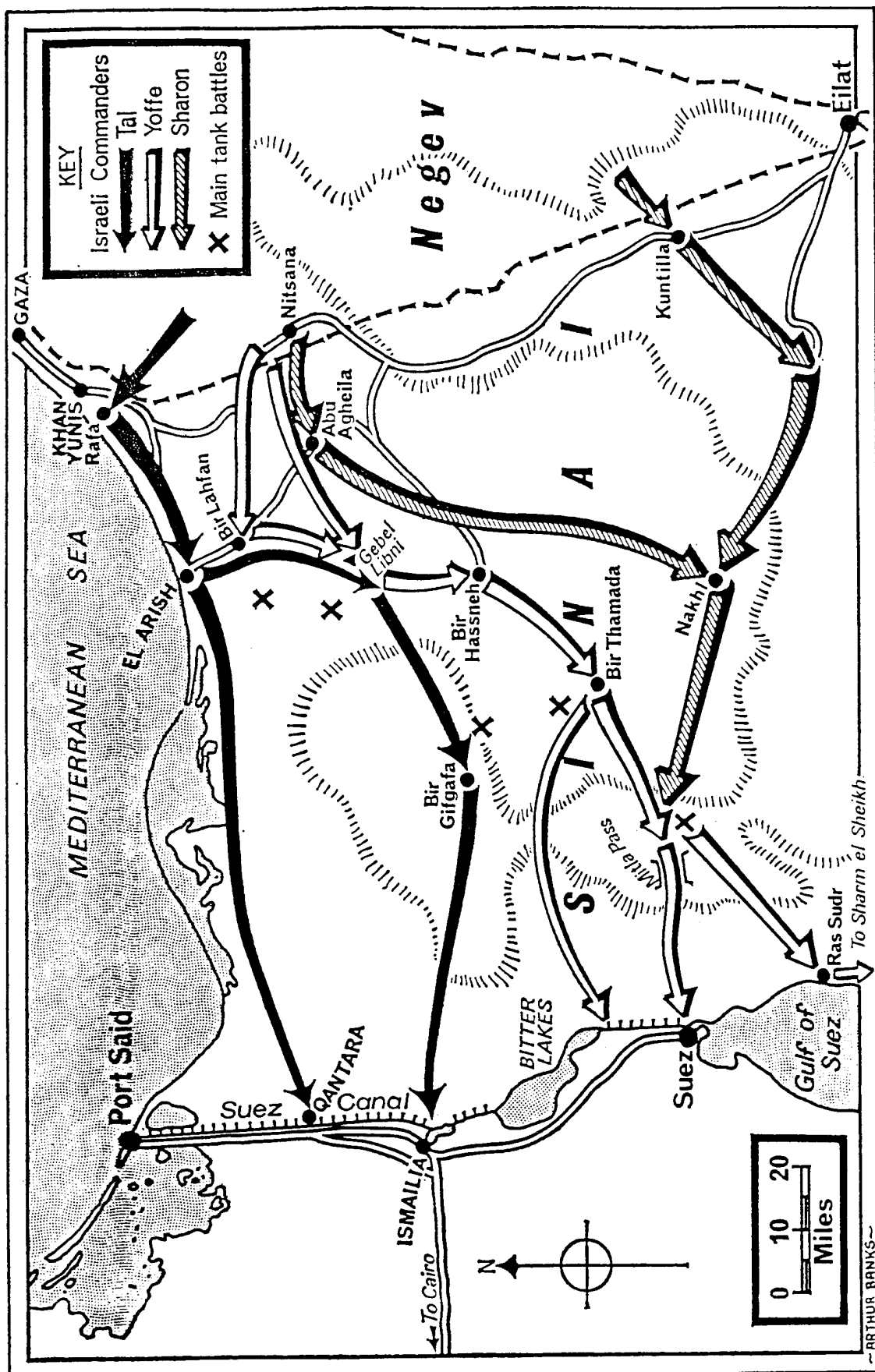
SIX DAYS IN 1967 ... OPERATIONAL ART IN THE SINAI

This paper examines the conduct of the Arab--Israeli conflict in 1967, "The Six Day War", from the perspective of the Operational Artist. It first provides a brief chronology of the significant historical events leading up to the conflict, and then it provides a discussion of some pertinent aspects of both the Egyptian and Israeli Operational Designs. This paper concentrates primarily on the operations in the Sinai. The author presents some lessons learned from the conflict, how they remain of interest to the military professional today, and explores the relationship between the abilities of belligerents to implement the tenets of operational art and the military potential that is available to each side.

ISRAEL AND THE ADMINISTERED TERRITORIES



SOURCE: RABIN, THE RABIN MEMOIRS



SOURCE: CHURCHILL, THE SIX DAY WAR

Introduction

For thousands of years the Jewish people have struggled against the Arabs to maintain a sovereign homeland. This historic enmity between these cultures was exacerbated in 1917, when the British made the "Balfour Declaration." This document simultaneously promised formal British support to the Zionists in their effort to reestablish a Jewish state and guaranteed the rights of the non-Jewish in Palestine. The perception that this land was 'twice promised' is one of the reasons the Arabs refuse to accept the Israeli state.¹

The 1967 "Six Day War" was the third in a series of four major conflicts that have taken place since the State of Israel was created in 1948. In this war the Israelis were vastly outnumbered by the better equipped Arabs. They fought the Arabs on three fronts: the Syrians to the north, in the Golan Heights; the Jordanians, supported by the Iraqis and the Saudis, to the east in the West Bank; and the Egyptians to the south, in the Sinai. With the Egyptians in the fray, the Arabs had more than twice as many supersonic aircraft, twice as many tanks and assault guns, and greater numbers of troops.² The Egyptians were seasoned combatants. They had engaged the Israelis in both 1948 and in 1956 in major conflicts. The Cairo-Moscow agreement with Russia in 1956 provided the Egyptians with the most modern Soviet equipment and training. Over 3,500 Egyptian officers and specialists had been trained in Russian naval, military, aviation schools, and staff academies.³ Yet in a matter of just six days, the Israelis not only successfully defended their homeland, they completely defeated the Egyptians in the Sinai, the Jordanians in the West Bank, the Syrians in the Golan Heights, and gained a "strategic

buffer" on all fronts which nearly doubled the territory under Israeli control. The Egyptian Army lost 10,000 troops and 1,500 officers with over 5,000 troops and officers (including 11 generals) taken prisoner. The Egyptians' seven divisions in the Sinai were decimated, and their Air Force was completely neutralized (338 of 425 aircraft were destroyed).⁴

One might ask, why is this war of interest to the military professional? It is a classic demonstration that superior implementation of the tenets of Operational Art by one adversary over another is the dominant factor in the determination of victory. A typical individual will have only a limited number of actual experiences on which to base his operational decisions. It is important to examine how and why operations were successfully and unsuccessfully planned and executed in past conflicts. This will then expand the professional's virtual experience and enable him to increase his ability to make sound recognitional decisions, based firmly on the principles of war, when confronted with crisis. This paper will focus on the operations of the Israelis against the Egyptians. Offering a brief historical tracing and an abbreviated account of the significant operational events that took place in the Sinai. It will then discuss some of the notable aspects of the Egyptian and Israeli operational designs and the lessons learned in the Sinai, which clearly illustrate that the prevailing determinant in warfare is the skill of the commander in his implementation of operational art, not the size or potential capability of the forces involved.

History/Sequence of Events

- 14 May 1948: Creation of the State of Israel. Immediately followed by a general Arab attack. Cease fire 18 Nov 1948. Armistice lines not conducive to security.
- Oct 1956: Egypt Blockades Gulf of Aqaba. Israel attacks. The British and French involved, as well, to open the Suez Canal. Ends with United Nations (U.N.) peacekeepers in the Sinai keeping the Egyptians and Israelis separated.
- Jul 1964: Israel completes "National Water Carrier" (series of canals and aqueducts which carry water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev Desert). Syria and Jordan start a joint project to divert Jordan River water away from Israel.
- Jul 1966: Syria assumes control of the Fatah (Yasir Arafat's, Palestinian terrorist organization). Campaign of violence toward Israel from Jordanian territory begins.
- Nov 1966: Israel crosses into Jordan to conduct retaliatory raid, in response to Fatah attacks.
- Apr 1967: Heavy exchange of fire between Israel and Syria (Air and Ground).
- 13 May 1967: Soviet message delivered to Syria and Egypt, falsely reporting that Israel was massing troops on the Syrian border. Incites the Arabs.
- 16 May 1967: President Nasser (Egypt) requests that the U.N. peacekeepers leave the Sinai. Two Egyptian divisions move to the Israeli border in the Sinai.
- 19 May 1967: Israel fully mobilizes reserves.
- 29 May 1967: Egypt increases force to seven divisions in the Sinai.
- 5 Jun 1967: "Six Day War" begins; events in the Sinai:
- 0745-1035 5 June; Israeli air strike in 2 waves. Egyptian Air Force neutralized.⁵
 - Israelis divide ground force into three groups. Objective to penetrate Egyptian force, block their escape and to engage/destroy in the Sinai.⁶
 - The first group under BGen Tal to attack and penetrate at Rafa.
 - The second group under BGen Yoffe to penetrate through the dunes

and block the mountain passes in the western Sinai.

-The third group under BGen Sharon to attack and penetrate at Abu Agheila

10 Jun 1967: At 1930, hostilities come to an end after all parties agree to accept the U. N. call to cease fire.

Egyptians

The operational commander, in the development of a successful operational design, must first concern himself with the aims and objectives of his country's cause. Liddell Hart observed that, "the military objective should be governed by the political objectives, subject to the basic condition that policy does not demand what is *militarily...impossible* (emphasis added)"⁷.

Nasser clearly laid out the strategic objective of the Egyptians when he announced that, "we intend to open a general assault against Israel. This will be total war. Our basic aim is the destruction of Israel."⁸ The Egyptian objective did not appreciate the tenacity of the enemy at bay. Sun Tzu taught that, "to a surrounded enemy you must leave a way of escape. Show him there is a road to safety, and so create in his mind the idea that there is an alternative to death. Then strike. . . . Wild beasts, when at bay, fight desperately. How much more is this true of men!"⁹ The Israelis certainly perceived the threat of annihilation. As one Israeli officer put it, "this would have been a second Masada. When the Egyptians got here, they would have found no one alive. I would have killed my wife and daughter rather than let them fall into their hands. And I don't know anyone who wouldn't have done the same."¹⁰

The guidance and objectives provided to the operational commander must be transformed into a concrete plan or operational idea. "The operational idea or scheme (concept) is the essence of operational design. To be successful, the *operational idea* must portray the broad vision of *what* the operational commander intends to do and *how* he intends to do it."¹¹ The Egyptian plan for operations against Israel had been drawn up by the General Staff in 1966. Operation Kahir intended to use a mobile defense aimed at luring the Israelis deep into the Sinai, then to launch a series of crushing counterattacks. President Nasser ordered the staff to abandon the plan; any concession of any of the Sinai or the Gaza Strip was unacceptable. The Egyptian Army was to simply prepare to attack Israel, at a time to be determined by Nasser. He apparently did not consider the possibility that Israel might preempt him and attack first.¹² As a result, the Egyptians moved into the Sinai without a clear set of military objectives and no operational idea. They consequently dug themselves in along the border with Israel in defensive positions (taught to them by the Soviets) to wait for the order to attack Israel.

The Egyptian practice of digging in their tanks or confining them to reinforced revetments behind fortified positions along the Israeli border deprived the armor of its main asset to the operational-tactical commander, speed and mobility. This restricted Egyptian freedom of action against the Israeli onslaught.¹³ The very rigid Soviet doctrine the Egyptians brought to the Sinai allowed the Israelis an opportunity to confidently examine a very finite set of enemy capabilities. They then exploited them with an appropriate course of action to achieve their military objective of destroying the Arab center of gravity, the Egyptian ground force in the Sinai.

Israelis

Guidance and Objective

In stark contrast to the Egyptians, the Israeli military leadership had an open dialog with its political leadership, enabling them to formulate a clear set of political aims. These were translated into achievable strategic and operational objectives. Yitzhak Rabin, the Israeli Chief of Staff in 1967, describes in his Memoirs a portion of the Operational Idea:

- "Our strategy was designed first and foremost to attain control of the skies by means of a sudden and massive attack to destroy the enemy's air power."
- "The war must be fought on the enemy's territory and the enemy's forces must be defeated as quickly as humanly possible."
- "We viewed the Egyptian Army as the main objective...our strategy called for destroying the Egyptian Army and conquering the Sinai through three axes of thrust."¹⁴

The guidance that the Israeli commanders received provided the aims, available resources, the applicable restraints, and constraints. For example, the Israeli leadership recognized the limited time that they had available to them to achieve their objectives. They planned on having only 48 hours before international pressure would force a cease fire. In the conflict, they achieved their objectives in the Sinai as planned, but ignored the U.N. cease fire call for 24 hours, in order to capture the Golan Heights, on the Syrian front to the north.¹⁵ They also recognized that with four out of every five soldiers a civilian, the duration of effective mobilization was limited. For this reason they could not leave the timing to Nasser.¹⁶ A critical point, that Nasser somehow missed.

Since the Israelis believed that they only had 48 hours to destroy the Egyptian ground force in the Sinai, their design relied heavily on two principles as taught by Liddell

Hart; *Deep Penetration* and *Indirect Approach*. They avoided directly confronting the Egyptian force in their dug in positions, because that would have played to the Egyptians strengths and would have taken too much time. To penetrate the Egyptian lines and to attack from unexpected directions made possible the type of maneuver warfare at which the Israelis excelled.¹⁷ It enabled them to attack the Egyptian center of gravity on conditions favorable to the Israeli force.

Deception and Surprise

The success of the Israeli design was, in no small part, a result of a creative operational deception and surprise plan. "All warfare is based on deception. . . . Feign, disorder, and crush him. . . . Attack him where he is unprepared , appear where you are not expected."¹⁸

The Israelis recognized their own naval force as a critical vulnerability and that the Egyptian Navy could easily have threatened Tel Aviv. The Israelis "persuaded" the Egyptians to move a large portion of their Navy through the Suez and into the Red Sea, by repeatedly moving the same four landing craft overland into the port of Eilat, on the Gulf of Aqaba, by day and then back out by night. This convinced the Egyptians that they were preparing for an attack on Sharm el-Sheikh, as they had in 1956.¹⁹ To draw attention away from the main points of penetration in the North and to further "persuade" the Egyptians that Sharm el-Sheikh was the objective, the Israelis used dummy tanks under poor camouflage to make a brigade of armor look like a division.²⁰ This also contributed to "the strategy of indirect approach, and its corollary, 'the line of least expectations,' to throw the opponent off balance."²¹ Deception was also crucial in the air.

The Israelis convinced the Egyptians to move many of their best jets to the south by air feints to the south, over the Gulf of Aqaba, for several days before hostilities began.

These jets became *hors de combat*.²²

Even though both the Egyptians and the Israelis were poised for battle, the Israelis were able to effectively use the element of surprise in their plan. The Israelis wanted to give the Arabs the impression that they were willing to let diplomatic efforts take their course and that the window of opportunity for an Israeli preemptive attack was past. The Israeli Minister of Defense, Dayan, made public statements to that effect on the day prior to the attack. They also sent several thousand soldiers to the beaches in Tel Aviv, on leave, to deceive the Arabs into believing that they were adopting a long term defensive posture.²³

The timing for the initial wave of air strikes was planned carefully to maximize surprise and shock value on the morning of Monday 5 June. 0745 was chosen for the time on target for the simultaneous attack on 10 Egyptian airfields. This time was past the peak of alert. The Egyptians kept their jets on five minute alert at the end of the runways starting before dawn, because that is when they expected an attack if one came. Their dawn fighter patrols were back on the deck, with the pilots eating breakfast. 0745 was also 15 minutes before the Egyptians start work. The Israelis caught many of the Egyptian commanders on their way to work.²⁴

Massing of Effects

To achieve their initial operational objective of neutralizing the Egyptian Air Force the smaller Israeli Air Force had to successfully mass the effects of its efforts. Their strike

aircraft were able to achieve an incredibly fast turn-around time. The Israeli aircraft were able to sustain a return-to-target rate of less than 60 minutes. They were able to land, refuel, rearm, and take off, all in an average of 8 minutes. Their plan called for the use of special delayed fusing of the bombs that were used to destroy the runways, which prevented the Egyptians from making quick repairs.²⁵ The Israelis gambled that the Syrians and the Jordanians would not respond quickly in the defense of the Egyptians. Rather than dilute the mass of the initial air strikes, the Israelis did not attack any Syrian or Jordanian positions and left only a few jets over Israel in defense.²⁶ By the end of the first morning, the Israelis had air superiority, and by the second day, had destroyed the Egyptian Air Force. In fact, Nasser believed that the Israelis were operating at three times their strength and that they must have had outside assistance.²⁷

On the ground, the Israelis were able to mass the effects of their older Sherman tanks, by using tank transports to move them quickly around the theater of operations. A well-maintained tank is good for about 100 hours of combat driving before major downtime. Israeli tanks were operated in combat for an average of 60 hours in the Sinai. The Egyptians did not use transports resulting in a force one half to two thirds below authorized strength, before a shot was fired.²⁸

Maneuver

The purpose of maneuver is to place the enemy in a position of disadvantage through the flexible application of combat power. Effective maneuver keeps the enemy off balance and thus also protects the friendly force. It contributes materially toward exploiting successes, preserving freedom of action, and reducing vulnerability by

continually posing new problems for the enemy.²⁹ The Israelis ground force was divided into three thrusts. The Northern group, under BGen Tal, penetrated at Rafa. The Southern group, under BGen Sharon, penetrated at Abu Agheila. The Center group, under BGen Yoffe, penetrated through the dunes, which the Egyptians believed to be impassable and left undefended. This demonstrated Liddell Hart's axiom: "Natural hazards, however formidable, are inherently less dangerous and less uncertain than fighting hazards. All conditions are more calculable, all obstacles more surmountable, than those of human resistance."³⁰

Intelligence

"If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles."³¹ The Israelis made it their business to become familiar with all aspects of Arab habits, customs, and culture and applied that knowledge to their planning. As described above, they were intimately familiar with the habits of the aviation community. Their superior intelligence enabled them to achieve even better economy of effort. Israeli pilots were able to leave the camouflaged aircraft decoys alone and to accurately target only the actual aircraft.³² The Israeli intelligence network knew "of enemy air movements and activities, the location and details of the enemy air bases, the deployment of his aircraft, and the location of his radar and missile sites."³³

Desired End State

"Restraint applied to both the means and the ends of warfare is essential to reaching a successful outcome in most wars."³⁴ The Israeli operational planners realized that restraint was necessary in developing the military objectives to assure the desired end

state and the achievement of the national strategic objective of long term security for the State of Israel. They had no interest in inflicting "punishment" on the Arabs for threatening to annihilate the Israeli nation. In this conflict, the Israeli military power was directed nearly completely at military targets. "Restriction of the level of violence is best seen in the use of Air Power. . . . At no time was the Air Power directed at civilian targets, factories, or shipyards."³⁵

Lessons Learned

Intellectual Honesty

One of the critical differences between the Israelis and the Egyptians is the concept of intellectual honesty. "Intellectual honesty was a product of the Israeli style of leadership,"³⁶ but was not a characteristic of the Egyptians. If the Egyptian operational commander had the moral courage to "speak truth to power" and let Nasser know that they were doomed for failure with the guidance that was given, they might have fared better. "Moral courage is required to remain intellectually honest and to reach intelligence 'conclusions' that are supported by facts. . . . The commander cannot be left with uncertainty in his mind regarding what is an estimate and what is opinion."³⁷ The lesson to be learned is that intellectual honesty is critical in intelligence, planning, and the commanders' estimate process. Mathematical models such as Lanchester's equations can be dangerous. Many of the variables in warfare are difficult or impossible to accurately quantify. Science applied to the art of warfare must be closely scrutinized. It is too easy for the planner to make the numbers say what he wants them to say by finding data to

support a predetermined "right answer." The challenge is to avoid that trap and to take the more difficult path. That is, to approach the task honestly, with the leadership supporting an open dialog to ensure the correct decisions are made.

Adherence to Mission

Based on lessons learned in the 1956 conflict, the Israelis became convinced that war is chaos, "and the struggle to control the battlefield is in reality a futile war against the effects of unintended consequences-entropy."³⁸ They saw the inevitable "fog of war" as an area to exploit and as a potential ally. The chaos and confusion in battle creates opportunities which are impossible to predict during the planning stage. To maximize this potential, the Israelis developed the concept of adherence to mission. "The simplest definition of adherence to mission is that higher headquarters establishes a goal in broad terms and the unit charged with achieving the goal may do so by any means at hand. . . . The object of adherence to mission is to get every soldier at every level to recognize--and then exploit on his own authority--opportunities that are occurring right before his eyes."³⁹ In the Six Day War, the Israelis were able to prove the worth of this concept. The success of the Israelis in the Sinai can be partially attributed to this philosophy. Unit commanders in the Sinai were required to be familiar with the operational objectives and were free to take the initiative when they saw the opportunity. The result was that the Egyptians had no time to rest, they had no operational pause from which to mount a counter-attack. The adherence to mission concept enabled the Israelis to keep the initiative and to maintain a great deal of momentum.

This concept remains important today. "The political climate of the modern world demands a *blitzkrieg* if victory is to be achieved before the intervention of outside pressures."⁴⁰ The Israelis were willing to sacrifice some of the advantages of a more centralized decision making philosophy, where the decision-maker has the 'big-picture', for greater flexibility and speed. Technology today can make the adherence to mission concept even more powerful, because technology can give the operational-tactical commander the benefit of the big picture, with a fused plot giving him real time operational situational awareness. It also keeps the operational-strategic commander 'in the loop' with what 'on the fly' decisions the commanders below him are making without interrupting the momentum.

Conclusion

The official end to the Six Day War did not come until 1930 on Saturday 10 June, when the Syrians and Israelis finally agreed to a cease fire. The Egyptians had agreed to a cease fire the day before at 0320. The Israelis were not content to let the Syrians maintain their foothold in the Golan Heights, from which they had routinely sniped and shelled the kibbutzim in the valley below for the 19 years since 1948.

"By a feat of arms unparalleled in modern times, the Israelis, surrounded by enemies superior in quantity and quality of equipment and overwhelmingly superior in numbers, had fought a war on three fronts and not only survived but had won a resounding victory."⁴¹ The victory and the nature of the accomplishments achieved by the Israelis was phenomenal; but it was not simply good fortune or uncommon luck. What

made these feats possible was a sound Israeli operational design against a weak one. The Israelis honestly estimated the situation and developed an achievable operational plan, while the Arabs did not.

The Israelis in the Six Day War made one of the best demonstrations in modern military history of the importance of the application of Operational Art in crisis. The equipment and manpower available to the operational commander do not decide the victor. How the operational commander makes use of the assets he has at his disposal is the most prevalent factor.

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