. . . The dazzling victory in the '67 war . . . contributed to the building of a myth around the IDF [Israel Defense Forces] and its personnel. The common expectations from the IDF were that any future war would be short with few casualties.

— Major General Avraham Adan,
Israeli division commander, 1973[1]

The standard for America's Army must be "decisive victory."

— General Gordon Sullivan,
U.S. Army Chief of Staff, 1992[2]

Achieving a decisive victory in a short period with relatively few casualties stands as a desirable goal for modern armies in conventional war. The Six Day War of 5–10 June 1967 saw the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) achieve such a military triumph over the combined Arab armies of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. As a result of this remarkable achievement, Israel emerged as the superpower in the Middle East, seemingly invincible in conducting maneuver warfare against any Arab coalition. Conventional wisdom, therefore, would counsel against challenging such a militarily superior foe in a major war. But Egypt and Syria subsequently risked just that by attacking Israel on 6 October 1973, less than seven years after their debacle. Acutely aware of the unfavorable odds, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat resorted to a war strategy designed to achieve political success *without* a military victory.

There is an important lesson here about the limits of military power. Israel's impressive battlefield accomplishment in 1967 had failed to bring peace with any Arab state. In fact, the Arabs' resolve was strengthened by the humiliation of their decisive defeat. Meanwhile, the dramatic military victory unconsciously created an albatross for the IDF. In particular, the stellar military performance in 1967 spawned an unrealistic standard of excellence virtually impossible for the IDF to duplicate in its next armed conflict. Furthermore, the Israelis expected the Arabs to perform in the next war as poorly as they did in 1967. Rather than discern these two expectations as a recipe for disaster, the Israeli military unconsciously fell into the trap of preparing to fight its next war as it had waged its last conflict. And this it did in a spirit of over-confidence.

In response, the Egyptians, led by Anwar Sadat, exploited Israel's strategic mindset through a judicious and fortuitous combination of war and diplomacy. The shock and lethality of the 1973 war, coupled with Sadat's adroit statesmanship and America's determined mediation, led to a change in Israeli attitudes and policy. Eventually, a new Israeli government signed a peace treaty

with Egypt that promised to return the entire Sinai to the Egyptians. That agreement significantly altered the political landscape of the Middle East.

The Egyptian achievement should give reflective pause to any country confident in the superiority of its military forces *alone* against any potential adversary. The United States certainly falls into this category, especially after its armed forces, supported by contingents from other coalition members, decimated the Iraqi military in 100 hours during Desert Storm. The Gulf War resembles, in many respects, the Israeli victory in 1967 and has raised similar expectations within American society concerning its military establishment's ability to attain decisive victory, in a short time, and with relatively few casualties. Because of this haunting parallel, the United States stands to gain much from a reexamination of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War in light of the earlier Six Day War.

THE BLITZKRIEG OF THE SIX DAY WAR. The 1967 Arab-Israeli War transformed tiny Israel into a regional superpower: a puny but potent David had handily defeated a Goliath. The IDF had every reason to bask in its resounding military victory, both for the magnitude of that success and for the social and economic benefits that accrued from the war. There now appeared little hope for the defeated Arabs militarily, for with the passage of time, Israel seemed destined to become even more powerful than her Arab neighbors. Nonetheless, six years later, in 1973, Egypt and Syria initiated another war against Israel, knowing full well that they were incapable of decisively defeating the Israelis. Caught off guard, the IDF failed to duplicate its impressive performance of 1967. The consequent political fallout in Israel after this failure can only be understood in light of the Six Day War.

On 5 June 1967, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defense minister, unleashed Israel's military juggernaut with a plan designed to humiliate Egypt by utterly destroying its armed forces. An important lesson from the 1956 Sinai campaign shaped Dayan's final war strategy. In the 1956 war, the IDF had defeated the Egyptian Armed Forces and captured the entire Sinai peninsula in collusion with British and French forces, which, for their part, destroyed Egypt's air force on the ground and occupied the twin cities of Port Fu'ad and Port Sa'id on the northern entrance to the Suez Canal. This Israeli military triumph, however, proved for naught, for the international community, led by the United States, condemned the combined military action against Egypt and eventually pressured the three allies to withdraw from the captured territories. Though defeated militarily, Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser, by defiantly resisting the tripartite onslaught and saving part of his army in the Sinai, emerged from the Suez Crisis a hero. His political fortunes rose dramatically, transforming him into a pan-Arab leader and a major figure in the "Nonaligned Movement."

Now, almost eleven years later, Dayan, who had been the Israeli chief of the General Staff in the Sinai campaign, wished to avoid a repeat of 1956. Upon his appointment as defense minister on 1 June 1967, just five days prior to Israel's attack on Egypt, Dayan reviewed the current war plan and found it unacceptable. The plan called for the IDF to seize the Gaza Strip and the northeast portion of the Sinai peninsula as bargaining chips in negotiations for opening the Strait of Tiran, which Nasser had closed to Israeli shipping toward the end of May. Dayan rejected these limited operational aims and told the General Staff that Israel must avoid a repetition of 1956 when Nasser, though defeated, had gained a political victory. Only a crushing military defeat would prevent Nasser from gaining a propaganda victory after the next conflict.

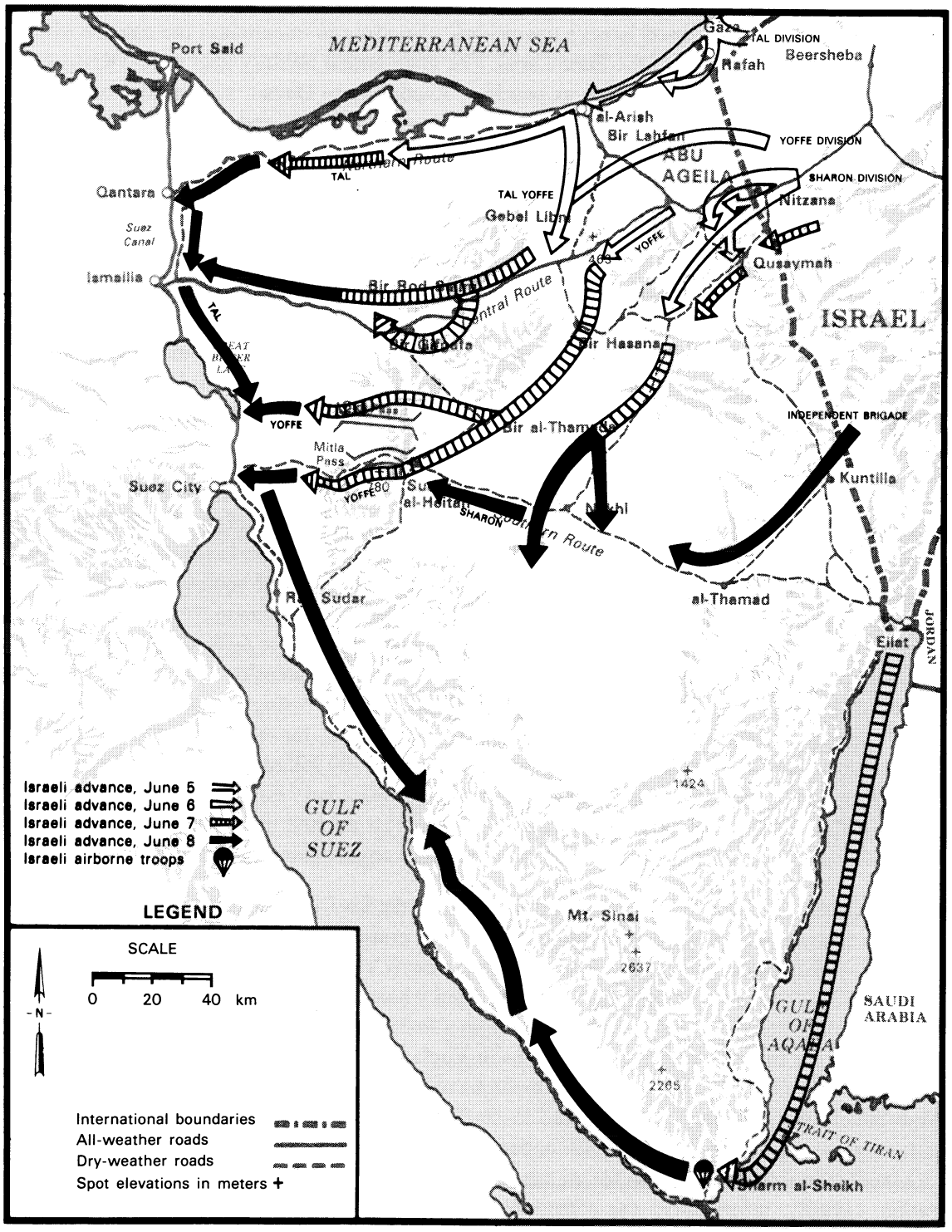
Consequently, Dayan widened Israel's operational objectives to encompass the capture of the entire Sinai peninsula short of the Suez Canal. The main Israeli military goal was to destroy as much of the Egyptian Armed Forces as possible. According to Dayan, such a decisive Israeli military triumph would not just defeat Nasser but would humiliate and emasculate him as an Arab leader.[3]

The Israeli military victory proved brilliant indeed, dazzling the West while shocking the Arab world. In a mere six days, from 5–10 June, the IDF routed the combined Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian Armies. On the first day, the Israeli Air Force destroyed the combined air forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, while Israeli ground forces launched a major offensive into the Sinai. On the fourth day of the campaign, Nasser admitted defeat just as Israeli units reached the Suez Canal.[4] (See map 1.) In addition to attacking Egypt on the first day of the war, Dayan ordered an attack against Jordan later that afternoon; the morning of the third day found King Hussein approving a general withdrawal of the Jordanian Army from the West Bank. Finally, the Israelis devoted the last two days of the war to capturing the Golan Heights from the Syrians.

In dramatic fashion, Israel had won outnumbered and outgunned. The IDF, with 250,000 men, 1,000 tanks, and 275 combat aircraft, had decimated an Arab coalition of 300,000 troops, close to 2,000 tanks, and over 500 fighters and bombers. In consequence, Israel increased its size fourfold, adding 26,476 square miles to its territory: the Sinai (23,622 square miles), the Gaza Strip (140 square miles), the West Bank (2,270 square miles), and the Golan Heights (444 square miles). These acquisitions provided Israel with strategic depth and more defensible borders, gains that made the Israelis feel quite confident about their national security. Israeli losses in this lightning campaign were 983 killed, 4,517 wounded, and fifteen missing, a relatively small figure when compared to the over 10,000 Egyptian casualties. Jordan, for reluctantly participating in the Arab cause, lost 80 percent of its armor and suffered 700 killed and 6,000 wounded and missing. Syrian figures were somewhat lower than those for Jordan.[5] For the Israelis, the dramatic nature of the victory made the human losses bearable and elicited little criticism of the war's conduct from the Israeli public afterward. No one could argue against such success.

Israeli self-confidence understandably soared after the Six Day War, buoyed by international acclaim. Western writers were especially lavish in their praise of the IDF. Retired French General André Beaufre compared the Israeli victory to Germany's crushing defeat of France in 1940: "[The 1967 war] is indeed lightning war of the kind whose effects we experienced everywhere in 1940, but this time [it was] compressed within a limited time frame never before realized."[6] Writing for the Institute of Strategic Studies in England, Michael Howard and Robert Hunter likened the Six Day War to the daring campaigns of the great Napoleon Bonaparte: "The Third Arab-Israeli War is likely to be studied in staff colleges for many years to come. Like the campaigns of the younger Napoleon Bonaparte, the performance of the Israeli Defence Force[s] provided a text-book illustration for all the classical Principles of War: speed, surprise, concentration, security, information, the offensive, above all training and morale."[7] Such analyses underscored the mystique with which the Israeli military machine was regarded by the West, sentiments that continued unabated right up to the 1973 war.

The magnitude of the Israeli victory suggested that the Arabs would need many years before they could embark on another major armed conflict. Egypt, for its participation, lost 85 percent of its air force and 80 percent of its ground equipment. Israel, in sharp contrast, immediately



Map 1. The Six Day War: Egyptian front

increased its fighting capabilities through its captured arsenal, and subsequent years saw the country grow stronger militarily. The Israeli defense industry, for example, experienced remarkable growth. By 1973, Israel, although a small country of just over three million inhabitants, could boast the production of the Kfir attack plane, mobile medium artillery and long-range guns, the Shafrir air-to-air missile, air-to-ground missiles, the Reshef missile boat, the Gabriel sea-to-sea missile, sophisticated electronic devices, and most types of ammunition and fire-control systems (with the help of Western finance and technology). These military accomplishments ushered the IDF into the age of electronic warfare and served to enhance Israeli society's undaunted confidence in the deterrent capabilities of its military.

Other nonmilitary indicators supported Israel's new status as its region's superpower. Demographically, 31,071 Jews settled in the Holy Land in 1968, a 70 percent increase in immigration over the previous year. This trend continued for the next several years, especially after 1972 when the Soviet Union permitted its Jews to emigrate to Israel. In addition to drawing new settlers, Israel became a more attractive country for tourism, which grew dramatically from 328,000 visitors in 1967 to 625,000 in 1970, bringing with it much-needed foreign exchange. Economically, the integration of captured Arab territories brought in new markets, cheap labor, and valuable natural resources. The Abu Rudeis wells in the Sinai, for example, provided Israel with over half its oil needs, whereas control of the Golan Heights permitted the Israeli government to channel the waters of the Jordan River into Lake Galilee, thereby reclaiming 12,000 acres in the Chula Valley as new farmland. Meanwhile, a postwar economic boom reduced unemployment to below 3 percent in 1970, transforming the pre-1967 recession into a consumption boom: the 1 percent growth of the economy in 1967 climbed to 13 percent in 1968, dropping only to a still respectable 9 percent in 1970. The number of private automobiles doubled between 1967 and 1973, a clear indication of the country's new-found prosperity.

Politically, Israel appeared firmly wedded to the dual forces of stability and continuity. The ruling Labor Party, in power since the founding of the state in 1948, maintained its hold on the reigns of government through the 1973 war. After Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's death on 26 February 1969, Golda Meir took over as prime minister, maintaining the old guard's control of the party. Though some Israelis encouraged the government to seek reconciliation with the Arabs, the peace issue never developed into an urgent national debate. Foreign pressures agitating for a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem also failed to materialize. The status quo was thus becoming enshrined, thereby validating a greater Israel, now containing a large but tranquil Arab population. Internationally, the United States replaced France as Israel's main arms supporter. Having the world's most powerful country as a close ally further strengthened Israel's status as a regional superpower, especially since neither President Lyndon Johnson nor his successor, President Richard Nixon, wanted to force Israel to withdraw from its captured territories as President Dwight D. Eisenhower had after the 1956 war. For all appearances, Israel stood as an impregnable fortress defended by an invincible military. But the IDF was far from invulnerable.

THE ISRAELI JUGGERNAUT. After the Israeli triumph in the Six Day War, no Arab army or coalition of armies seemed a match for the IDF in a conventional war. Israel's victory in 1967 rested on the three pillars of intelligence, the air force, and armored forces; together they allowed the Israelis, though outnumbered, to win dramatically.[8] It seemed unlikely that any army would wage a conventional war against an adversary superior in these three critical areas of maneuver warfare. But the Egyptians, in conjunction with the Syrians, would find ways to exploit

Israeli vulnerabilities in each area, and the cumulative effect of these exploitations would produce tremors within Israel both during and after the 1973 war.

One Israeli pillar was its intelligence branch, or Aman, supported by Mossad, the Israeli equivalent of the Central Intelligence Agency. The victory in 1967 had stemmed from excellent information that the Israeli intelligence community had gathered about the Arab armies. On the eve of the war and throughout the campaign, senior Israeli commanders possessed intimate knowledge of Arab war plans, capabilities, vulnerabilities, troop dispositions, and redeployments. Well-placed spies, the use of technological assets, and poor Arab security were keys to the Israeli intelligence coup, and after the war, Israel appeared destined to retain a first-class intelligence apparatus.[9]

The Egyptians publicly recognized Israel's remarkable intelligence achievement. One year after the war, Muhammad Hassanayn Heikal, a close confidant of Nasser, provided a critical account of the Israeli success in the semiofficial Egyptian newspaper, *al-Ahram*, focusing on the preemptive air strike. According to Heikal, the Israeli Air Force had destroyed virtually the entire Egyptian Air Force on the ground in a mere three hours owing to superb intelligence gathering and analysis. Rather than attack with the first or last light of day, as the Egyptians would have expected them to, the Israelis struck between 0830 and 0900, when they knew, through careful study, that the Egyptian air defenses were exposed. Moreover, according to Heikal, Israeli Military Intelligence learned of the scheduled flight of Field Marshal 'Abd al-Hakim Amer, general commander of the Egyptian Armed Forces, and the air force chief, to inspect Egyptian forces in the Sinai. All senior Egyptian field commanders gathered at Bir Tamada's airport in central Sinai to await Amer's arrival. While Amer was in the air, the Israeli Air Force struck Egyptian airfields, leaving Egyptian troops without their principal commanders at a time of great crisis. In addition to this excellent timing, Israeli pilots knew which airports to hit first, singling out for destruction the TU-16 medium bombers and the MiG-21 fighters. Heikal ended his article with both a compliment and a condemnation—"the enemy knew more [about us] than necessary, and we knew less [about him] than necessary."[10] The underlying message was clear: the Egyptians would have to win the intelligence war if they hoped to gain a military advantage over the IDF in the next conflict.

This startling success by Israel's Military Intelligence subsequently lulled Israel into overconfidence. For the next conflict, Israeli senior commanders expected to win the intelligence struggle again with accurate and timely information buttressed by accurate analysis. In fact, by 1973, Major General Eliyahu Ze'ira, Israel's director of Military Intelligence, confidently promised to provide a forty-eight-hour warning of an impending Arab attack—ample time for Israel to mobilize its reserves and gain mastery of the skies![11] All Israeli war plans were based on obtaining this advance alert. An Arab surprise did not figure into Israeli calculations. But promising such a wake-up call proved unrealistic. Clever Egyptian deception operations, coupled with Israeli miscalculations, were to mask effectively the Arabs' intent long enough for them to gain initial advantages on the next battlefield.

A second Israeli pillar was the Israeli Air Force. In the Six Day War, Israeli pilots, flying mainly French-made aircraft, destroyed 304 Egyptian planes on the tarmac and then inflicted similar damage on the smaller Jordanian and Syrian air forces. This astonishing feat, indelibly marked as a classic in the annals of air warfare, depended upon excellent intelligence, detailed

planning, and superior training. Control of the air allowed the Israeli ground forces to roll through the Arab armies with relative ease and dramatic speed. The 1967 war confirmed the critical importance of gaining air superiority in maneuver warfare. Consequently, Israeli war strategies depended upon Israel maintaining an air force superior in quality and comparable in quantity to the Arab air forces.

By 1973, over half the Israeli defense budget went to the air force with its 17,000 personnel. The number of combat aircraft increased from 275 in 1967 to 432 by the summer of 1972. By this time, the Israeli Air Force had transitioned from being a French- to an American-supplied war machine, with an inventory that included 150 Skyhawks, 140 F-4 Phantoms, 50 Mirages, and 27 Mystere IVAs. On the other hand, the Egyptian Air Force, some 23,000 officers and men, fielded a Soviet air fleet comprising 160 MiG-21s, 60 MiG-19s, 200 MiG-17s, and 130 Su-7s. To the Egyptians' chagrin, the Soviets refused to provide Egypt with more advanced MiG-23s and Tu-22s. Despite Egyptian advantages in numbers, especially when combined with the Syrian Air Force, the Israelis were markedly ahead in avionics and air-to-air missiles, possessing the American Sidewinder and Sparrow as well as the Israeli Shafrir. In addition to its technological advantage, the Israeli Air Force also maintained a clear edge in pilot expertise. Israeli pilots received approximately 200 flight hours per year with emphasis on initiative, whereas the Egyptians garnered only 70 hours in a more centralized system based on ground direction centers. In air-to-air combat, Israeli pilots outclassed their Egyptian counterparts, and the Egyptians clearly understood that their air force was the weak link in their armed forces.

Waging modern warfare in an open desert without a competitive air force appears suicidal. The Six Day War had confirmed beyond any doubt the critical importance of air supremacy for successful ground offensives over open terrain. But the dilemma of achieving air-to-air competitiveness constituted only half of Egypt's problem. The Egyptians also wanted the capability to conduct strategic strikes into Israel, both as a deterrent and as a means for retaliation in the event the Israelis turned to strategic bombing. In light of these two imperatives, the senior Israeli military leadership, with few exceptions, was confident that Egypt would avoid launching a major war against Israel without first ensuring sufficient air power to challenge the Israeli Air Force. Senior Israeli officers believed that the Egyptians' capability to attack Israel in strategic depth with either missiles or long-range bombers was still a couple of years in the future. As underscored by the Agranat Commission (established after the 1973 war), Israeli intelligence assessments of Egyptian intent depended upon this basic assumption. It proved dead wrong![12] Though the Soviets did provide Egypt with a small number of long-range SCUD missiles on the eve of the war (mid September), Egypt was prepared to risk a different kind of war, one not reliant on its possession of a competitive air force.

The Armor Corps constituted Israel's third pillar. In 1967, after achieving breakthroughs in eastern Sinai at Rafah and Abu Ageila, armored brigades led by tanks with little or no infantry support spearheaded the IDF's lightning advance across the Sinai desert. The IDF's success had rested on the ability of its tactical commanders to demonstrate initiative in combat while Israeli tank crews exhibited mastery of fire and movement over their Egyptian counterparts. Thus, after the war, the Israeli General Staff placed an even greater emphasis on armor in budget allocations, doctrine, organization, and tactics. Infantry and artillery experienced a concomitant neglect. Indeed, a number of infantry brigades were converted to armor units. Tank-heavy armored brigades, lacking in well-trained mechanized infantry, became the norm, with Israeli doctrine

and practice consigning mechanized infantry to the role of mopping-up operations. To compensate for a tank-heavy doctrine for land warfare, the Israeli General Staff counted on the Israeli Air Force quickly gaining air superiority and then serving as "flying artillery" for ground forces. Another lightning campaign, fought along the lines of the Six Day War, would result from this hopeful doctrinal scenario.

In essence, the IDF prepared to fight the last war. Rather than develop a more balanced force structure centered on combined arms, Israeli doctrine and strategy relied upon what worked best in 1967: intelligence, the air force, and tanks. This dynamic trinity would carry the fight into the enemy's territory in decisive fashion. The Israeli military leadership assumed confidently that the Arabs would wage Israel's kind of war—one fought over open terrain pitting air and armor forces directly against each other. Not only did the Israelis expect to fight the last war, they also expected a repeat command performance. Put another way, the IDF in 1973 was designed to fight more as a swift rapier employing agile maneuver forces than as a bludgeon overpowering its adversary with firepower. Israel's enhanced geostrategic situation after the 1967 War only served to accentuate that doctrine and force structure.

The amazing victory of 1967 left Israel with a feeling of invincibility, but it also created a major burden for the IDF by setting an incredibly high standard of stellar performance against which both Israeli society and the army would measure their competence in the next major conflict. Writing in 1979, Major General (retired) Avraham Adan, who commanded both the Armor Corps and a reserve tank division in the 1973 War, tersely described this albatross: "The dazzling victories in the '67 war . . . contributed to the building of a myth around the IDF and its personnel. The common expectations from the IDF were that any future war would be short with few casualties."[13] But blitzkrieg wars are far from the norm in military history, and societies that expect lightning results every time stand to suffer major disappointments. It fell to Egypt's political and military leadership to take advantage of this albatross in the next war.

EGYPTIAN WAR STRATEGY. All indicators suggested that Egypt, Syria, and Jordan would require a generation before they could face Israel in another major war. The IDF had clearly demonstrated its military prowess on the battlefield, while the three Arab states had shown considerable military ineptitude. For the Arabs to attack from their position of military weakness with the goal of achieving political gains seemed to make little sense. But Egypt and Syria surprised everyone by doing just that!

Though the IDF had virtually decimated the Egyptian Armed Forces in the 1967 War, Nasser refused to admit defeat and allow Israel to dictate peace terms. Over the next three years, numerous clashes between the two armies took place over the Suez Canal, culminating in the War of Attrition (1969–70). This three-year period witnessed sporadic but sometimes intense fighting, during which time Nasser's regime, with major Soviet assistance, struggled to rebuild its armed forces. Then, unexpectedly, a major setback occurred in January 1970, when the Israeli Air Force bombed Egypt's heartland, exposing the inability of Nasser's air defense system to defend Egyptian cities.

Unable to meet the Israeli air threat, Nasser secretly flew to Moscow for emergency assistance. He convinced the Kremlin to commit Soviet combat personnel to man Egypt's strategic air defense sites, as well as to fly Egyptian combat planes, an undertaking that began in March. There now loomed the possibility of a direct confrontation between Israel and the

Soviet Union. After matters came to a head on 30 July 1970, when Israeli pilots shot down four Soviet-piloted MiGs, American mediation helped bring about a three-month cease-fire in August. Israel welcomed the respite, for the war of attrition had cost the country over 400 killed and 1,100 wounded.[14] Barely one month after the cease-fire went into effect, Nasser suddenly died of a heart attack, leaving it to Sadat, who assumed the presidency in September 1970, to craft a war strategy for the next stage in the conflict. Sadat's answer would surprise everyone, including his fellow Egyptians.

The broad outlines of Egypt's war strategy of 1973 had, in fact, emerged during Nasser's last years, although Nasser had reached no final decision about going to war. In an article published in 1969 in the semiofficial newspaper *al-Ahram,* Heikal, still a member of Nasser's inner circle, provided prescient insights into the nature of the next war:

> . . . I am not speaking of defeating the enemy in war (*al-harb*), but I am speaking about defeating the enemy in a battle (*ma'arka*) . . . the battle I am speaking about, for example, is one in which the Arab forces might, for example, destroy two or three Israeli Army divisions, annihilate between 10,000 and 20,000 Israeli soldiers, and force the Israeli Army to retreat from positions it occupies to other positions, even if only a few kilometers back. . . . Such a limited battle would have unlimited effects on the war. . . .
>
> 1. It would destroy a myth which Israel is trying to implant in the minds—the myth that the Israeli Army is invincible. Myths have great psychological effect. . . .
>
> 3. Such a battle would reveal to the Israeli citizens a truth which would destroy the effects of the battles of June 1967. In the aftermath of these battles, Israeli society began to believe in the Israeli Army's ability to protect it. Once this belief is destroyed or shaken, once Israeli society begins to doubt its ability to protect it, a series of reactions may set in with unpredictable consequences. . . .
>
> 5. Such a battle would destroy the philosophy of Israeli strategy, which affirms the possibility of "imposing peace" on the Arabs. Imposing peace is, in fact, an expression which actually means "waging war". . . .
>
> 6. Such a battle and its consequences would cause the USA to change its policy towards the Middle East crisis in particular, and towards the Middle East after the crisis in general.[15]

Though the Egyptian Armed Forces failed to annihilate 10,000 Israelis in 1973, Heikal's analysis captured the broad outlines of Sadat's strategy. Rather than aiming to destroy Israel's armed forces or capture key terrain, Sadat would instead seek to change attitudes in Israel and to alter United States policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict by means of a limited war. The Egyptians would achieve these two goals, although with far less damage to Israel than they had hoped—but certainly with far more benefit to Egypt than ever envisaged by Heikal.

Sadat developed a war strategy different from that of his predecessor. Nasser, who after the 1967 war lost faith in the ability of the United States to conduct an even-handed foreign policy in the Arab-Israeli conflict, had worked closely with the Soviets, relying on the Kremlin to represent Egyptian interests to Washington. Sadat, on the other hand, mistrusted the Soviets and wanted to draw Egypt closer to the West, in particular the United States. Without formal diplomatic relations with the United States, a situation inherited from Nasser, Sadat sought to develop a meaningful dialogue with Washington by using backdoor channels. Willing to distance himself from the Soviets, he went so far as to expel all Soviet military advisers and experts from

Egypt in 1972—a dramatic step that surprised and befuddled Middle East experts in the West. When Washington failed to take advantage of this Russian exodus, Soviet military assistance resumed again at the beginning of 1973, ironically in greater quantities than before.

But Sadat failed to involve either the United States or the Soviet Union in any meaningful way. In fact, by 1972, both Washington and Moscow were experimenting with détente, and neither side wanted to jeopardize that delicate relationship by becoming involved in the volatile issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, Washington was consumed with ending the Vietnam War and with making overtures to Communist China. The Middle East had to wait its turn in the order of priorities. Henry Kissinger, the U.S. national security adviser and later secretary of state, believed that time worked to America's advantage. "A prolonged stalemate," he calculated, "would move the Arabs toward moderation and the Soviets to the fringes of Middle East diplomacy."[16]

There appeared little reason for the United States to change its policy toward the Arab-Israeli conflict. A relative peace reigned in the region. Moreover, seeking an agreement with a weak political leader made little sense. Few policy makers in Washington took Sadat seriously; most regarded him as merely a weak, transitional figure, soon to pass into historical oblivion. As later admitted by Kissinger, "when Hafiz Ismail [Sadat's national security adviser] arrived in Washington for his visit on 23 February 1973, we knew astonishingly little of Egypt's real thinking."[17] Increasingly aware of the significance of détente for the Arab-Israeli problem, Sadat slowly crept to the conclusion that only a major military operation across the Suez Canal would jar both Israel and the two superpowers out of their general lethargy toward Egypt and the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Egyptian president reached this conclusion sometime in the latter half of 1972.

Many discussions over strategy took place among the Egyptian political and military leadership before Sadat reached the final decision for a limited war. Most senior Egyptian commanders pushed for a general war to determine the fate of the Sinai. This view became abundantly clear in January 1972 when Sadat chaired a special meeting with senior military commanders at his residence in Giza (Cairo).[18] But most of these officers resisted the idea of going to war in the near future, arguing that the armed forces were as yet unprepared for fighting Israel. Apparently, only Lieutenant General Sa'ad al-Din al-Shazli, the chief of the Egyptian General Staff, and Major General Sa'id al-Mahiy, commander of the Artillery Corps, expressed a willingness to risk a limited military operation across the Suez Canal.

During that January session, General Muhammad Sadiq, the war minister, presented the most powerful arguments against going to war in the near future. For him, it was inconceivable that a limited war could bring Egypt political gains. The army's own internal studies estimated that the Egyptian Armed Forces would suffer 17,000 casualties in crossing the Suez Canal, whereas Soviet calculations placed Egyptian losses over the first four days of combat as high as 35,000. Egypt would gain nothing from such a bloody conflict, even if it could hold on to a bit of territory in the Sinai. Therefore, before embarking on any hostilities, Sadiq wanted to have a much better-trained and equipped military force—one of 250,000 troops capable of defeating the Israelis in a decisive battle. He also underscored the critical importance of air power and the fact that the Egyptian Air Force still lacked the ability to challenge the Israeli Air Force for control of the skies. After emphasizing the above points, the prevailing military position was quite clear.

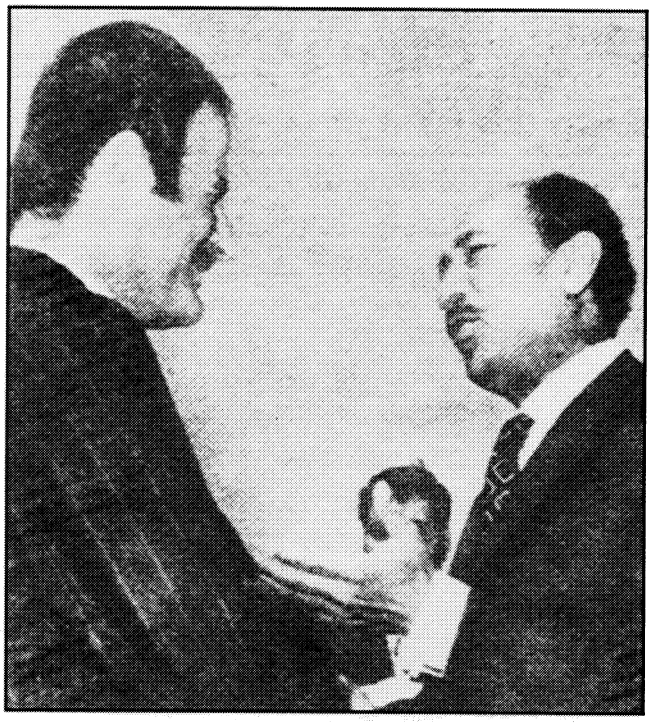
Only a major war to liberate most, if not all, of the Sinai in a single campaign made any sense, and for this kind of struggle, the Egyptian Armed Forces were far from ready.

Egyptian General Ahmad Ismail Ali, war minister and commander in chief

Sadat dismissed these arguments for political reasons. From his perspective, the government could ill afford to wait the five to ten years for the military to reach the necessary state of preparedness. The Egyptian people, angered by the "No War, No Peace" situation, were agitating for action, and the economy lacked the resources to remain on a war footing much longer. When Sadiq seemed unwilling to embrace a limited war concept, Sadat fired him after a stormy session of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces held on 24 October 1972, some ten months later. Other senior officers who lost their jobs included the deputy war minister and the commanders of the Egyptian Navy and the Central Military District (Cairo). In Sadiq's place, Sadat appointed General Ahmad Ismail Ali, who would prove a loyal commander in chief, faithfully carrying out his president's wishes.[19] Within eight months, the Egyptian Armed Forces were prepared to fight a limited war.

To improve Egyptian odds on the battlefield, Sadat sought to tap the resources of the Arab world. By April 1973, he had firmly cemented a coalition with President Hafiz al-Asad of Syria so that Israel would have to fight on two fronts. By attacking Israel from the north and the south simultaneously, the two Arab states would offset, to some degree, Israel's advantage of interior lines. In addition, to gain invaluable allies for the war, Sadat initiated discussions with oil-producing Arab states about the possibility of employing oil as an economic weapon to pressure Western governments to adopt policies more favorable to the Arab cause.[20] At this time, however, no Arab leader envisaged the enormous amounts of money that would be transferred to the coffers of oil-producing Arab states with the imposition of an oil embargo during the war.

Sadat's political goals were simple and clear, as were his means. With respect to Israel, Sadat sought to discredit the "Israeli Security Theory," an Egyptian term to describe what most Egyptians considered the main obstacle to peace. According to Egyptian analysis, the Israeli Security Theory was founded upon the Israelis' firm belief that the IDF could deter any Arab attempts to regain lost territories through military actions. This article of faith carried political implications for the Arab-Israeli conflict: the Israeli government, believing in the invincibility



President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and his Syrian ally, President Hafiz al-Asad

of its armed forces, would continue to refuse to negotiate with the Arabs other than from a position of strength from which the Israelis could then dictate peace terms. In other words, military supremacy and political arrogance had spawned a diplomatic stalemate. To soften Israel's intransigence toward peace negotiations, Sadat felt he needed to undermine Israeli confidence in the IDF by tarnishing its image with Israeli society through a successful Arab military operation of operational and tactical significance. Egypt's military weaknesses, however, would prevent it from defeating Israel decisively. This handicap required Sadat to develop a realistic war strategy commensurate with Egypt's military capabilities.

On 1 October 1973, Sadat outlined his strategic thinking in a directive issued to General Ahmad Ismail Ali, the war minister and commander in chief:

> To challenge the Israeli Security Theory by carrying out a military action according to the capabilities of the armed forces *aimed at inflicting the heaviest losses on the enemy* and convincing him that continued occupation of our land exacts a price too high for him to pay, and that consequently his theory of security—based as it is on psychological, political, and military intimidation—is not an impregnable shield of steel which could protect him today or in the future.
>
> A successful challenge of the Israeli Security Theory will have definite short-term and long-term consequences. In the short term, a challenge to the Israeli Security Theory could have a certain result, which would make it possible for an honorable solution for the Middle East crisis to be reached. In the long-term, a challenge to the Israeli Security Theory can produce changes which will, following on the heels of one another, lead to a basic change in the enemy's thinking, morale, and aggressive tendencies.[21]

In this directive, Sadat clearly directed the Egyptian Armed Forces to focus on achieving a psychological effect against Israel by hemorrhaging its nose—that is, by causing as many casualties as possible—rather than on seizing strategic terrain or destroying the IDF. Life was precious in Israel, hence an opportunity for Egyptian exploitation.

Apparently, on the eve of war, Ahmad Ismail requested an additional directive from Sadat designed to clarify unequivocally, for the historical record, that the Egyptian Armed Forces were embarking on a war for limited objectives in accordance with their capabilities.[22] On 5 October, the day before the war, Sadat complied with the request by delineating three strategic objectives affirming the limited nature of the war:

> —to end the current military situation by ending the cease-fire on 6 October 1973.
>
> —to inflict on the enemy the greatest possible losses in men, weapons, and equipment.
>
> —to work for the liberation of occupied land in successive stages according to the growth and development of possibilities in the armed forces.[23]

Moreover, Egypt would definitely commence hostilities on 6 October, with or without Syrian participation.

The above strategic directive once again avoided mentioning the defeat of the IDF as an objective. Clearly Sadat risked a war without much hope, if any, of destroying, or even soundly defeating, the IDF on the battlefield. Rather, he called upon his military to begin the war, make the Israelis suffer from high losses in blood and treasure, and to seize as much terrain as opportunities permitted. The directive, however, failed to identify a clear end state. Rather, by merely discrediting Israel's security theory, Egyptian pride would be restored at the IDF's expense, and Egypt could then enter negotiations after the war from a position of strength. In the end, astute diplomacy would transform military gains into a political victory.

In addition to challenging Israel, Sadat also targeted the United States in his war strategy. According to his thinking, only effective American pressure could nudge Israel into returning captured lands to the Arabs. A limited military success, Sadat hoped, would shake the superpowers, in particular the United States, out of their diplomatic inertia toward the Arab-Israeli conflict and force a change in their attitude and policy toward Egypt. Superpower intervention also could end hostilities at an opportune moment. In the process, Egypt could immediately gain diplomatic maneuverability and regain her pride and rightful place in international politics. Strengthened diplomatically, Sadat then hoped to entice Washington into becoming Egypt's ally. The Egyptian president desperately wanted American technology and capital in order to revitalize Egypt's stagnant economy. In this regard, going to war would strengthen Sadat's political position in Egypt through the prospect of an economic recovery.

Sadat shed some light on his strategic thinking in an interview conducted by *Newsweek* magazine in April 1973, six months before the war.[24] The Egyptian president drew upon the contemporary example of the Vietnam War to reveal how Egypt might approach its next conflict with Israel. The Vietnamese people should have taught the United States the critical importance of a national will wearing down an opponent superior in technology. "You Americans always use computers to solve geopolitical equations and they always mislead you. . . . You simply forgot to feed Vietnamese psychology into the computer." In much the same way, Sadat felt, the United States lacked any understanding of the Egyptian psyche, how the Egyptian people were determined to regain their lost lands—whatever the odds and cost. Without American pressure on Israel, war was inevitable. "The time has come for a shock," warned Sadat. Should war break out, however, Sadat promised the continuance of dialogue, even in the midst of hostilities. "Diplomacy will continue before, during, and after the battle." Here the Egyptian leader alluded to the use of war designed in a rational sense to achieve political benefits. Diplomacy, rather than waging war, would constitute Egypt's main effort.

Arnaud de Borchgrave, *Newsweek*'s senior editor who conducted the interview, provided additional insight into the Egyptian president's thinking by noting discussions with Sadat's aides. According to these unnamed sources, Sadat had learned an important lesson from the Vietnam

War when, in 1968 and 1972, the Vietnamese Communists had suffered a military defeat but still gained a psychological victory. Egypt could achieve similar results. A military victory was thus not essential for political gain; even a defeat in battle could bring significant psychological results, followed by tangible advantages. Nasser had demonstrated just such a possibility in 1956 when the United States cooperated by forcing Israel to withdraw completely from the Sinai. In 1973, Israel was not adequately prepared, militarily or psychologically, for Sadat's type of war—much to Egypt's strategic advantage.

To appreciate Sadat's strategic thought, an analogy can be made between Israel and a bully living in a neighborhood filled with children. From the Egyptians' perspective, Israel was the classic bully in their region. In the neighborhood situation, such a troublemaker uses his physical strength to intimidate or terrorize other kids to conform to his wishes, for he believes no one can beat him in a fair fight. He relates with others only from a position of strength, with little if any desire for compromise. The bully's reasoning and attitude are what the Egyptians labeled, on the macrolevel, the Israeli Security Theory. But often in real life, one does not need to beat the bully to elicit a change in his attitude. A serious fight bloodying his nose can often change a bully's attitude and behavior, even gain his respect. Rather than engage in another bloody fight—with its physical and emotional costs—the bully is willing to relate differently to the one kid who has stood up to him, even though the child lost the fight. This analogy of the neighborhood bully captures the essence of Sadat's strategic thinking and war aims.

Finally, to help achieve his goals, Sadat worked carefully to enlist the support of Saudi Arabia and other oil-rich Gulf States. Egypt needed petrodollars, and there was the possibility of gaining diplomatic leverage using oil as a political weapon. On 21 July 1972, Heikel published an article in *al-Ahram* arguing for the use of oil in such a manner, and in January 1973, Sadat raised the issue with King Faysal during his Pilgrimage to Mecca.[25] Three months later, in a *Washington Post* interview, Ahmad Zaki Yamani, the Saudi petroleum minister, raised in public the possibility of a link being made between the continued flow of Mideast oil to the West and changes in American policy toward Israel. Further warnings came from King Faysal, other Arab leaders, and even American oil men, but none of these cautions received serious consideration by the Nixon administration. Still, by September, the American media was clearly discussing the emerging oil crisis and the question of a potential oil boycott.[26] Saudi Arabia, with a production of 8 million barrels of oil a day, coupled with an expected cash surplus of 6 billion dollars by the end of the year, could stop the flow of oil without a drastic effect on the kingdom's economic development. By hinting of oil politics, Faysal was clearly working in tandem with Sadat and Asad in preparing for the prospect of another armed conflict. The diplomatic stage was thus set for the fourth Arab-Israeli war.

ISRAELI DEFENSES IN THE SINAI. Although willing to embark on a limited war with clear political aims, Sadat faced a difficult military dilemma. The Egyptian Armed Forces were as yet unprepared for a major campaign to regain the Sinai. Moreover, the bitter memory of the devastating defeat in 1967 militated against the Egyptians taking any great risks. As a result of these considerations, Sadat was determined to avoid placing the armed forces in a position that might lead to another disaster. But to achieve any tactical success required the Egyptians to overcome formidable Israeli defenses in the Sinai. In other words, to accomplish Sadat's political objectives, the Egyptian Armed Forces had to effect a respectable military performance.

President Anwar Sadat of Egypt and King Faysal of Saudia Arabia, who helped implement the oil embargo against the United States

Opposite the Egyptian Army stood the Bar-Lev Line, an elaborate system of fortifications to a depth of thirty to forty kilometers designed to deter the Egyptians from launching a major amphibious operation. Constructed in 1968–69 at a price tag of $235 million, the Bar-Lev Line experienced some decay after the War of Attrition ended in August 1970, as the Israeli military gradually closed some fortifications, cutting the number of strongpoints from around thirty to approximately twenty-two. Despite these reductions, the Bar-Lev Line still presented a formidable barrier, and the Egyptian General Staff had to devote a great deal of time, effort, and resources in developing a plan for overcoming the Israeli defenses. While the Bar-Lev Line was not constructed as a Maginot Line, the Israeli senior command still came to expect it to function

as a graveyard for Egyptian troops, preventing any major Egyptian effort to establish bridgeheads on the east bank.

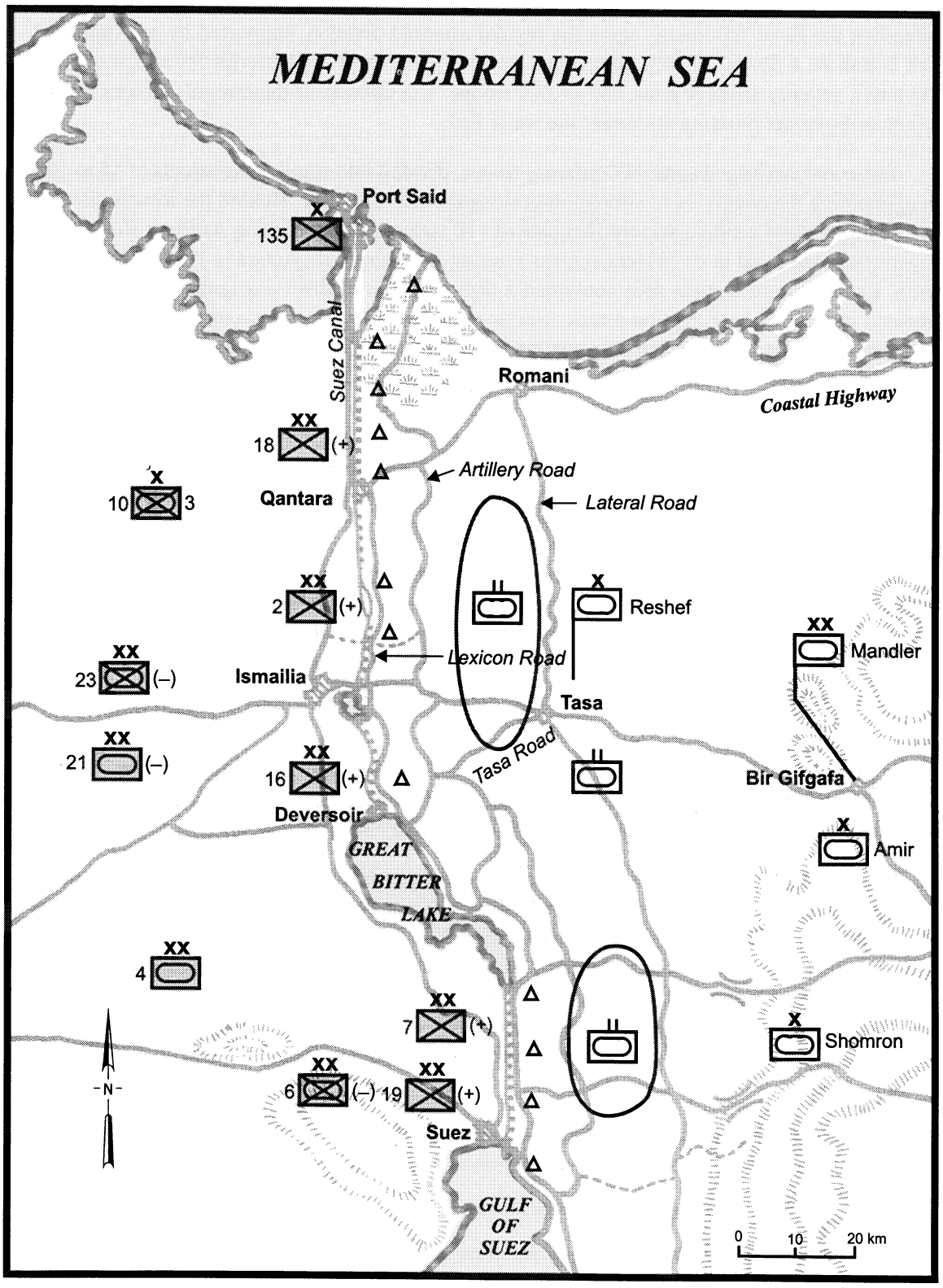
The first major obstacle for the Egyptians to overcome was the Suez Canal, which Dayan once referred to as "one of the best anti-tank ditches in the world." The waterway was 180 to 220 meters in width and 16 to 20 meters in depth. To prevent sand erosion, concrete walls lined the water's edge. At high tide, the water flowed a meter below the top of the concrete wall lining the canal; at low tide, the water shrank to two meters below the wall in the north to three meters in the south. At the water's edge, Israeli engineers constructed vertical sand ramparts that rose at an angle of 45 to 65 degrees and to a height of twenty to twenty-five meters. These obstacles would prevent the Egyptians from landing tanks and heavy equipment without prior engineering preparations on the east bank. Israeli military planners calculated that the Egyptians would need at least twenty-four, if not a full forty-eight hours, to break through this barrier and establish a sizable bridgehead.

As a final touch to take advantage of the water obstacle, the Israelis installed an underwater pipe system designed to pump flammable crude oil into the Suez Canal to create a sheet of flame. This burning furnace would scorch any Egyptians attempting a crossing. Some Israeli sources claim the system was actually unreliable, and apparently only a couple of taps were operational. Nevertheless, the Egyptians took this threat very seriously, and, on the eve of the war, during the late evening of 5 October, teams of frogmen blocked the underwater openings with concrete.[27]

At the top of the sand ramparts that ran the length of the canal, Israeli engineers had constructed thirty strongpoints at seven- to ten-kilometer intervals. Built several stories high into the sand, these concrete forts were designed to provide troops with shelter from 1,000-pound bombs as well as offer creature comforts such as air conditioning. Above ground, the strongpoints' perimeters averaged 200 by 350 meters, surrounded by barbed wire and minefields to a depth of 200 meters. The entire length of the canal contained emplacements for tanks, artillery pieces, mortars, and machine guns so that Israeli soldiers could foil an Egyptian crossing at the water line.

To support the rapid movement of Israeli troops to the possible Egyptian crossing zones, the IDF constructed an elaborate road system (see map 2). Three main roads facilitated movement north and south. Lexicon Road ran along the canal and allowed the Israelis to conduct patrols between the strongpoints. Ten to twelve kilometers east of Lexicon stood Artillery Road, with some twenty artillery and air defense positions and tank and logistic bases. Thirty kilometers from the waterway, Lateral Road allowed the Israelis to concentrate operational reserves for a major counterattack. A number of other roads running east and west were designed to facilitate Israeli counterattacks against the Egyptian crossing sites.

The defense of the Sinai depended upon two plans, Dovecoat (*Shovach Yonim*) and Rock (*Sela*).[28] In both plans, the Israeli General Staff expected the Bar-Lev Line to serve as a "stop line" or *kav atzira*—a defensive line that had to be held at all cost.[29] As noted by an Israeli colonel shortly after the War of Attrition, "The line was created to provide military answers to two basic needs: first, to prevent the possibility of a major Egyptian assault on Sinai with the consequent creation of a bridgehead which could lead to all-out war; and, second, to reduce as much as possible the casualties among the defending troops."[30] To prevent a limited Egyptian crossing operation, Dovecoat called for the employment of only regular forces. Responsibility for



Map 2. Sinai front, initial dispositions, 6 October 1973

defending the Sinai fell mainly upon the regular armored division, supported by an additional tank battalion, a dozen infantry companies, and seventeen artillery batteries for a total of over 300 tanks, seventy artillery guns, and 18,000 troops. The mission of these regular forces was to defeat an Egyptian crossing at or near the water line.

Dovecoat envisaged some 800 infantry troops, divided into small detachments of 15 to 100 men, manning the twenty or so strongpoints along the Bar-Lev Line. Behind the forward line of fortifications stood a single armored brigade of 110 tanks positioned along Artillery Road. This brigade was deployed in three tactical areas running from north of Qantara to Port Tawfiq in the south. Each forward tactical area contained a tank battalion of thirty-six tanks whose primary mission, in case of an Egyptian attack, was to move to the water line and occupy the firing positions along the ramparts and between the fortifications. Behind this tactical area of defense, the IDF positioned two armored brigades, one to reinforce the forward armored brigade and the other to counterattack against the Egyptians' main effort. One of these brigades was located at Bir Gifgafa, the other at Bir Tamada, east of the Giddi and Mitla Passes. Should the regular armored division prove inadequate for defeating the attacking Egyptian troops, the Israeli military would activate Rock, a plan mobilizing two reserve armored divisions with support elements. Their employment would signify a major war.

All Israeli planning was predicated on the assumption of a nearly forty-eight-hour advance warning to be provided by Israeli Military Intelligence. During these two days, the Israeli Air Force would assault the Arab air defense systems while the reserves mobilized and moved to their assigned fronts according to plan. On land, the Israelis expected to defeat the Egyptians with tank-heavy brigades, with Israeli pilots providing reliable "artillery" support to counter the Egyptians' firepower.

EGYPTIAN MILITARY AIMS AND PLAN. To achieve any success against the IDF, the Egyptians had to penetrate the sand embankments of the Bar-Lev Line while simultaneously exploiting cracks in the three Israeli pillars of intelligence, air force, and armor.

The responsibility for breaching the earthen embankments before the IDF could react with sufficient repelling force fell to the Engineer Corps, under the command of Major General Gamal Ali. Upon this engineering problem rested much of the crossing operation's tempo. To clear a path seven meters wide for the passage of tanks and other heavy vehicles involved removing 1,500 cubic meters of sand. Meanwhile, in the Egyptians' worst-case scenario, Israeli tank companies and battalions might be counterattacking within fifteen to thirty minutes, with an armored brigade arriving in two hours. Breaching operations, therefore, had to be effected quickly.

To facilitate these operations, the Egyptian General Command assigned six missions to the Engineer Corps:

1. Open seventy passages through the sand barrier;
2. Build ten heavy bridges for tanks and other heavy equipment;
3. Construct five light bridges, each with a capacity of four tons;
4. Erect ten pontoon bridges for infantry;

5. Build and operate thirty-five ferries;

6. Employ 750 rubber boats for the initial assaults.[31]

Of the six tasks, the first proved the most critical.

To expedite the breaching operation, the Egyptians discovered a simple yet ingenious solution: a water pump. Other methods involving explosives, artillery, and bulldozers were too costly in time and required nearly ideal working conditions. For example, sixty men, 600 pounds of explosives, and one bulldozer required five to six hours, uninterrupted by enemy fire, to clear 1,500 cubic meters of sand. Employing a bulldozer on the east bank while protecting the congested landing site from Israeli artillery would be nearly impossible during the initial hours of the assault phase. Construction of the much-needed bridges would consequently begin much too late.

At the end of 1971, a young Egyptian officer suggested a small, light, gasoline-fueled pump as the answer to the crossing dilemma. So, the Egyptian military purchased 300 British-made pumps and found that five such pumps could blast 1,500 cubic meters of sand in three hours. Then, in 1972, the Corps of Engineers acquired 150 more-powerful German pumps. Now a combination of two German and three British pumps would cut the breaching time down to only two hours. This timetable fell far below that predicted by the Israelis, who apparently failed to appreciate the significance of the water cannons used by the Egyptians during their training exercises.

While finding a solution for the sand embankment, the Egyptian Armed Forces still faced an opponent superior in air power and armor. In the face of such a formidable foe, Sadat demanded that the senior leadership of the armed forces devise missions only within their means. On 3 June 1971, he outlined his vision of a limited war: "When we plan the offensive, I want us to plan within our capabilities, nothing more. Cross the canal and hold even ten centimeters of [the] Sinai. I'm exaggerating, of course, and that will help me greatly and alter completely the political situation both internationally and within Arab ranks."[32] With such words, Sadat breathed a spirit of caution into his top senior commanders, even to the point of once warning his new war minister, Ahmad Ismail, not to lose the army as had happened in 1967.[33] Ahmad Ismail was a conservative and cautious commander who, in his previous position as director of general intelligence, had assessed the Egyptian military as unprepared for war. But his temperament of loyalty and caution conformed well with Sadat's strategic use of the military in a limited war.

Caution on Sadat's part made sense. Egypt's military was markedly inferior to the IDF. The Egyptians did outnumber the Israelis in planes, tanks, artillery pieces, and surface-to-air missiles, and these numerical advantages increased precipitously with the participation of the Syrian Armed Forces and the token units from other Arab countries. But the IDF offset these disadvantages in numbers with clear advantages in quality over quantity in both human and technological terms. Israeli soldiers were generally better trained and could employ their weapons more effectively than their Arab counterparts.

Soviet military aid, nonetheless, provided the Arabs with the technological means to challenge seriously Israeli superiority in air and maneuver warfare. To compensate for an inferior air force, the Egyptians, as well as the Syrians, fielded an integrated air defense system comprising SAM-2s, SAM-3s, SAM-6s, SAM-7s, and ZSU-23-4s. The SAM-6s and ZSU-23-4s

were mounted on vehicles and could easily accompany armor; the SAM-7s were infantry weapons carried by one soldier on foot. But the Soviet air defense system had a serious weakness: the SAM-2s and SAM-3s were immobile and could only be moved with great care over a nine-hour period at best. Thus, the danger existed of a possible degradation in the integrated nature of the air defense umbrella should there be a major redeployment of missiles to the east bank in the midst of war. The deployment of SAM-2 and SAM-3 battalions close to the Suez Canal during the last days of the War of Attrition extended the air defense coverage about twenty kilometers into the Sinai—but far short of the fifty to fifty-five kilometers needed to extend the coverage to the three strategic passes of Bir Gifgafa, Giddi, and Mitla. A dash by armor to the strategic passes would surpass the air defense's coverage and would expose Egyptian ground forces to the devastating power of the Israeli Air Force.

To support its land operations without degrading its air defense system, the Egyptian Armed Forces limited their initial bridgeheads to twelve to fifteen kilometers east of the canal, within the range of their air defense umbrella. Within this parameter, the Egyptians could attain air parity over the battlefield with land-based missiles and still conduct a major offensive operation. With this territorial limitation, the Egyptian Air Force could then restrict its missions to ground support and the bombing in depth of the Sinai and thus avoid a direct confrontation with the Israeli Air Force for air supremacy. After supporting the crossing with bombing missions deep into the Sinai, the Egyptian Air Force could then redeploy, with its main mission to serve as a strategic reserve for defense against Israeli air strikes west of the Suez Canal.

For ground operations, the Egyptians countered the Israelis' predominantly tank-intensive force (and doctrine) by employing Soviet antitank missiles—Saggers and RPG-7s (both infantry weapons that could be effective at maximum ranges of one mile and 325 yards, respectively). If used in sufficient numbers, these weapons posed a serious threat to Israeli tanks attacking hastily prepared defensive positions during the crossing operation. Egyptian planners expected their infantry armed with these weapons, supported by artillery and tanks, to play the main role in defeating Israeli armor counterattacks during the amphibious assault. Here, the Egyptians planned to exploit a serious flaw in Israeli doctrine and organization. Israeli armor units lacked enough infantry, mortars, or artillery to suppress Egyptian foot soldiers armed with antitank missiles. The Egyptians thus approached the war with some confidence in respect to the tactical defensive. As noted by an Egyptian brigadier general who crossed with his brigade in the first hour of the war: "the enemy's tanks making a penetration are a rich meal for starved men if our defenses are in depth."[34] The Egyptian Armed Forces had trained to turn Israeli breakthroughs into opportunities. The conduct of a major offensive based on air defense and infantry carrying antitank missiles represented an innovation in modern warfare and caught the IDF off guard.

Beginning in November 1972, the Egyptian General Command proceeded with final plans to translate Sadat's war aims into concrete operational and tactical objectives.[35] The campaign plan, eventually given the code name Operation Badr, contained two phases. The first phase called for five infantry divisions in two field armies to cross the Suez Canal on a broad front without a main effort. As a consequence of this phase, Israeli senior commanders in the Sinai would lose precious hours seeking to discover the Egyptian main effort. Operation Badr outlined the following missions for the crossing operation:

1. Cross the Suez Canal and destroy the Bar-Lev Line,