



Faculty of Graduate Studies

The Ibrahim Abu-Lughod Institute of International Studies

[IALIIS]

Israel's 1967 First Strike against Egypt:

Preemptive or Preventive

الضربة الإسرائيلية الأولى ضد مصر في عام 1967: استباقية أم وقائية

Prepared by

Gamal M. A. Mohammed

Supervisor

Dr. Roger Heacock

2012



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This thesis was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters Degree in International Studies from the Faculty of Graduate Studies at Birzeit University-Palestine.

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To *Palestine*:
History,
People, and
Land

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ABSTRACT

تبحث هذه الرسالة في الضربة الإسرائيلية ضد مصر صباح يوم 5 يونيو 1967 وفيما إذا كانت هذه الضربة تعد استباقية أم وقائية استنادا إلى الضوابط الخاصة بتصنيف كل منهما. وتحاول الدراسة إثبات أن الضربة الإسرائيلية كانت وقائية، وليست استباقية كما تدعي أغلب المراجع التي ناقشت حرب عام 1967 تفصيلا أو عرضيا وذلك من خلال الربط بين الأسس النظرية للحرب الاستباقية والوقائية والتفاصيل التاريخية التي صاحبت أزمة مايو-يونيو 1967.

وقد بدأت الدراسة بتحليل أسباب التوتر في المنطقة خاصة على الحدود السورية الإسرائيلية، ثم الانتقال إلى بحث الخطط العسكرية العربية في إطار القيادة العربية الموحدة، استنادا إلى المصادر الأولية الخاصة بهذه القيادة، ومن ثم الخطط العسكرية المصرية في سيناء. كما تعرضت الدراسة بالشرح والتحليل للتفاصيل ذات الصلة بالقرارات التي اتخذتها القيادة المصرية أثناء الأزمة، لمعرفة ما إذا كانت القيادة المصرية تعتزم القيام بالضربة الأولى ضد إسرائيل أم لا.

وقد اعتمدت الرسالة في أكثر من موضع على العديد من المصادر الأولية، في ضوء توفر عدد كبير من الوثائق الخاصة بهذه الفترة، خاصة الأجنبية منها، مثل وثائق وزارة الخارجية الأمريكية، ووكالة المخابرات المركزية الأمريكية، وبعض الوثائق المتاحة من مجموعة دول حلف وارسو والكتلة الشرقية، بالإضافة إلى وثائق وزارة الخارجية الفرنسية.

ورغم عدم توفر أغلب الوثائق المصرية والعربية المطلوبة لتحقيق فهم أكبر للحقائق الخاصة بالأزمة التي أدت إلى حرب عام 1967، إلا أن عددا من السياسيين المصريين الذين شاركوا في صنع أحداث هذه الفترة قام بنشر مجموعة لا بأس بها من الوثائق الخاصة بهذه المرحلة التاريخية الهامة، حيث تم الاعتماد عليها أيضا، وذلك في محاولة للحصول على رؤية واضحة للأحداث تمزج بين كافة المصادر الأولية المتاحة، فضلا عن العشرات من المصادر الثانوية التي تناولت هذه الفترة.

ويحاول البحث تقديم رواية جديدة للأحداث التي سبقت أو واكبت الأزمة التي مرت بها المنطقة في مايو-يونيو 1967 والتي أدت إلى اندلاع الحرب، بحيث تكون قادرة على مواجهة الرواية الإسرائيلية والغربية لهذه الفترة التاريخية الهامة، ويمكن من خلالها إثبات أن الضربة الإسرائيلية كانت وقائية.

THESIS TIMELINE

- 1949 The 1948 war ended with armistice agreements between Israel and four Arab countries Egypt [February 24], Lebanon [March 23], Jordan [April 3] and Syria [July 20].
- May 28, 1951 General Riley, Chief of Staff of UNTSO, asserted, “Neither party to the armistice agreement [Syria and Israel]... enjoys rights of sovereignty within the demilitarized zones.”
- 1955 Nasser expressed his willingness to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with the Partition Plan [The General Assembly Resolution 181].
- October 24, 1956 Israel secretly colluded with Britain and France to invade Egypt. The aim was to occupy the Suez Canal and topple President Nasser of Egypt.
- 1957 The Suez War of 1956 ended with certain arrangements in the Sinai that included the deployment of United Nations Emergency Forces [UNEF] along the Egyptian-Israeli armistice lines and in Sharm El Sheikh to guarantee Israeli access to the Gulf of Aqaba. The Sinai was never demilitarized.
- 1959 Israel announced beginning of work in its National Water Carrier project that would divert the water of the Jordan River to the Negev desert.
- 1964 Israel developed the idea of achieving air superiority by destroying the Egyptian airfields.
- January 1964 First Arab Summit was held in Cairo and a Unified Arab Command [UAC] was established. The aim was to prevent Israel from stealing Arab waters. Arab countries concerned confirmed their sticking to Johnston Plan quotas developed by Eric Johnston in 1955.
- June 1964 Work ended in Israel’s National Water Carrier project to divert the water of the Jordan River.
- July 1964 UNTSO officials accorded credit for Syrian restraint in face of Israeli aggressive policies in the demilitarized zones.
- December 19, 1964 King Hussein’s third meeting in London with Ya’acov Herzog, Director of Prime Minister’s Office. The meeting discussed the UAC and the King assured Herzog that only defensive plans had been concluded.

- 1964/1965 As a proof for Israel's disregard for the armistice agreement, Lebanon filed 382 complaints of over-flying against Israel.
- January 1965 Beginning of Palestinian military struggle. Infiltrators used Jordanian and Lebanese territories. Jordan and Lebanon were targets of Israeli reprisals.
- March 1965 Israel complained about Palestinian infiltrators to the United Nations Security Council.
- 1965/1966 Syria abandoned its counter-diversionary projects of the Baniyas and Hasbani Rivers due to continuous Israeli military intervention.
- April 25, 1966 After six months of inactivity, Palestinian guerillas resumed their operations. The last one was on November 7, 1965.
- May 16, 1966 Israel accused Syria in the United Nations Security Council of supporting FATEH.
- November 4, 1966 Egyptian-Syrian Joint Defense Treaty was signed.
- November 13, 1966 Israel launched an aggression against the Samu' village in the West Bank after an operation for FATEH two days before. Eighteen was killed in addition to more than one hundred injured. It was the largest Israeli military operation since the Suez War in 1956.
- December 1966 Egypt ratified a defensive plan code-named Qahir [The Original Qahir]. Though modified during the crisis of May-June 1967, [The Modified Qahir] its defensive character was never changed.
- April 7, 1967 As a continuation of Israel's provocative policies on the armistice lines, a trans-border Israeli-Syrian confrontation escalated into an aerial battle during which Syria lost six MiG-21 aircraft. Israel used tens of its aircraft.
- May 13, 1967 The Soviet Union and other sources as well, informed Egypt about Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian borders.
- May 15, 1967 Egypt issued orders of mobilization of the army to the Sinai. Egypt deployed between sixty-six and seventy-two thousand soldiers [facing by the end of the crisis approximately seventy thousand Israeli soldiers]. Forces were deployed to forward positions in the Sinai though in a defensive manner.
- May 16, 1967 Nasser received Ibrahim Makhous, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs. He told Makhous that the Soviet help might be limited and would not exceed moral and political support.

- May 17, 1967 Two Egyptian MiG-21 interceptors were used in a reconnaissance mission over Israel.
- May 19, 1967 UNEF forces evacuated its posts. Israel issued orders for large-scale mobilization.
- May 22, 1967 Nasser announced closure of the Gulf of Aqaba in front of Israeli shipping restoring the pre-1956 measures. The Egyptian directive allowed Israeli military vessels and Israeli escorted ships to navigate through the Straits of Tiran.
- Nasser received Dimitry Bojidaev, the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo. He told Bojidaev that the Arab countries expected the Soviet Union to neutralize the United States.
- May 23, 1967 The United States Embassy in Cairo delivered Johnson's verbal note to Nasser asking for self-control.
- May 24, 1967 Nasser suggested to U Thant, United Nations Secretary General, referring the issue of the Straits of Tiran to the International Court of Justice.
- Ezer Weizman, Chief of Operations in the IDF disseminated orders for a military operation, Operation Axe, against Egypt without informing the Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol. When informed by Weizman, Eshkol refused to authorize it.
- Abba Eban, Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, was received by the French President de Gaulle. De Gaulle told Eban that Israel should not start the war.
- May 25, 1967 Shams Badran, Egypt's Minister of War, visited Moscow to consult with Soviet leaders. On the same day, Eban arrived at Washington.
- Levi Eshkol, Yigal Allon, Arie Levavi and Yitzhak Rabin fabricated information about an Egyptian-Syrian attack and sent it to Eban in Washington.
- While in Washington, Eban received a cable from his government informing him about an imminent Egyptian-Syrian attack. He informed Dean Rusk, the Secretary of the State.
- Fajr [Dawn] Operation is discussed in Nasser's meeting with his military commanders. He convened with Amer separately and Fajr was cancelled.

Mustapha Kamel, the Egyptian Ambassador to Washington, was summoned to the State Department and informed of Israel's claims about an imminent joint Egyptian-Syrian attack against Israel. He denied the Israeli claims.

May 26, 1967 Badran's first meeting with Alexei Kosygin. Badran asserted, "We will not initiate hostilities."

Eban was received by Rusk, Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense and Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He repeated his government claims.

President Johnson received Eban. The American estimates conveyed to Eban were, "There is no Egyptian intention to... attack."

Four MiG-21 interceptors were used in the second and last Egyptian reconnaissance mission over Israel during the crisis.

Nasser threatened only once during the crisis to "destroy Israel" and he used the term in its military context meaning destroying any attacking Israeli forces.

May 27, 1967 Bojidaev awoke Nasser at dawn conveying a message Moscow received from Washington about an Egyptian-Syrian attack. Nasser denied the Israeli claims.

Badran's second meeting with Kosygin. Badran stressed, "We do not want war at all."

The Fourth Armored Division arrived at Bir Thamada in the heart of the Sinai. Its mission was to defend the strategic passes of the Sinai. Its location was one-hundred kilometers from the Egyptian-Israeli armistice lines.

May 30, 1967 Jordan joined the Egyptian-Syrian Joint Defense Treaty. Egypt, accordingly, was in command of the armies of both Syria and Jordan. The treaty constituted a defensive alliance.

May 31, 1967 Nasser repeated to Robert Anderson, an American envoy, his willingness to settle the issue of the Straits of Tiran in the International Court of Justice. Israel knew about Nasser-Anderson's meeting the same day.

June 1, 1967 De Gaulle received Makhous and was assured that Syria took only defensive measures.

Meir Amit, Chief of the Israeli Mossad, met with McNamara. Amit said, “He feels extreme measures are needed quickly.” Amit was referring to his government’s decision to strike. About the Straits of Tiran, Amit said, “They are not crucial.”

June 2, 1967

Undersecretary Eugene Rostow said to the Israeli Ambassador, “We have been told categorically that Egypt will not attack.” He added, “If we had these assurances from the Soviets in connection with our own security, the U.S. would not rush into a confrontation.”

About the Straits of Tiran, McNamara said to a British delegation, “The Israeli access to Eilat is not really vital in an economic sense. The question is rather political.”

Israel’s Ambassador to Washington knew about the forthcoming visit of Egypt’s Vice President, Zakaria Mohieddin, to settle the issue of the Straits.

June 3, 1967

American Ambassadors to Arab states received a circular telegram in which they were informed, “You should not assume that the United States can order Israel not to fight for what it considers to be its most vital interests.”

About Egypt’s position on the Straits, the American telegram added, “There may be some flexibility in what Cairo would be willing to do...”

June 4, 1967

Iraq joined the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian defense alliance. The alliance continued to be defensive.

Israel dispatched frogmen to the Egyptian port of Alexandria making June 4 the chronological first day of the war.

June 5, 1967

Rusk to President Johnson on the initiation of hostilities, “The Israelis kicked this [the war] off.”

PREFACE

The Arab-Israeli conflict dominated the political scene in the Middle East since 1948. In this year, five Arab states mobilized their forces against the newly declared state of Israel. Whereas the Israeli narrative about the war asserts that the Arab goal was to annihilate the Jewish people, the focus of the Arab narrative is on the catastrophe that was inflicted on the indigenous population of mandatory Palestine. The 1948 war ended with Israel in possession of seventy-eight percent of mandatory Palestine leaving hundreds of thousands of Palestinians either displaced to the rest of the Palestinian territories, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank administered later on by Egypt and Jordan respectively, or as refugees in the neighboring Arab countries. Israel signed four armistice agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in February 24, March 23, April 3 and July 20 respectively.

In 1956, another round of the Arab-Israeli conflict erupted in the region. Israel secretly colluded with Britain and France in order to topple the Egyptian regime under President Nasser and secure a foothold in the Suez Canal zone. The tripartite plot failed and the three countries finally evacuated the conquered Egyptian territories in the Suez Canal and the Sinai with specific security arrangements in the Sinai that included stationing United Nations Emergency Force [UNEF] and free-shipping for Israel in the Straits of Tiran.

The spark of the 1967 war could be attributed to, among other things, the post-1956 Suez war arrangements in the Sinai. In addition to this, the sixties witnessed a strong sensation of nationalism among the Palestinian Diaspora that culminated in a series of Palestinian guerilla infiltration in the Palestinian territories conquered in the 1948 war.

The war of June 1967 is considered one of the most important of the Arab-Israeli wars in the twentieth century. The main reason is not only the defeat of three Arab countries, but the enduring irreversibility of some of its consequences.

For forty-five years, Israel has been occupying the Gaza Strip, the West Bank of the Jordan River, and the Syrian Golan Heights.

The outcome of the war represented another catastrophe for the Palestinians and brought the rest of mandatory Palestine, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, under Israeli occupation.

No war has ever been debated like that of June 1967. Pro-Israel writings on the war argue that it was defensive in nature and came as a reaction to threats posed by neighboring Arab countries to destroy the state of Israel.¹

Amid a crisis in May-June 1967, Israel seized the initiative on June 5 and inflicted a stunning blow to the Egyptian Air Force [EAF], followed by a ground invasion the same day. The course and outcome of the war, both during the war and in its aftermath, ignited many theories that tried to explore how the crisis was instigated and what roles, whether direct or indirect, other players, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union,² employed either to initiate the crisis to achieve certain agendas, and/or influence its outcome.

¹ Central Office of Information, *The Six-Day War: Israel Government Year Book 5728/1967-68* (Prime Minister's Office, March 1968), 2 [Reproduced by Emory Institute for the Study of Modern Israel, 2008]; Neil Lochery, *Why Blame Israel: The Facts Behind the Headlines* (Cambridge: Icon Books, 2004), 78.

² Events during and after the "crisis" that led to the 1967 war created an atmosphere that promoted conspiracy theories about the war and the role of the Soviet Union and the United States. Many Egyptian officials accused the Soviet Union of conspiring against Egypt and Arab countries to promote its influence in the region. In addition, Egypt accused the United States at the beginning of battles of directly intervening in military operations on the Israeli side. Though Nasser publicly denied it later on, the real role of the United States during the crisis remains controversial.

On accusing the Soviet Union of conspiring against Egypt see:

صلاح نصر، مذكرات صلاح نصر: العام الحزين (القاهرة: دار الخيال، 1999)، 184؛ مذكرات اللواء عبد الحميد الدغدي في محمد الجوادي، الطريق إلى النكسة: مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967 (القاهرة: دار الخيال، 2000)، 80-81؛ شهادة الفريق مذکور أبو العز في موسى صبري، السادات: الحقيقة والأسطورة (القاهرة: المكتب المصري الحديث، 1985)، 395؛ شهادة حسين الشافعي في أحمد منصور، شاهد على العصر: ثورة الضباط الأحرار كما يراها حسين الشافعي ج 9 (قناة الجزيرة، 20 نوفمبر 1999) على:

The 1967 war has been an extensively researched topic in the unfolding history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, the great bulk of the available literature is historical and narrative with scarce theoretical projection. Even the available theoretical studies on the war draw their conclusions from biased and sometimes false information that distort their results. The focus of this research is on the first strike strategy and its application in 1967. It is beyond the scope of this study either to rewrite a complete history of the war or to address the causes of the Egyptian and Arab defeat in 1967. Rather, this paper addresses the question of hostilities' initiation in 1967 and to which party, Israel or Egypt, laid the responsibility. This research falls under the rubric of international security studies and to achieve the research objectives, a combined approach linking theory with empirical data is utilized.

This paper comes in five chapters. The first chapter includes a theoretical background on first strike and its different forms. It also includes an extensive review of the available literature on the 1967 war, problem statement and hypothesis. Most importantly, the chapter clarifies the methodology through which the research hypothesis is tested. The second chapter reviews some of the main stations on the road to the 1967 war particularly the situation on the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines. It also exposes some of the common misconceptions often adopted about the prewar

<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/6CE4804C-10A5-4842-B524-30416C4B4FA7.htm> Accessed December 27, 2011.

On accusing the United States of collaboration with Israel see:

Mohammed Fawzy, General Commander of the UAR [Egypt] armed forces to General Miroslav Smoldash in The Visit of the Czechoslovak President's Special Envoy, V. Koucki, to the UAR, June 28, 1967, National Czech Archive, Prague; محمد حسنين هيكل، 1967: الانفجار (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 1990)، 374-371

On critique for Heikal's views on American collaboration see:

William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict Since 1967* (Washington: Brookings Institute, 2005), 431; Elie Podeh, "The Lie that Won't Die: Collusion 1967," *Middle East Quarterly*, Winter (2004): 51-62 on: <http://www.meforum.org/587/the-lie-that-wont-die-collusion-1967> Accessed July 16, 2011.

On conspiracy theories on the war see: Elias Sam'o, "The June 1967 War: Miscalculation or Conspiracy?" in *The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Miscalculation or Conspiracy?*, ed. Elias Sam'o (Illinois: Medina University Press, 1971), 147-161; Richard B. Parker, "Conspiracy Theories," in *The Six Day War: A Retrospective*, ed. Richard B. Parker (Florida: University Press Florida, 1996), 237-288

period. In the third chapter, the study provides an extensive review of the Arab and Egyptian military policies in the pre-war period and during the crisis. The fourth chapter handles in depth the Egyptian policies expressed publicly as well as secretly during the crisis about the initiation of hostilities. In the fifth chapter, the study combines the suggested criteria of different forms of first strike with the empirical conclusions reached in the research to strategically/historically conceptualize the Israeli strike against Egypt in 1967.

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

First Strike: Concepts

In light of the concepts of preemption and prevention, studying the Israeli strike against Egypt on June 5 assumes certain significance amid the ongoing debate about the recent re-activation of these concepts as norms of international relations. As Douglas C. Lovelace noted, "If Revolution in Military Affairs [RMA] was the acronym and the concept of choice in the U.S. defense community in the 1990s, so preemption has threatened to supercede it in the 2000s."³

One year after the September 11, 2001⁴ attacks, the United States issued a National Security Strategy [NSS]⁵ in which it legitimized the activation of concepts like preemption and prevention to repel an imminent threat. Knowing how serious the re-activation of these concepts were, the United States formulated what it considered the necessary conditions for re-course to preemption including accurate intelligence and close co-ordination with allies to form a common assessment of impending threats. The concept of preemption as elaborated by the Bush administration has resulted in a protracted debate about differences between preemption and prevention among scholars of international relations and international law. President Bush outlined in the NSS the new adopted policy of preemption, but in fact, the practical application of this strategy, as used in the case of Iraq, definitely amounted to prevention.⁶

³ Colin S. Gray, *The Implications of Preemptive and Preventive War Doctrines: A Reconsideration* (Pennsylvania: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), iii.

⁴ A series of coordinated attacks that claimed the lives of more than three thousand American citizens on September 11, 2001. Al Qaeda leader, Osama Bin Laden, claimed responsibility for the attacks. See: Encyclopedia Britannica, "September 11 Attacks" *Encyclopedia Britannica* on:

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/762320/September-11-attacks> Accessed January 5, 2010

⁵ White House, *National Security Strategy* (Washington: 2002) on:

<http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/national/nss-020920.pdf> Accessed July 24, 2011.

⁶ Michael Walzer, *Arguing about War* (Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2006), 146.

Historically, the first strike strategy, and notions of preemption and prevention flourished and gained utmost importance in the nuclear era following the acquisition of nuclear weapons by the superpowers in 1945 and 1949. This new strategic environment implied that the commencement of military operations might be the factor that would determine the outcome of a nuclear war. Although deterrence was officially acknowledged as a main instrument of military confrontation,⁷ nuclear powers developed new strategies to minimize the effect of a possible first strike including a second strike option. In this new strategic environment, strategic thinkers elaborated the notions of preemptive and preventive strikes and clearly set the boundaries between them.⁸ Yet, preemption and prevention are not the only varieties of a first strike. Both terms might be also confused with other forms of first strikes like Accidental or Inadvertent War [Unintentional War, War by Miscalculation, War by Misperception] and Interceptive War.

First Strike

The United States Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms [DoD Dictionary] defines first strike as "the first offensive move of a war [generally associated with nuclear operations]."⁹ The definition underscores the link between first offensive move and nuclear wars. However, this research addresses

⁷ Mark Fitzpatrick, Alexander Nikitin and Sergey Oznobishchev, eds. *Nuclear Doctrines and Strategies: National Policies and International Security* (Oxford: IOS Press, 2008), 1.

⁸ On the link between the development of Weapons of Mass Destruction and the employment of first strike including preemption and prevention see the following:

Michael W. Doyle, *Striking First: Preemption and Prevention in International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 1; Karl P. Mueller et al., *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in U.S. National Security Policy* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2006), xi; Henry Shue and David Rodin, eds., *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 9; Dale C. Copeland, *The Origins of Major war* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 45; Robert C. Aldridge, *First strike: The Pentagon's Strategy for Nuclear War* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 6.

⁹ Department of Defense, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington: 2001).

the first strike strategy and its various forms in conventional warfare not in the nuclear one.¹⁰

Inadvertent War

Inadvertent war is a war that occurs despite the fact that, prior to the crisis, no state preferred war to continued peace. The processes of the crisis itself, therefore, play a significant role in causing one state to initiate war despite these pre-crisis preferences.¹¹

Nevertheless, not all crises lead to war and hence, there has to be a certain event or trigger that materializes during the crisis, whether actually or in the initiator's perception, that makes war inevitable. Moreover, this definition, though it reflects the effect of the crisis on states' preferences, it does not set a clear boundary between crisis and pre-crisis periods. A state might not wish to start a war prior to a crisis, but in a crisis situation, the same state might wish to take the advantage a crisis provides in order to achieve certain political and/or military goals even in the absence of a real threat to its security. In this context, "war is indeed chosen"¹² and is not a mere miscalculation or misperception even in light of pre-crisis preferences.

In inadvertent war, the initiator state is under the belief that an enemy state is about to attack either by mistaken assessment of an enemy move [accident] or because of bad intelligence [miscalculation].¹³ Also, the initiator might misperceive the behavior of the enemy as offensive [misperception]. Misperception, additionally,

¹⁰ In his study on preemption, Kurtulus highlights that definitions of concepts like preemption, prevention or accidental war are a product of nuclear strategic thinking and the fact that the world did not experience a nuclear war puts a limit to their empirical utility. However, this study discards this argument and instead deals with them under the framework of a conventional warfare. See: Ersun N. Kurtulus, "The Notion of a Preemptive War: The Six Day War Revisited," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 2, Spring (2007): 220-238.

¹¹ Copeland, *The Origins of Major War*, 44.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ On accidents as possible triggers for inadvertent war see: Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict* (London: Cornell University Press, 1999), 42-43.

could be either for intentions or for capabilities.¹⁴ That is why inadvertent war has other synonyms like accidental war, unpremeditated war, war by miscalculation, unintentional war, war by misperception, and war by misjudgment.

Accordingly, inadvertent war might be preemptive or preventive in nature. In case inadvertent war is preemptive, the initiator state builds its decision to preempt on false or uncertain information about enemy decisions, moves or behavior.¹⁵ In case of the preventive nature of the inadvertent war, before the crisis, the initiator state might not have wished before the crisis to launch war. However, the initiator decides to exploit the crisis to launch war on its adversary to get the advantage of more favorable situation.

Interceptive Strike

Interceptive strike is a military strike that "counters an armed attack which is imminent and practically unavoidable."¹⁶ Accordingly, while preemptive strike anticipates a merely "foreseeable" armed attack, interceptive strike comes to intercept and frustrate the outcome of an attack.¹⁷ For a strike to be interceptive, enemy forces of state [A] should cross or en route to cross the international frontier or violate the territorial waters or the territorial airspace of state [B] before the latter decides to frustrate the attack.

¹⁴ Van Evera, *Causes of war*, 136.

¹⁵ Some scholars argue that accidental war is rare in history. Others argue that history does not show any record of accidental wars. For the first argument see: Scott D. Sagan, *The Limits of Safety: Organizations, Accidents and Nuclear Weapons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 262-263. For the second one see: Michael Howard, *The Causes of War and Other Essays* (London: Temple Smith, 1983), 12.

¹⁶ Yoram Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-defense* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 172; Dimitrios Delibasis, *The Right to National Self-defense in Information Warfare* (Bury St. Edmunds: Arena Books, 2007), 211.

¹⁷ Unfortunately, Egypt had more than one opportunity to intercept the Israeli attack. However, the poor efficiency of the military leadership did not provide an opportunity to exploit these chances. See on interception: Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defense*, 172.

Preemptive War and Its Criteria

The DoD Dictionary defines preemptive attack as "an attack initiated on the basis of incontrovertible evidence that an enemy attack is evident". According to this definition, two inseparable criteria have to materialize before initiating a preemptive strike. The first criterion is the initiator's assessment that an enemy's attack is imminent.¹⁸ The second is the presence of an incontrovertible evidence that this attack is about to be implemented. The second criterion, however, must depend on clear and valid intelligence material.

Polebaum's Criteria

B. M. Polebaum¹⁹ argues that the technological advances in the field of nuclear weapons should open the door for a state's right to recourse to a first strike in self-defense. However, the following criteria, according to her, should materialize before that:

- [1] Exhaustion of alternative means to avert war;
- [2] Proportionality between the provocation and the military action; and,
- [3] Immediacy of the threat.

Kurtulus' Criteria

Ersun N. Kurtulus formulates what he considers the necessary conditions for preemptive war.²⁰ These are:

¹⁸ On imminence see also: Walzer, *Arguing about war*, 146; Terence Taylor, "The End of Imminence," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 27, No. 4, Autumn, 2004, 57-72; Ivo H. Daalder, ed., *Beyond Preemption: Force and Legitimacy in a Changing World* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 5; Douglas Lemke, *Regions of War and Peace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 34; Jack S. Levy, "Preventive War and Democratic Politics," *International Studies Quarterly*, No. 52 (2008): 4.

¹⁹ B. M. Polebaum, "National Defense in International Law: An Emerging Standard for a Nuclear Age," *New York University Law Review*, No. 59 (1984): 187-229.

²⁰ Ersun N. Kurtulus, "The Notion of Pre-emptive War: The Six-Day War Revisited," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 61, No. 2, (2007): 220-238.

[1] High alert or mobilization levels among the armed forces of the state that is about to attack;²¹

[2] Possession of vulnerable offensive weapons; and,

[3] Rough strategic parity regarding offensive capabilities.

Though the focus of the above criteria is only on material capabilities, Kurtulus' methodology depends on a combined approach that connects material capabilities with decision-making.²² The two approaches are essentially complementary to each other. Even if material factors are abundant at the disposal of one state, political decision is essential to use these material factors to achieve a certain political outcome. Wars are not random events and are the products of decisions.²³

Moreover, the above criteria suffer from obvious shortcomings. Neither high alert levels²⁴ nor mobilization of the armed forces is an indicator of an imminent attack. High alert levels might also be associated with defensive attitudes. The preemptor state should determine prior to succumbing to the temptation to preempt, whether the deployment of an adversary's forces is defensive or offensive. Offensive deployment of forces is a strong indicator of an impending attack. The preemptor state might know this either through pre-war intelligence information about the military

²¹ See as well: Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 43.

²² Kurtulus calls the decision making approach "the sufficient condition" for preemptive strike while the material factors, he believes, are "the necessary conditions." In his study on preemption and 1967 war, he used a comprehensive approach that combines decision-making and material capabilities. However, he did not conduct an analysis of Egyptian decision-making during the crisis and the focus of his study was on material capabilities and their link to preemption. Yet, he asserted that Egyptian decision-making "continues to constitute an important research agenda." See: Kurtulus, "The Notion of a Preemptive War," 224, 228.

The availability of material factors at the disposal of state [A] and their mobilization in situations with high alert levels are not enough alone for state [B] to launch a preemptive strike against state [A]. In the absence of a political decision of state [A] to strike militarily against state [B], the fear of state [B] is baseless. A state, however, could still launch a first strike against its adversary even if it lacks the material factors that will guarantee the success of its military operations. Such irrational policies are not rare.

²³ David A. Welsh, *Justice and the Genesis of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 9

²⁴ In the Cuban Missile Crisis, both the Soviet Union and the United States were on high alert levels but war did not break out.

plans of this state in case of war or intelligence warning during the crisis about an immediate attack.

Sofaer's Criteria

While the other two set of criteria, of Polebaum and Kurtulus, were set in a merely strategic and security context, Abraham D. Sofaer addresses the question of preemption using a mixed approach based on strategic and legal perspectives.²⁵ Sofaer listed the following criteria for a standard case of a preemptive self-defense:

- [1] Nature and magnitude of the threat involved;
- [2] Likelihood that the threat will materialize unless preemptive action is taken;
- [3] Exhaustion of alternatives to using force; and,
- [4] Consistency with UN charter and other applicable agreements.

Operational Definition for Preemption

In this research, an operational definition for preemption is formulated that combines the previous sets of criteria and considers its obvious shortcomings. Nevertheless, it is taken into consideration that the cardinal and most fitting symbol for preemption is immediacy or imminence of the threat. The following, in addition, are the required criteria for states to preempt an imminent threat:

[1] Political Criteria

- a) Exhaustion of all alternative means to avert war either overtly through the United Nations or any other relevant international organizations or covertly through second-track diplomacy; and
- b) Proportionality between the magnitude of provocation and the scale of military action.

²⁵ Abraham D. Sofaer, "On the Necessity of Preemption," *EJIL*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (2003): 209-226.

[2] Strategic and/or Military Criteria

a) High alert or mobilization levels among the armed forces of the state that is about to attack with offensive deployment of its armed forces. The preemptor state should have:

- Either pre-war intelligence information about the offensive military plans of the enemy state; or
- Intelligence warning during the crisis about an immediate enemy attack.

b) Possession of vulnerable offensive weapons like unsheltered aircraft.

c) Rough strategic parity between the two states regarding offensive capabilities especially in air forces.

[3] Legal

Consistency with United Nations Charter and other applicable agreements.²⁶

Preventive War

The DoD Dictionary defines preventive war as "a war initiated in the belief that military conflict, while not imminent, is inevitable, and that to delay would involve greater risk."

Accordingly, in preventive war, the threat the initiator might encounter is not imminent and might be distant, possibly for years. The reason on which the initiator builds its decision to strike first is the availability of favorable conditions that will guarantee the success of its military endeavor. In this regard:

[1] The purported attack is not imminent;²⁷ and,

[2] If the initiator state delays its military action, conditions in the future might be unfavorable.

²⁶ In this paper, however, preemption and prevention are not handled from a legal point of view. The focus is on the political and strategic context of both terms.

²⁷ Walzer, *Arguing about War*, 146; Daalder, *Beyond Preemption*, 43; Hidemi Suganami, *On the Causes of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28.

Thus, in the initiator's perception, the current circumstances are the best that provide the required elements of success for its military attack.

Whereas a preemptive strike is about immediacy and imminent threats, preventive strike is about distant threats that might, or might not, materialize in the future.²⁸

Literature Review

In reviewing some of the available literature about the 1967 war, it was noticed that different researchers outlined controversial and sometimes contradicting results. This was easily noticed in surveying two detailed Israeli studies on the 1967 war published in 2002 and 2005 respectively.²⁹ Whereas the first one set out to demonstrate how Israel was about to face a multi-front Arab attack that amounted to an existential threat, the other argues that the existential threat Israel faced was actually unfounded. Though both authors depend primarily on the same declassified Israeli documents, they come to entirely different conclusions.³⁰

This part of the research surveys a variety of studies on the 1967 war with more emphasis on the initiation of hostilities in order to pave the way for a clearer understanding of the nature of the Israeli strike. The surveyed literature falls under two main categories; narrative and theoretical.

The narrative literature deals with the historical context of the 1967 war and theoretical literature handles the war, and pre-war periods within a certain theoretical framework. In fact, there is an abundance of literature on the war in the first category. However, literature of the second category is scarce. Yet, few studies that combine narration and theory still hold a prominent position on the war. Brecher and Geist's

²⁸ Gray, *The Implications of Preemptive and Preventive War Doctrines*, 13.

²⁹ By Michael B. Oren and Tom Segev.

³⁰ Oren and Segev based their research on Israeli declassified documents from Ammunition Hill Archives, Ben-Gurion Archive, Israel Defense Forces Archives, Israel State Archive and Yad Tabenkin Archive in addition to other U.S. declassified documents from Lyndon B. Johnson Library and United States National Archive.

study on Israeli decision-making processes during the crisis that led to the war is a classic study on Israeli decision-making.³¹ Abraham Wagner's study on Israeli decision-making using quantitative analysis is another example.³² Other examples of theoretical studies include Kurtulus' study on the 1967 war and the concept of preemption.³³ Other theoretical studies dealt briefly with the 1967 war though the war itself was not the main issue.³⁴ However, none of the available literature applies, in depth, the concept of first strike to the 1967 war and this research is attempting to fill this gap.

First Category: Historiographical and Narrative Literature

One striking feature of the surveyed studies is the interchangeable and sometimes ambiguous use of terms, preemption and prevention, when describing the Israeli strike, particularly in non-specialists' analysis of the war. In an interview published in 1967, Isaac Deutscher described the Israeli strike against Egypt as preemptive.³⁵ This description dominated his entire interview. Deutscher's views regarding the Israeli strike comprised many shortcomings. His analysis mixes up the differences between preemption and prevention. He admits in his analysis that Egypt was not willing, for a variety of reasons, to strike first against Israel. If so, what was the Israeli strike supposed to preempt? Additionally, he argues that the overwhelming majority of Israelis have accepted a security doctrine of periodic warfare. If this was

³¹ Michael Brecher and Benjamin Geist, *Decisions in Crisis: 1967 and 1973* (California: University of California Press, 1980).

³² Abraham Richard Wagner, *The Six-Day War: A Study in Crisis Decision-Making* (New York: Department of Political Science, University of Rochester, Rochester, 1973) [PhD Dissertation].

³³ Kurtulus, *The Notion of a Preemptive War*, 220-238.

³⁴ Michael I. Handel, "Crisis and Surprise in Three Arab-Israeli Wars," in *Strategic Military Surprise: Incentives and Opportunities*, eds. Klaus Knorr and Patrick Morgan (New Brunswick: Transaction Books, 1984), 111-122.

³⁵ Isaac Deutscher, "On the Israeli -Arab War: Interview with Isaac Deutscher" in *The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, ed. Elias Sam'o (Illinois: Medina University Press, 1971), 47-62.

the essence of Israel's security doctrine, then the 1967 war might not have been a war of necessity [Preemption] and could have been a war of choice [Prevention].

In criticizing Deutscher's views on the war, Simcha Flapan quoted Deutscher's description of the Israeli strike but he used the word preventive instead of preemptive.³⁶ Although Flapan considers the Israeli attack preventive, his analysis later on is full of contradiction. In the course of his analysis, Flapan believes that the Egyptian strategy was about to be a total offensive against Israel. If, according to him, Egypt was about to employ an offensive strategy against Israel, why did Egypt decide to receive the first blow from Israel instead of striking first? Subsequently, if Israel was sure about the Egyptian offensive policy and decided to preempt it, then the Israeli strike against Egypt had to be considered preemptive not preventive. The paradox in Flapan's version about Nasser's attitude toward Israel was in his statement later on in his analysis that "from the beginning, Nasser's strategy was based not on preventive action but on counter-offensive after an Israeli attack."³⁷ Flapan's version about Nasser's attitude confirms the Egyptian defensive and/or counter-offensive strategy toward Israel and accordingly Egypt left the initiative for Israel to strike first. Moreover, if Egypt decided not to strike first, then the Israeli fears of an impending Egyptian attack was baseless.

No less different from the previous view is the assumption of David Kimche and Dan Bawly that Israel's attack against Egypt was preemptive.³⁸ According to their analysis, the American stance was one of the crucial factors that determined the Egyptian position regarding the first strike and Nasser declared this publicly as well

³⁶ The interchangeable use, however, could be attributed to translation from Hebrew to English. See: Simcha Flapan, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1967: An Answer to Isaac Deutscher," in *The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War*, ed. Elias Sam'o (Illinois: Medina University Press, 1971), 67-93.

³⁷ Flapan, "The Arab-Israeli War of 1967," 83.

³⁸ David Kimche and Dan Bawly, *The Sandstorm: The Arab-Israeli war of June 1967 Prelude and Aftermath* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968).

as privately. Assuming this, why did Egypt decide to attack first knowing previously that the United States would intervene against Egypt in case of such an attack against Israel? Egypt could have considered this scenario only if it had secured guarantees from the Soviet Union, which is unfounded scenario.

On another level, according to Kimche and Bawly, Nasser wanted and expected the Israelis to move first. If they acknowledge the fact that Egypt, due to the American factor, could not strike first, how did they consider the Israeli strike preemptive? Moreover, in discussing the Egyptian deployment of forces, they state that Egypt decided to activate its counter-offensive plans only in case of an Israeli attack. This attitude is indicative of Egypt's willingness and determination not to strike first and to wait for the Israeli attack.

In their description of Israeli and Egyptian policies, Kimche and Bawly are either mispresenting facts to justify the Israeli strike or unaware of the differences between preemption and prevention.

In another version, Chaim Herzog clarifies the inseparable link between an impending attack and preemptive strikes.³⁹ In his account of the 1967 war, Herzog makes it clear that the Arab forces were poised to attack and the new Israeli Minister of Defense, General Moshe Dayan, made it clear that every day of delay in launching a preemptive strike against Egypt would mean heavier casualties for Israeli forces. Nevertheless, in his description of the deployment of Egyptian forces in the Sinai, there is no doubt about the defensive deployment of these forces in light of the deployment of the major Egyptian armored forces to the rear in the central Sinai. At the end of his account, Herzog acknowledges that one of the cardinal errors of Nasser was that "he did not appreciate the decisive importance of the first strike," and that

³⁹ Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Random House, 1982).

"no use was made of the powerful potential of a first strike."⁴⁰ He then attributes the Egyptian success in the 1973 war to President Sadat's understanding of Nasser's errors including, of course, the value of the first strike. Indeed, there is no doubt about the fact that Israel struck first in 1967, but the major debate this research is addressing is the kind of the first strike Israel's made, which according to Herzog preemptive.

One of the recent arguments about the origin of the war is the study of Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez in which they argue that the crisis of 1967 was deliberately instigated by the Soviet Union.⁴¹ The aim was to manipulate Egypt into provoking Israel to strike preemptively following which the Soviet Union would intervene to support the Arab side.⁴² The ultimate goal for this escalation was to destroy Israel's nuclear facility at Dimona. They add that Nasser was about to strike first against Israel and sent his Minister of War, Shams Badran, to Moscow to get the consent of the Soviet leadership but the Soviets rejected his request. Ginor and Remez interchangeably use the terms preemption and prevention in a misleading manner that obscures differences between them. Throughout the entire length of the study, they describe the Israeli strike as preemptive, despite the fact that according to their analysis, the Soviets rejected Egypt's request to strike first and hence Egypt had to wait for the Israeli strike.

Recently, the declassification of Israeli documents on the 1967 war allowed Israeli researchers to shed more light on decisions made by the government of Israel

⁴⁰ Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 190.

⁴¹ Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona: The Soviet's Nuclear Gamble in the Six-day War* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 2007); Isabella Ginor, "The Russians were Coming: The Soviet Military Threat in the 1967 Six-Day War," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (2000): 44-59; Isabella Ginor, "The Cold War's Longest Cover Up: How and Why the USSR instigated the 1967 War," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (2003): 34-59.

⁴² Ginor and Remez thesis about the role of the Soviet Union as a deliberate instigator of the crisis is not new and their central argument has been reiterated in other studies on the war. Theodore Draper in his study on the war accuses the Soviet Union of instigating the crisis in order to create a second Vietnam for the United States. He even called the war the "Nasser-Kosygin's war." See: Theodore Draper, *Israel & World Politics: Roots of the Third Arab-Israeli War* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), 136.

during the crisis. Two important studies are notable in this regard, one by Michael B. Oren and the other by Tom Segev. Oren tries to introduce a comprehensive study on the political as well as military aspects of the war. He stresses in his book, and in several presentations on the war,⁴³ on the preemptive nature of the strike launched against Egypt and mentions, as an indicator of the Egyptian offensive intentions, an Egyptian military operation code-named Fajr or Dawn that was cancelled due to American and Soviet pressures. Oren, however, fails to provide answers for a few important questions. Why did not Israel abort the supposed Egyptian attack, Fajr operation, if it had verifiable information about it? Why did Israel risk the possibility that it might receive the first blow in case Egypt either received the American and Soviet warnings late or just ignored them? Could Israel risk something like this in spite of the strategic depth Israel lacked? If so, why does Oren repeatedly mention how significant the element of surprise was for Israel in order to succeed? In his analysis, Oren repeatedly brands the Israeli strike as preemptive.⁴⁴

While Oren's conclusion is with the defensive nature of the Israeli strike, Segev's conclusion is entirely different. Segev is clear-cut in his analysis that Israel did not face any existential threat in 1967 and that Egypt did not have offensive plans against Israel in 1967. Though he mentions that the IDF seized Egyptian documents after the war that contained instructions to start offensive operations on May 27, unlike Oren, he does not take the action for granted, as he clearly knows these orders were nothing more than regular operational orders issued in case of crises. His

⁴³ Michael B. Oren, "1967: The Unwanted War that Made the Middle East," *The Commonwealth Club of California* (June 24, 2002) on: <http://www.commonwealthclub.org/archive/02/02-06oren-speech.html> Accessed July 24, 2010; Michael B. Oren, "Questions and Answers with Michael Oren," *Jerusalem post* (June 5, 2007) on: <http://info.jpost.com/C004/QandA/qa.orenm.html> Accessed July 24, 2010.

⁴⁴ Oren repeats the word preemptive in his study twenty two times, twenty of which were about striking preemptively against Egypt in the Sinai and two times about striking preemptively against Syria. In addition, he uses the term preventive only once when he describes the idea of "...eliminating the Jordanian air force even without provocation, as a preventive measure..."

analysis is entirely in favor of an Israeli war of aggression against Egypt, though he never mentions it explicitly.⁴⁵ In an interview on the fortieth anniversary of the war,⁴⁶ Segev repeats an unconvincing conclusion that "war with Egypt was inevitable...because we were too weak not to strike at Egypt."⁴⁷ The Israeli cabinet voted in favor of war not because of the existential fear and panic in the weakness and vulnerability of its public opinion⁴⁸ but because of the opportunity, the situation provided to destroy the Egyptian army.

Moshe Gat accuses Egypt of instigating the crisis according to a carefully calculated plan.⁴⁹ The aim of the plan was to drive Israel to attack Egypt⁵⁰ so that Egypt could have an alibi to "close the Arab account with the Zionist state."⁵¹ Gat is clear in his analysis that "Nasser decided that the time was ripe for the final showdown with Israel."⁵² The central argument of Gat regarding Nasser's willingness

⁴⁵ Segev attributes the Israeli decision to strike to the panic that was spreading among the Israeli public because of what appeared as hesitation of the government and unpreparedness of the army. Here comes the contradiction in his analysis. He stresses on the psychological element and the fear that spread among the public of a second holocaust. However, do states go to war because of panic of the public? In addition, if there was panic, which might be true, were the commanders of the army in a state of panic as well? Segev is clear in his account that the leaders of the army were confident of victory even if they did not strike first and that their ultimate goal was to destroy the Egyptian army in Sinai.

⁴⁶ Amy Goodman, "Tom Segev, Mona El-Farra and Norman Finkelstein on the Six-Day War," *The Democracy Now* (June 8, 2007) on: http://www.democracynow.org/2007/6/8/israeli_historian_tom_segev_palestinian_physician/ Accessed April 1, 2012

⁴⁷ In the same interview, Norman Finkelstein analyzes the situation in Israel on two levels, first the people and how they feared a second holocaust and second the leadership and how they were confident of victory if they started the war. On the fortieth anniversary of the war, Churchill, a war correspondent in 1967, excluded the political and military leadership of Israel from the dominant fear among the Israeli citizens. See: Winston Churchill, "Extracts from an Address by Winston Churchill," (Johannesburg: February, 2007) on: http://www.sixdaywar.co.uk/winston_churchill.htm Accessed December 18, 2011.

⁴⁸ Surprisingly, one of Heikal's articles before the war stressed on the psychological element and its relation to deterrence and asserts that war was inevitable because Israel lost its power of deterrence because of the Egyptian moves during the crisis.

⁴⁹ Moshe Gat, "Nasser and the Six-Day War, 5 June 1967: A Premeditated Strategy or an Inexorable Drift to War," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (2005): 608-635

⁵⁰ Oren has the same argument that Nasser's strategy was to draw Israel into starting the war. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 92.

⁵¹ Gat, "Nasser and the Six-Day War," 631.

⁵² Gat misquotes Nasser's words in one of his speeches during the crisis. He accuses Nasser of threatening to "wipe Israel off the face of earth" in a statement which he delivered on May 26, 1967. On that day, Nasser gave a statement to Arab Trade Unionists and he never said this sentence in his

to destroy Israel is that three conditions were available, in Nasser's perspective, to go to war with Israel. Nasser saw three imperative conditions to go to war with Israel: securing Arab unity, expanding Arab armies to the point where they were bigger, stronger and better than the IDF and ensuring Israel's diplomatic isolation. In 1967, absolutely none of these conditions existed.⁵³ Any credible analyst on the Arab world knows that these conditions were not available during the crisis and therefore Nasser could not go to war while they were absent.

Gat's analysis is clear about Israel taking the initiative and striking first against Egypt and his hypotheses about a premeditated Egyptian plan to go to war with Israel is supportive of the preemptive nature of the Israeli strike against Egypt. Nevertheless, what contradicts his hypothesis is his knowledge of Nasser's decision not to initiate hostilities. If, according to him, Nasser was clear in his rejection of starting hostilities, what did Israel preempt?

Other narrative studies come to relatively the same conclusion. Charles Yost concludes that it was inadvertent war.⁵⁴ In his article, he describes his conclusion by saying:

"It remains the thesis of this article that no government plotted or intended to start a war in the Middle East in the spring of 1967." He further adds in another part of his article that, "it seems more likely that they blundered into it."⁵⁵ Morris and Draper

statement. Gat, however, might have mistakenly confused Nasser's statements with the commentaries of the media, which were more bellicose.

⁵³ However, Israel Ministry of Defense provided unfounded version that Nasser in 1967 believed that these conditions existed and hence he decided to escalate. On these conditions see: Avi Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan: The Life of King Hussein in War and Peace* (London: Allen Lane, 2007), 235; Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six Days' War* (Israel Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 1967), 160. On the existence of these conditions in 1967, see: Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six Days' War*, 171. On a critique for this see: Malcolm H. Kerr, *The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd Al-Nasir and His Rivals* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

⁵⁴ As shown before, inadvertent war might be preemptive in nature. Yet, preemption follows misperception or miscalculation.

⁵⁵ Charles W. Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War: How It Began," in *The June 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Miscalculation or Conspiracy*, ed. Elias Sam'o (Illinois: Medina University Press, 1971), 19-32.

come to the same conclusion as Yost.⁵⁶ However, miscalculation in Draper's account was not on the political level but on the military one. The Egyptians, he argues, miscalculated the balance of forces. Draper, nevertheless, admits in his study that Egypt decided to let the Israeli side strike first in hope that they would retaliate with a second strike. Therefore, Draper's narrative is clear about Israel taking the initiative and striking first in light of the Egyptian strategy to abandon a first strike. Accordingly, Israel's strike could not have been preemptive.

In conclusion and after surveying many of the available studies on the 1967 war, the following conclusions could be drawn. First, scholars and politicians alike, use the terms preemptive and preventive wars interchangeably though, as outlined previously, they are entirely different. When applied to the 1967 war, the difference between both terms is essential to understand which party, Israel or Egypt, was responsible for starting hostilities and whether the pretexts according to which hostilities were started were enough to justify the attack or not. Second, most of the surveyed studies agree on the fact that Israel struck first against Egypt and initiated hostilities and that the strike was preemptive. Third, some non-specialists, like Isaac Deutscher, depict the Israeli attack as preemptive. However, it is inconvenient to accept this depiction from persons with enough credentials to understand clearly differences between preemption and prevention. Among them, well-known academics like Michael B. Oren or persons with military background like Chaim Herzog or persons with expertise in the field of intelligence like David Kimche.

Second Category: Theoretical Literature

Most of the existing theoretical studies on first strike depict the Israeli strike of 1967 as preemptive.

⁵⁶ Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, 133.

Armstrong believes that Israel's Six-Day War is a classic example of preemptive war as Egypt was building up forces on the Israeli border, so it was credible to believe that they would attack Israel very soon. He adds that the Israeli attack was preemptive rather than preventive because Egypt's attack was imminent.⁵⁷

Doyle also believes that Israel's strike against the Egyptian army that massed on its border is a classic example of justified preemptive war. Like Armstrong, in order to differentiate between preemption and prevention, he adds, "prevention is triggered by gathering threats that are neither as imminent nor as over-whelming as the threat faced by Israel in 1967, when it feared being overrun by hostile invading armies."⁵⁸

In the same vein, Flynn believes that the Israeli strike was preemptive arguing that "when assessing the imminent threat coming from the Arab states, Israel's need to error on the side of caution and attack made preemption a necessity."⁵⁹

Pursuing the same line, Mueller describes the Israeli strike in 1967 as "an archetypical example" of preemption, though he admits that preemptive attacks are quite rare.⁶⁰

Additionally, Betts describes the Israeli strike as the "only one actual case [that] seems clearly right" in its justification as preemption.⁶¹

Reiter believes that "preemptive wars almost never happen. Of all the interstate wars since 1816 only three are preemptive: World War I, Chinese

⁵⁷ Walter-Sinnott Armstrong, "Preventive War: What is it Good for," in *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification*, eds. Henry Shue and David Rodin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 215.

⁵⁸ Doyle, *Striking First*, 9-10.

⁵⁹ Matthew J. Flynn, *First Strike: Preemptive War in Modern History* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 201.

⁶⁰ Mueller et al., *Striking First*, 22.

⁶¹ Richard K. Betts, "Striking First: A History of Thankfully Lost Opportunities," *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 1 (2003): 17-24 on: http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/resources/journal/17_1/roundtable/866.html Accessed November 7, 2011.

intervention in the Korean war and the 1967 Arab-Israeli war."⁶² According to him, in approximately two centuries, the 1967 war is one of three examples of preemptive wars.

The Israeli narrative about the war is the most prevalent in the literature reviewed and, in majority of cases, researchers take for granted that the war in 1967 is a classic example, *locus classicus*, of preemption.⁶³

Even studies which admit that there was no clear indicator that an Egyptian attack was imminent, argue that the Israeli attack "lies somewhere in between preemptive and preventive."⁶⁴

The war, according to Stein,⁶⁵ was a result of miscalculation. Welsh, also, citing Stein, believes that the 1967 war broke out by mistake when the Israeli leaders mistakenly concluded that an Arab attack was imminent and launched a preemptive strike.⁶⁶ In this regard, Wagner believes in his dissertation that Israel was concerned about the threat of "an Egyptian invasion" in 1967.⁶⁷

What is remarkable about the theoretical literature is that all studies examined provide an excellent and diversified designation of theoretical notions like preemption

⁶² Dan Reiter, "Exploiting the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars Almost Never Happen," *International Security*, Vol. 20, No. 2, Autumn (1995): 5-6.

⁶³ Christian Reus-Smit and Duncan Snidal, *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 563; Richard K. Betts and Thomas G. Mahnken, eds., *Paradoxes of Strategic Intelligence: Essays in Honor of Michael I. Handel* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 11; Anthony Clark Arend, "International Law and the Preemptive Use of Military Forces," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No., 2 (2003): 94-95; Tom Sauer, "The Preventive and Preemptive Use of Force: To be Legitimized or to be Delegitimized," *Ethical Perspectives*, Vol. 11, No. 2-3 (2004): 133; Daniel Schwartz, "Just War Doctrine and Nuclear Weapons: A Case Study of a Proposed Attack on Iran's Nuclear Facilities from an American and Israeli Perspective," *Southern California Interdisciplinary Law Journal*, Vol. 18, No. 189 (2008): 199-201; Robert J. Delahunty and John Yoo, "The Bush Doctrine: Can Preventive war be Justified," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (2009): 849; Lawrence Freedman, "Prevention not Preemption," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2003): 108.

⁶⁴ Cynthia Grabo, *Handbook of Warning Intelligence: Assessing the Threat to National Security* (UK: The Scarecrow Press, 2010), 246.

⁶⁵ Stein, however, believes that Nasser might have misread the defensive posture of IDF as offensive. See: Jancie Gross Stein, "Calculation, Miscalculation and Conventional Deterrence: The View from Jerusalem" in *Psychology and Deterrence*, eds. Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein (Baltimore: the Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 60-88.

⁶⁶ Welsh, *Justice and the Genesis of War*, 9.

⁶⁷ Wagner, *The Six-Day War*, 224-225.

and prevention. However, because researchers build their conclusions on biased historical information, the ultimate outcome of the theoretical application of these notions would certainly be in support of the Israeli allegation.

Problem Statement

The aim of this research is to test the dominant hypothesis of the preemptive nature of the 1967 war. In doing so, the current research is attempting to answer a main question of, was the 1967 war preemptive or preventive?

However, in order to address the main question, the following sub-questions must be addressed as well:

[1] To what extent were the Arab states responsible for inflaming the situation in the region before the crisis that led to the 1967 war?

[2] Did Egypt and the Arab countries have any offensive military plans against Israel?

[3] Did Egypt consider a first strike strategy against Israel?

Hypothesis

The main hypothesis of the research is that the Israeli strike against Egypt in 1967 was preventive not preemptive. Most of the available literature about the war argues that the Israeli strike came amid a crisis in which Egypt deliberately took several escalatory steps, including rallying the Arab world militarily against Israel, the outcome of which was war. Accordingly, Israel was acting defensively against what it believed was an Egyptian and Arab attack, whether actual or imminent, against Israel.

Methodology

This study argues that Egyptian and Arab policies during the crisis that led to the 1967 war were, essentially defensive. To prove this, the situation along the 1949 Israeli-Syrian armistice lines must be examined in addition to an analysis of President

Nasser's discourse and policies as expressed in secret meetings during the crisis in order to refute the assumptions about Nasser's willingness to strike first against Israel. Furthermore, the research tries to elaborate how Egypt took several de-escalatory steps during the crisis while Israel was simultaneously taking escalatory steps including finalization of its offensive military plans against Egypt.

In refuting the hypothesis about Egyptian and Arab offensive plans against Israel and in ascertaining the Egyptian dismissal of a first strike option, the research shows that the Israeli strike against Egypt on the morning of June 5, 1967 was not preemptive as many writings argue.

To prove this, the study analyzes both primary and secondary sources on the war. Although Egyptian archives are still officially unavailable to researchers,⁶⁸ many Egyptian officials and eyewitnesses to events that preceded the war published documents that shed the light on the Egyptian policies during the crisis.⁶⁹ The most famous of these is Mohamed Hassanein Heikal who, in his study on the war, annexed many original documents pertaining to the Egyptian and Arab policies during the crisis. Regarding the role of the Unified Arab Command [UAC], the reports of the Joint Defense Council represent a very significant source through which Arab military policies within the UAR can be elaborated. The report of the Committee on the Investigation of the Causes of the June 1967 Defeat, published by Sa'ad El Ta'eh is also analyzed.

⁶⁸ According to Mohamed Fawzy, the Egyptian Chief of Staff in 1967, an objective analysis of the war and its causes might be difficult in light of the absence of major official documents. He revealed that during the crisis decision-makers issued historical decisions in significant issues sometimes orally and without records. See: Jeremy Salt, *June 5, 1967: A Retrospective View* (Washington: The Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine, 1997), 2; 368، شهادة الفريق محمد فوزي في صبري، السادات،

⁶⁹ Tom Segev used a near similar approach in his study on 1967 war. In an interview, Segev stated that Israeli politicians used to take confidential governmental documents as part of their personal papers. He traced those documents in the private paper collections of Israeli politicians and used them as an important source for his study. See: Harry Kreisler, "Israel and the 1967 War: Conversation with Tom Segev," *University of California Television* (June 4, 2007) on: <http://www.uctv.tv/search-details.aspx?showID=12623> Accessed March 29, 2012.

In addition to above listed documents, the proceedings of the trials of Egyptian officials for the defeat clarify additional aspects related to the Egyptian policies before the war. The most important of which is the trial of Shams Badran, the Egyptian Minister of War during the crisis, in which he revealed confidential information.

Other eyewitnesses like Amin Hewedy, former Egyptian Minister of War, Tharwat Okasha, the Egyptian Minister of Culture in the cabinet that witnessed the war and Moussa Sabry, a close journalist to President Sadat published several important documents.

All of the above-mentioned documents appear in Annex I.

Not only does the research depend on Egyptian sources but also on primary sources from other countries. In this regard, the declassified documents of the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency of United States of America represent an important primary source. They appear in Annex II. Furthermore, recently declassified documents from former Warsaw Pact countries provide an important perspective on the Soviet policy during the crisis. The Cold War International History Project [CWIHP] established at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars published and translated some of these documents. They appear in Annex III.

The research also depends on abundant secondary sources that deal with the issue of 1967 war including the memoirs of key political and military figures from relevant countries like Egypt, Israel and the United States.

The following approaches guide the course of this research:

[1] Literature Assessment:

The research includes an in-depth analysis of many of the studies published on the war. Using documents, the study either validates and/or invalidates some of the

facts and/or misconceptions about the war. Additionally, the research intends to integrate its findings, using archival materials, with the findings of other studies published since 1967. More emphasis is on recently published studies that draw on archival materials. The aim is to introduce a critical analysis for the Israeli and Western versions on the 1967 war.

[2] Historical Description and Evaluation:

One of the significant aims of this research is to establish a new reading for the main events that either preceded or happened during the crisis itself in order to establish a new narrative and challenge the Israeli one.

[3] Theoretical Application:

After viewing the principal events before and during the crisis, the criteria of different forms of first strike are applied in light of the historical data concluded in the paper, to see to which type it fits the Israeli strike in 1967.

CHAPTER TWO PROLOGUE TO THE 1967 WAR

In this chapter, the study introduces a new reading for some of the significant events that either preceded or accompanied the crisis in May-June 1967. In pursuing this, the study tracks the Syrian-Israeli conflict and its role in increasing the tension on the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines. The aim is to introduce a new version for this conflict that focus on the Israeli role in breeding them since the conclusion of the Armistice agreements in 1949 until the war erupted in 1967.

Additionally, some of the common assumptions that readers and analysts usually take for granted when they discuss 1967 war are analyzed. Most importantly, the study contests in this chapter the common assumption that the Egyptian policies were escalating all along the crisis, which rendered the war eventually inevitable. Egypt, as will be proved, did take several de-escalatory policies that Israel completely ignored.

Furthermore, it addresses Issues like the demilitarization of the Sinai according to the post-1956 settlement and the withdrawal of the Egyptian forces from Yemen to the Sinai to participate in the alleged forthcoming attack on Israel in 1967. Moreover, the study also analyzes the mutual defense agreements signed between Egypt and other Arab countries before and during the crisis to see whether they were offensive or defensive in nature.

The Syrian Front

In this part of the research, the Israeli claim about the role, which Syria played in the pre-1967 war to inflame the situation and increase the tension on the armistice lines is challenged. It has always been argued that Syria supported guerilla operations against Israel and that those operations increased in level and magnitude up to the war in June 1967.¹ Although, that fact was right, historians never scrutinized the rationale behind the Syrian strategy. In this part, the study reconstructs the events that led to the deterioration of the situation on the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines by assuming that there was a dialectic relationship between the three issues of contention between Israel and Syria.

Historically, Israeli-Syrian conflict centered upon three issues that emerged before the 1967 war. These can be chronologically arranged as follows: first, the status of the demilitarized zones [since the signing of the armistice agreements in 1949]; second, the Jordan River water [since Israel embarked on its National Water Carrier in 1959]; and, third, the guerilla operations against Israel starting in 1965.²

Prior to the 1967 war, Israel typically blamed Jordan, Syria and Lebanon for guerilla infiltration of Israeli territories and argued that by doing this, the three states did not abide by the armistice agreements of 1949. Yet, Israel itself violated repeatedly its obligations under the armistice agreements with its neighboring Arab countries. Based on conversations with senior United Nations Truce Supervision Organization [UNTSO] officials, the American Consulate in Jerusalem on July 21, 1964, noted "Most UN observers accord certain amount of credit to [the] Syrians for restraint"³

¹ Israel Tal, trans., *National Security: The Israeli Experience* (USA: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 135; Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (California: University of California Press, 1996), 62.

² Segev, 1967, 192; Walter Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967: The Origins of the Arab-Israel Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), 49.

³ In a report prepared by the CIA in 1962, here is how the report showed the Israeli provocative policies and Syrian restraint: "On 25 March, Israel seemed to be trying to invite an incident. It sent a

over long periods in face of Israel seizing control in demilitarized zones⁴ [DMZs] by force or constant threat [of] using it." The telegram added that Israel emerged victorious "largely because UN [has] never [been] able to oppose aggressive and armed Israeli occupation and assertion of actual control over such areas."⁵ During this period, the United States was always concerned about the aggressive Israeli policies that might provoke the Syrians to react with further deterioration of the situation on the armistice lines. The American administration conveyed, through its Ambassador to Israel, the American "wish to counsel greatest restraint on Government of Israel [GOI] in matter of patrolling in and around the DMZ" and "also urge GOI to suspend any other extraordinary military activity which might be construed by the Syrian Arab Republic Government [SARG] as provocative."⁶ General Odd Bull, Chief of Staff of the UNTSO, believed that "Israeli troops patrolling these roads -close to the demarcation lines- often behaved in a provocative manner."⁷ Not only did Israel deliberately breach the armistice agreements on the Syrian armistice lines, but on the armistice lines with other Arab countries as well. In 1964/65, Lebanon filed 382 complaints of over-flying against Israel with the Mixed Armistice Commission [MAC]. On one particular occasion, the Lebanese asserted that Israeli planes had

ferryboat with only an armed launch as escort, to cruise about the area of the lake where the previous shooting exchanges between Syrian shore batteries and Israeli patrol and fishing boats had taken place. The maneuver passed off without incident, however." See: Office of Current Intelligence, "Current Intelligence Weekly Summary," *Central Intelligence Agency*, OCI No. 0410/62, (30 March 1962): 7 [Annex II].

⁴ In a report prepared in 1966, the CIA believed that "the chief possibilities for trouble lie in Arab sabotage raids, Israeli nibbling at certain disputed border areas and Syrian belligerence." See: National Intelligence Estimate, "The Eastern Arab World," *Central Intelligence Agency*, NIE No., 36-66, (February 17, 1966): 11 [Annex II].

⁵ Department of State Telegram from U.S Consulate in Jerusalem to Secretary of State, July 21, 1964 in:

ستيفن جرين، الانحياز: علاقات أميركا السرية بإسرائيل (القدس: شركة الخدمات النشرية المستقلة المحدودة، 1992)، 168 و 327-332.

⁶ Document 77, *Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel* (Washington: July 13, 1964) [Annex II].

⁷ Odd Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East: The Experiences and Views of a U.N. Observer* (London: Leo Cooper, 1976), 101.

penetrated 120 kilometers inside their country.⁸ The conflict with the Arab states and the deterioration on the armistice lines were not a result of the guerilla operations. FATEH operations in Israeli territories did not begin until January 1965.⁹ The continuous Israeli provocation and the penetration of Syrian territories¹⁰ were, as this research is hypothesizing, the reason behind Syrian decision to support guerilla operations against Israel.

Water rights were also a contention issue and in 1959, Israel declared that it was going to start working on a project to transfer the water of the Jordan River to the Negev desert. It took the Arab states five years to declare in a series of Arab summits starting 1964 that they would begin counter-diversionary projects in their respective territories. Israel used its military to stop the Syrian projects until the Syrians themselves abandoned their plans in 1965/66.¹¹ Failure of the Syrians encouraged

⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁹ Before 1965, operations against Israel were not organized or politically oriented as they were after 1965. They were an embodiment of grudge and hatred among Palestinian refugees. Benny Morris suggests that ninety percent or more of the infiltrations between 1949 and 1956 were motivated by economic and social concerns as a direct consequence of the displacement of Palestinians. The reasons for crossing the border, according to him, were looking for relatives, returning to their homes, recovering possessions, tending to their fields, collecting their crops, and, occasionally, exacting revenge. Some were thieves and smugglers; some were involved in Hashish convoys; while others were nomadic Bedouins, more accustomed to grazing rights than to state borders. He adds that the politically motivated raids did not amount to very much. In 1966, the Permanent Representative of Syria to the United Nations "...rejected Israel's accusations that it was responsible for the activities of Palestinian groups scattered throughout the area. There were more than one million two hundred and fifty thousand Arab refugees living in wretchedness across the Demarcation Line from Israel, within sight of the homes, farms, vineyards usurped from them. They knew that Israel disregarded their rights, as often reaffirmed by the United Nations resolutions. Why then, he added, should Syria be held responsible for the behavior of more than one and a quarter million Arab refugees?" See on Morris's views: Avi Shlaim, "Review of Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956: Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation and the Countdown to the Suez War by Benny Morris," *London Review of Books* (August 4, 1994) on: <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~ssfc0005/Israels%20Dirty%20War.html> Accessed November 25, 2011 See the statement of the Syrian Representative to the U.N. in United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1966*, 171. See on the relationship between infiltration and refugees the Chief of Staff of UNTSO in United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1955*, 32.

¹⁰ In November 14, 1964, the Syrian Permanent Representative to the United Nations informed the Security Council that Israel violated the armistice agreement with Syria fourteen times between October 7 and November 12 resulting in seven killed and twenty-six wounded Syrians. See:

منذر عنتاوي وآخرون، الكتاب السنوي للقضية الفلسطينية لعام 1964 (بيروت: مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية، 1966)، 362.

¹¹ Actually, the Arab projects came as a reaction to defend the Arab rights against the Israeli National Water Carrier. Furthermore, under these projects, the Arabs would utilize the same amount of water that the Johnston Plan of 1955 designated. Although Israel announced that it would abide by its share in the plan, the National Water Carrier itself would divert the water outside the river basin, which the

them to oppose Israel using other non-conventional means. Hence, Syria started to support guerilla operations against Israel. Although the three previous issues were the main issues of conflict between Israel and Syria, the water issue, in particular, was not an immediate cause of the war but rather as an intermediate cause.¹²

A great deal of confusion usually exists when commentators and analysts explore the events prior to the 1967 war on the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines. Israeli sources attempt to cover up the relationship between the conflict of Syria and Israel over the DMZs and the Syrian-supported guerilla operations against Israel. The guerilla operations were arguably one of the immediate precipitating causes that resulted in the escalation that preceded the war in 1967. Yet, analysis of the last assumption is indicative of some controversies.

The Palestinian military struggle started against Israel in 1965 when FATEH declared its responsibility for a sabotage operation in Israel in January 1965.¹³ The

Arab countries rejected during the technical discussions that preceded the formulation of the plan. This would make three Arab countries 77 million cubic meters short of their allocations in Johnston plan. Water allocations, according to the plan, represented the irrigation needs of lands inside the basin. See: Munther J. Hddadin, "Water in the Middle East Peace Process," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 168, No. 4, (2002): 325-326 (324-340); C.G. Smith, "The Disputed Water of the Jordan," *Transactions of the Institute of the British Geographers*, No. 40, (1966): 126; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 203; صادق الشرع، 446، *حروبنا مع إسرائيل 1947-1973: معارك خاسرة وانتصارات ضائعة* (عمان: دار الشروق، 1997)، 446، *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War: Government, Armed Forces and Defense Policy 1963-1967* (New York: Routledge, 2007) , 57.

¹² Jeffrey K. Sosland, *Cooperating Rivals: The Riparian Politics of the Jordan River basin* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 92. The author cites different view points on the exact location of the water issue in relation to the 1967 war:

[1] Thomas Naff and Ruth Matson agree that the build-up in water-related Arab-Israeli hostility was a major factor leading to the June 1967. Shai Feldman has the same argument.

[2] Geographer Aaron Wolf argues that water was neither a cause nor a goal of any Arab-Israeli warfare.

[3] Nadav Safran argues that the dispute over the water issue resulted in a prolonged chain reaction of border violence that linked directly to the events that led to the war.

See also: Shai Feldman, "Israel's national Security: Perceptions and Policy," in *Bridging the Gap: A Future Security Architecture for the Middle East*, eds. Shai Feldman and Abdullah Toukan (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1997), 10.

¹³ Yezid Sayigh revealed that FATEH scheduled its first military operation on December 31, 1964 against a water pumping station. Yet, Lebanese patrol arrested its operatives. On the second night, another group of its operatives sneaked through the Syrian borders to the south of Lake Tiberius where they planted an explosive charge in a water canal but the Israelis claimed later on that it did not explode. See:

يزيد صايغ، *الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية 1949-1993: الكفاح المسلح والبحث عن الدولة* (بيروت: مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية، 2003)، 179.

frequency and the efficiency of its operations increased gradually until the war in 1967. According to the Israeli official statements, Palestinian organizations launched 113 operations¹⁴ between January 1965 and June 1967 that claimed the lives of eleven Israelis.¹⁵ Oren, however, attempts to exaggerate the number of guerilla operations up to 270 in the first months of 1967 on the Jordanian borders only.¹⁶ Guerilla operations usually targeted water pipes, pumping stations, bridges and railroads.¹⁷ Though they did not represent a real security threat to Israel, it exploited the events against Syria in order to assert its control over the DMZs in the north. General Odd Bull noticed that most of these operations were amateurish.¹⁸ The scale of FATEH raids did not

¹⁴ According to Benny Morris, guerilla groups -mainly FATEH- carried out some 122 raids, most of them abortive, between January 1965 and June 1967. Other sources in Arabic cite the following numbers of operations: 35 in 1965, 41 in 1966 and 37 in the first five months of 1967 with 113 in total. See: Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist Arab Conflict 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 303;

هيثم الكيلاني، الاستراتيجيات العسكرية للحروب العربية الإسرائيلية 1948-1988 (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، 1991)، 220

In November 1966, the Israeli Permanent Representative to the U.N. stated, "There had been seventy one [71] raids in Israel since January 1965 across the borders from neighboring Arab states." See: United Nations, Yearbook of the United Nations 1966, 174. The increased frequency of operations in the first few months of 1967 from Israeli perspective might be due to the hostile Arab policies. However, it might also be a reaction to the continuous Israeli aggressive policies on the armistice lines starting from its attack against the Samu' village in the West Bank in November 1966 and against Syria in April 1967. Donald Neff noticed that though there appears to be no reliable record of total casualties caused by Syrian guns between 1949 and 1967, not a single Israeli civilian is reported to have been killed by Syrian artillery in the six months before the 1967 war, a period of intense skirmishes between the two countries.

¹⁵ صايغ، الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية، 224-225.

¹⁶ Sayigh mentions that FATEH announced responsibility for 300 operations. However, he notices that FATEH sometimes exaggerated the number and effect of its operations against Israel. Oren notes that in 1965, FATEH carried out 35 attacks according to Israeli reckoning, 110 by Palestinian accounts. Oren, however, exaggerates in certain occasions the number of operations and of Israelis killed. For example, he mentions that a fire-exchange in May 1965 resulted in six Israelis killed. Yet, according to both the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and General Odd Bull, on May 31, the incident resulted in two civilians killed and another four wounded. See for Oren's narrative: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 24-25, 45. For a counter-narrative see: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Which Came First Terrorism or Occupation: Major Arab Terrorist Attacks against Israelis Prior to the 1967 Six-Day War," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (March 2002) on: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism+Obstacle+to+Peace/Palestinian+terror+before+2000/Wicch+Came+First+Terrorism+or+Occupation++Major.htm> Accessed October 31, 2011; Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, 86.

¹⁷ On the targets of Palestinian guerilla operations see: Segev, *1967*, 209; Kimche and Bawly, *Sandstorm*, 27-28; Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 47 and 56; Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, 84-85.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 92.

overawe even the Israeli government and military staff.¹⁹ Due to the insignificant effect of these operations, Israel did not bring the issue before the United Nations until March 1965, which was two months after they started.²⁰ The Israeli army in return resorted to retaliatory actions against civilians of the countries from which the army believed the operatives were coming. In April 1966, Israel attacked villages north of Jerusalem and in the Hebron area killing eight civilians.²¹ In a single retaliatory operation against the Samu' village in the West bank in November 1966, the IDF killed eighteen Jordanian soldiers and injured one hundred and thirty four more. The policy of large-scale retaliation was dominating the Israeli high political and military echelons even before the 1967 war.²²

Israel used to direct its accusations against Jordan and Lebanon until mid 1966. Nevertheless, Israel continued its military operations across the armistice lines with Syria. That is because, the status of the DMZs was the main issue of contention not guerilla operations.²³ Israel did not start accusing Syria of supporting guerilla operations until May 1966, when on May 16 Israel "charged that Syria was the source, training ground, principal supplier and main support of a terrorist organization

¹⁹ Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 47; 448، الشرع، حروينا مع اسرائيل، Special Report Weekly Review, "Anti-Israeli Arab Terrorist Organizations," *Directorate of Intelligence-Central Intelligence Agency*, SR No. 00790/68A (October 4, 1968): 1-3 [Annex II].

²⁰ United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1965*, 215.

²¹ The reprisal raid was an Israeli response to explosive charges placed by guerillas in Moshav Beit Yosef in the Beit Shean Valley on April 25, 1966 the outcome of which was two civilians wounded. The guerilla operation came after six months of inactivity. The last guerilla operation that preceded it was on November 7, 1965. See: Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Which Came First Terrorism or Occupation.," Bull, War and Peace in the Middle East, 93.

²² In a special report prepared by the Directorate of Intelligence of the CIA on the Palestinian guerrilla groups on October 4, 1968, the report estimated that the Israeli policy of large-scale retaliation began in early 1968. However, analysis of the magnitude and nature of the Israeli retaliatory actions before the 1967 war is good evidence against that assumption. See: Special Report Weekly Review, "Anti-Israeli Arab Terrorist Organizations," 2.

²³ While in 1965 Israel accused Jordan on March 1 and May 27, and Jordan and Lebanon on June 4 of responsibility for cross-border operations, Israel, on March 17, accused Syria of responsibility for "the tense and dangerous situation" on the armistice lines as the "Syrian authorities had resumed the practice of opening fire upon peaceful Israeli civilian activities." This indicates that though Syria, in the Israeli perception, did not have a hand in guerilla operations, tension between the two countries persisted. See: United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1965*, 217.

variously known as FATEH [Conquest] and El Asefa [Storm]."²⁴ Even scholars who managed to establish a direct link between the Syrian-Israeli dyad and the events before and after mid-May 1967 did not succeed in understanding why Syria intensified its support to the Palestinian guerilla groups.²⁵

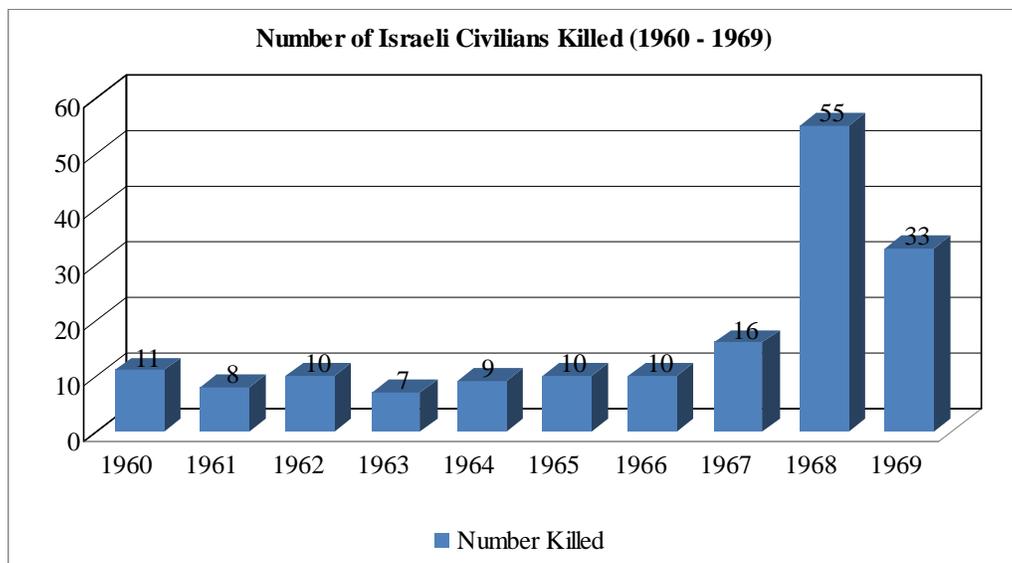
It was not until the beginning of the Palestinian second Intifada that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs provided numbers about Israeli lives lost in, as Israel claims, terrorist operations since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

The following chart [Chart No. 1] shows the Israeli death toll because of these operations starting from 1950 until 1989 and Israeli death toll in the sixties [Chart No. 2] according to the National Insurance Institute:



²⁴ United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1966*, 167.

²⁵ Burrowes and Muzzio believed that Syria was more often the source than the target of conflict with Israel. This pattern, however, changed and between late November 1966 and April 1967, Israel was more the source (58%) than the target (42%) of conflict with Syria. Yet, archival materials reveal that Syria was always a victim of the Israeli aggressive policies that aimed at controlling the DMZs. Furthermore, they limit the Israeli-Syrian conflict on the DMZs to the perennial rights of cultivation and ignore the right of sovereignty. Moreover, the conflict over the DMZs preceded the guerilla activities by at least sixteen years. See: Robert Burrowes and Douglas Muzzio, "The Road to the Six-Day War: An Enumerative History of Four Arab States and Israel," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (1972): 216.



The charts show that the decade of the sixties witnessed the smallest death toll in the Israeli history from the establishment of the state in 1948 until 1989. In the sixties, one hundred and sixty nine Israeli lives were lost with an average of 16.9 victims per year. Between January 1965 and December 1967, Israel lost thirty-six casualties due to "hostile enemy action." The study noted before that Israeli sources claim that Palestinian guerilla operations resulted in eleven Israelis killed between January 1965 and June 1967. In 1967, the year of the war, Israel lost sixteen Israeli casualties [Chart No. 3]. However, two distinctive periods are notable that year: the pre-war period and the post-war one. Different sources that tackled the 1967 war claim that Israel lost only one Israeli casualty reportedly killed at the beginning of 1967 in January.²⁶ This means that:

[1] The combined death toll of both Palestinian guerilla activities and Syrian attacks were twenty-one casualties between January 1965 and June 1967.

²⁶ The casualty was an eighteen years old Israeli soldier home for the weekend. Therefore, it may also be suggested that Israel did not lose a single Israeli civilian between January and June 1967. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 45; Segev, *1967*, 198; Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 47; Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 48.

[2] Israel lost fifteen Israeli persons after the 1967 war.²⁷

[3] Syrian attacks in the first half of 1967 did not cause any Israeli losses of lives.

The death toll in the two successive years of 1968 and 1969 represents more than half of the total death toll in the entire decade, which signifies the increased level of armed resistance to the occupation after the 1967 war.²⁸



One should ask an important question in this regard; how does this analysis fit with the Israeli claim that escalation before the war was more the responsibility of the Arab countries and Palestinian guerillas.

The records of the Security Council in 1967 show that Israel accused Syria with persistent violations of the armistice agreement. In January 1967, the Israeli permanent representative to the United Nations sent five successive letters dated 8, 9,

²⁷ According to Sayigh, Arafat announced the launch of military resistance against Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories on August 28, 1967. He believes that Palestinian guerilla groups used to exaggerate Israeli losses. However, Moshe Dayan, the Israeli Minister of Defense, announced in a press conference on October 27, 1967 Israeli losses after the war. According to him, Israel lost ten lives including civilians, police and army soldiers in the armed resistance starting after the end of the 1967 war which gives credibility to the assumption of this research that almost all Israeli lives lost in 1967 came after the war and not before. See:

صايغ، الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية، 252; برهان الدجاني، الكتاب السنوي للقضية الفلسطينية لعام 1967 (بيروت: مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية، 1969)، 658 [هامش رقم 2].

²⁸ The CIA believed that "frequent and well-publicized raids started in November 1967." Yet, this comes in contradiction with what Moshe Dayan said in a statement in October 1967 in which he claimed the loss of ten Israeli lives after the war due to guerilla operations. See on the CIA version: Special Report Weekly Review, "Anti-Israeli Arab Terrorist Organizations," 2.

11, 15 and 17 January in which "Israel complained to the Security Council of a serious intensification by Syria of acts of aggression along and across the border with Israel." Syria, in turn, informed the Security Council that Israel aimed "to expand its illegal occupation of the demilitarized zone." In January 1967, the Chief of Staff of UNTSO believed that "the settlement of the problems of land cultivation [in DMZs] would greatly help in relaxing the tension between the two countries."²⁹

More than a decade after the 1967 war, in 1976/77, Moshe Dayan admitted to the Israeli journalist Rami Tal that Israel provoked more than 80 percent of the incidents on the Israeli northern borders with Syria.³⁰ The continuous Syrian shelling of the northern Israeli settlers' homes was actually the result of a series of carefully planned Israeli provocation directed against the Syrians.

Jan Muhren, a Dutch U.N. observer on the Israeli-Syrian border between 1966 and 1967, expressed the same version. He said that Syria posed no threat to Israel and that Israel's aim was to take possession of another piece of the DMZs.³¹

According to the previous chart, Israel tolerated more guerilla operations and more casualties in the run-up to the 1956 war. The sixties, in comparison, witnessed a decrease in the death toll and the number of operations. In fact, the Israeli desire to terminate any Syrian presence in the DMZs was the main reason behind the tension on the armistice lines.³² The failure of Syria to stop the gradual Israeli encroachment

²⁹ United Nations, *Yearbook of the United Nations 1966*, 168.

³⁰ Yediot Ahronot published this interview on April 27, 1997 years after Dayan's death. See also on this: Segev, *1967*, 193.

³¹ The Dutch Public Television [Nova TV] broadcast an interview with Muhren on June 4, 2007. See: Jan Eikelboom and Dieuwke van Ooij, "Another View of the Six-Day War," *Nova TV* (June 4, 2007) on: <http://www.novatv.nl/page/detail/uitzendingen/5206#> Accessed November 7, 2011.

³² The Syrian official position with respect to DMZs was that "Neither Israel nor Syria had sovereign rights in the area." General Riley, Chief of Staff of UNTSO, supported the Syrian position in a memorandum dated May 28, 1951 in which he asserted, "Neither party to the Armistice Agreement, therefore, enjoys rights of sovereignty within the demilitarized zone." Accordingly, Gluska's views about that cannot be accepted. He believes that "The Israeli position [in connection to DMZs] which was not sanctioned by the U.N., was that the entire area west of the international border was under Israeli sovereignty." See: Yitzhak Oron, ed., *Middle East Record Volume One 1960* (London:

over the DMZs and the cessation of its projects to divert the tributaries of the Jordan River, due to Israeli military intervention, were the main drive behind the Syrian support of the guerilla operations. The Syrian strategy of supporting guerilla operations became the only available option in front of Syria to stand up to Israel. The Syrian relationship with FATEH passed in two stages. In the first one, the relationship was not official or institutional. In the second stage, however, Syria directly embraced FATEH so that Israel believed that the ruling Ba'ath party was willing to absorb FATEH within the Syrian army.³³ Beginning in January 1967, Israel's efforts to assert its control over the DMZs reached such a high level that continuous Israeli-Syrian low intensity confrontations existed on the armistice lines for approximately two weeks. In a reaction to the Israeli provocations, guerilla operations started again against Israel on January 14 and 16 until Syria and Israel held a meeting of the Israel-Syria Mixed Armistice Commission on January 25. These activities became more after the April 7 confrontation. The CIA estimated that after the April 7 confrontation, "there have been 14 terrorist incidents since then."³⁴ That is between April 7 and the date of the document on May 23, 1967.

Analysis of the pattern and timing of guerilla operations in the first half of 1967 reveals that when Israel intensified its activities in the DMZs and Syria failed to confront those using military means, the result was the intensification of the guerilla operations.

In conclusion, the conflict between Syria and Israel over the DMZs was sixteen years ahead of the beginning of guerilla operations. Even after the beginning

Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960), 198; National Intelligence Estimate, "The Arab-Israeli Dispute: Current Phase," *Central Intelligence Agency*, NIE No. 30-67 (April 13, 1967): 5-6 [Annex II]; Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 40.

صايغ، *الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية*، 193-201; Segev, 1967, 193

³⁴ Document 45, *Briefing Notes for Director of Central Intelligence Helms for Use at White House Meeting* (Washington: May 23, 1967) [Annex II].

of guerilla operations, Chief of Staff of UNTSO believed that finding a solution to the Syrian-Israeli contention over the DMZs would result in pacifying the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines. However, when Syria started to believe that they were going to lose the battle with Israel over the control of the DMZs, guerilla operations began to assume more significance. The Syrian military weakness was a determining factor for the Syrian decision to avoid a conventional military confrontation with Israel. Hence, Syria decided to support guerilla operations against Israel. Despite the fact that FATEH operations began independent of any official Syrian patronage, the replacement of the Syrian regime with a new radical left-wing troika in 1966 led to a more active Syrian adoption of guerilla activities.

Israel was the party responsible for the deterioration of the situation on the armistice lines. The Israeli desire to control the demilitarized zones on the northern borders provoked the Syrians and drove them to support guerilla operations against Israel. Since the Syrians were militarily weak as shown by their decision to stop their diversionary projects of the Jordan River tributaries as well as their failure to confront the Israeli aggressive policies in the DMZs, supporting FATEH was the only practical option to counter the Israeli policies. The Israeli retaliatory policies, in turn, resulted in a series of escalatory steps that led to the materialization of a crisis in May-June 1967 that ended in war.

Invalidating Misconceptions

Egyptian Escalation versus De-escalation

Studies on the dynamics of the crisis of May-June 1967 tend to depict the crisis as if it was a process of Egyptian unprovoked and unilateral escalation against which Israel had to react. Yet, examination of the minute details of the Egyptian decisions reveals a different conclusion. The last escalatory movement taken by

Nasser was on May 22 when he declared the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli and foreign shipping carrying oil bound for Eilat. This decision, however, was approximately two weeks before the onset of military operations on June 5 after a three-week crisis. Nevertheless, Israeli commentators and analysts accuse Egypt not only of creating the crisis itself but also of escalating along the entire crisis period. In this regard, Ezer Weizman, Israeli Chief of Operations during the war, described the crisis in these words:

*"The steps leading up to the Six Day War followed all the rules of escalation. Step by step, day by day, strand by strand, the war was woven, steadily and systematically. The provocative acts of the Egyptians set the wheel turning..."*³⁵

Yigal Allon also believed,

*"War might still have been averted had there come forward some competent international authority capable of persuading Egypt to agree to a gradual de-escalation to the build-up of military forces, to the re-opening of the Straits, and to an understanding that acts of infiltration and terrorism would cease. But no such initiative was forthcoming, and war become inevitable."*³⁶

The aim of this approach, of course, is to blame Egypt for the deterioration that preceded the onset of military operations and to excuse Israel for its decision to strike. Surprisingly, on June 2, that is three days before the war, the United States was considering the possibility of mediation between Israel and the Arab countries,³⁷ which denotes, unlike the Israeli claims, the relative quiescence shortly before the war.

Brecher and Geist's study is one of the most interesting and detailed studies on the dynamics of the 1967 crisis. Researchers on the 1967 war tend to take some of

³⁵ Ezer Weizman, *On Eagles' Wings: The Personal Story of the Leading Commander of the Israeli Air Force* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1976), 199.

³⁶ Yigal Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army* (New York: Universe Books, 1970), 91.

³⁷ Meeting in Washington on June 2, American and British delegations thought of Letser B. Pearson, the Canadian Prime Minister, as a possible mediator. See: Document 130, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

Brecher and Geists's assumptions about the Egyptian policies for granted. According to them, Egypt continued to escalate during the crisis until the conflagration happened on the morning of June 5, 1967 and that Israel was only reacting to the Egyptian provocative policies. This can be seen in their classification of the crisis from the Israeli perspective into three phases: first, Apprehension and Mobilization (May 17-May 22); second, Delay and Diplomacy (May 23- May 28); and third, Resolution (May 29-June 4). Close to the end of the first phase, the Israeli cabinet approved the large-scale mobilization on May 19 three days before Nasser declared the blockade.³⁸ By the end of the second phase, the cabinet decided to keep the army on full alert. By the end of the third phase, the cabinet decided to go to war. Israeli decisions in each phase coincided with what its cabinet perceived as an escalation from Nasser. While this might be true in the first phase, it cannot follow the same pattern in the last two phases.³⁹ Nevertheless, Brecher and Geist assert that the closure of the straits was a point of no return on the path of war⁴⁰ regardless of the course of events during the last two phases. In a recent dissertation on preemptive strikes, Rachel T. Bzostek adopted Brecher's classification of the crisis period before the 1967 war according to

³⁸ One has to ask, why did Israel issue orders for large-scale mobilization before the announcement of the blockade? See: Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 104.

³⁹ In Brecher and Geist's account, the movement of the Fourth Armored Division [FAD] to Sinai was a landmark of Egyptian escalation in the second phase. Surprisingly, they consider Heikal's article about the inevitability of war with Israel and Nasser's speech to the Arab Trade Unionists as an escalation. However, they should have explained whether the deployment of the FAD was offensive or defensive before considering it as an escalation. Furthermore, if one is going to build military escalation according to political leaders' speeches, then one should not blame Egypt for the mobilization of its army in reaction to the harsh threats of Israeli politicians against Syria in the pre-crisis period. They add more confusion, when they mention that Nasser left some doors open for "a possible ad hoc accommodation" in his press conference on May 28. In addition, they considered the Egyptian-Jordanian pact as an escalatory step ignoring its defensive terms. On the three phases see: Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 104-170.

⁴⁰ Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 119.

which Egyptian policies were nothing more than a series of escalation until Israel struck on June 5.⁴¹

However, their study suffers from significant methodological flaws. First, their analysis of Egyptian decisions is based only on the statements published in the media. Nasser's discourse during the crisis, although bellicose in certain occasions, did not necessarily reflect the real essence of the Egyptian policies. Second, they tend to ignore Arabic and Egyptian literature on the war. Brecher and Geist had a very significant opportunity to study and analyze in depth first hand Israeli information and testimonies. His study is full of interviews with Israeli decision-makers during the crisis. However, he did not pay attention to the vast literature available in Arabic. Though most of Egyptian primary sources were not, and still not, available to researchers, he could have benefited from abundant secondary sources that dealt with the war from an Arab perspective.⁴² Even though Brecher published different studies later on crisis dynamics and behavior, his conclusions on 1967 war remained nearly the same. Academically, comparison should explain decisions of the Israeli cabinet in tandem with its Egyptian peers. Taking the discourse in the media as a denominator for Egyptian policies is not methodologically accurate. When the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Avraham Harman, told Dean Rusk, the Secretary of State, on June 2 that Nasser's belligerent statements threatening the extinction of Israel equaled an aggression, Rusk answered in a definitive manner, "there is some difference between what is said and what is actually done."⁴³

⁴¹ Rachel Tamara Bzostek, *Why not Preempt? An Analysis of the Impact of Legal and Normative Constraints on the Use of Anticipatory Military Activities* (Louisiana: Graduate Faculty of Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, August 2005) [PhD Dissertation].

⁴² In the bibliography section of their study, the authors referred only to six references on the Arabic perspective. Not all of them dealt directly with the 1967 war. Though in the preface Brecher and Geist acknowledged that the study would focus only on Israel not all the participants in the crisis, they should have discussed briefly the Egyptian behavior instead of taking for granted that Egypt was escalating all the way ahead during the crisis.

⁴³ Document 132, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

Brecher and Geist also find evidence in support of the idea that stress results in a decrease in perceived alternatives in case of Israel during the Six-Day War. This means that during the crisis period of 1967, Israel was making decisions under stress, which minimized its alternatives to the military one that culminated into its aerial strike on June 5, 1967. Yet, Israeli officials' retrospective commentaries on the war did not reveal any confusion or uncertainty about their decisions.

More importantly, Israel activated its June 5 plans implemented even before Egypt decided to impose the blockade on Eilat. According to the Encyclopedia Hebraica, Israel considered the execution of its military plans during the time between Egypt's decision to mobilize its army to the Sinai and the declaration of the blockade. Segev asserts, "The army and Rabin were discussing war plans even before Egypt declared the Gulf of Aqaba closed."⁴⁴ Furthermore, Rabin told Prime Minister Eshkol that "...even if the Egyptians refrained from blockading the straits, our situation would be no less difficult." He added, "Whether or not the Egyptians were bent on leading the situation to war at present, we were inevitably moving in that direction."⁴⁵

Analysis of Egyptian policies after the declaration of the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba shows that Egypt took several de-escalatory steps that were completely and deliberately ignored by the Israeli side for fear that the Egyptian moves might settle the crisis politically with more advantages on the Egyptian side.

De-escalation begins when the adversaries tend to be less hostile toward each other in a process that comprises adoption of new strategies, making conciliatory gesture or proposing negotiations.⁴⁶ The formation of new attitudes usually pursues information in support of changes in an opponent's hostile motivation as well as

⁴⁴ Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 160; Segev, *1967*, 234.

⁴⁵ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 71.

⁴⁶ Ho-Won Jeong, *Understanding Conflict and Conflict Analysis* (London: Sage, 2008), 179; Louis Kreisberg, *International Conflict Resolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 34-57.

reduction in adversarial activities.⁴⁷ The moves towards de-escalation becomes manifest by concession and relaxation of punitive actions.⁴⁸ However, for de-escalation process to be effective, both sides must de-escalate simultaneously. As long as at least one side thinks it can win, de-escalation is harder to achieve. Unfortunately, in 1967 de-escalation was only from the Egyptian side.⁴⁹ One cannot argue that Egypt took its de-escalatory steps at a wrong time or when war was inevitable. Rubin believes that most conflicts usually have a multiple ripe movements rather than only one and there is no such thing as a wrong time to attempt to de-escalate.⁵⁰

Charles W. Yost believed that "Both sides [Egypt and Israel] might on many occasions have moved to end their confrontation by compromise, but neither side showed the slightest willingness to do this."⁵¹

However, from the moment Egypt pronounced the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, the main concern of Egypt later on was to contain the crisis.⁵² To achieve this, Egypt took several de-escalatory steps even in relation to the Gulf of Aqaba itself, the closure of which was considered *casus belli* by the Israeli government. In the following section, these de-escalatory steps are elaborated.

The Status of the Gulf of Aqaba

The Arab countries, particularly Egypt and Jordan, did not recognize the Israeli occupation of what it later called Eilat. Egypt, later on, agreed bilaterally with

⁴⁷ Ibid, 180

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ One can argue that Abba Eban's tour to Europe, Britain and France, and the United States meant to search for a diplomatic solution to the crisis and to find an approach to de-escalate. Yet, Eban himself mentions explicitly in his memoirs that the aim of his tour was to give time to the Israeli army to deploy its forces to the south on the Egyptian borders. See: Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1992), 369; Robert Slater, *The Rabin of Israel: A Biography* (London: Robson, 1993), 127.

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Z. Rubin, "The Timing of Ripeness and the Ripeness of Timing," in *Timing the De-escalation of International Conflicts*, eds. Louis Kriesberg and Stuart J. Thorson (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1991), 237-246.

⁵¹ Yost, "The Arab-Israeli War," 19.

⁵² See Nasser-Amer conversation about the rationale behind the forthcoming Egyptian de-escalation in: هيكل، الانفجار، 573-574.

Saudi Arabia on specific measures through which Israel would be denied access to its new port through the Straits of Tiran. The legal status of the Straits remained a matter of contention between the Arab states concerned and Israel. During the Tripartite aggression against Egypt in 1956, the Israeli forces occupied Sharm El Sheikh and secured an access for its shipping through the Straits. Egypt, in return for the Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, accepted the presence of international force in Sharm El Sheikh to monitor free shipping through the Straits. Israel continued to use this passage until Egypt again decided to close the Straits on May 23, 1967 and restore the pre-1956 measures.⁵³

After the Suez war, in an aide de memoire from John Foster Dulles, the U.S. Secretary of the State, to Abba Eban, the Israeli Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the United States acknowledged that the Gulf of Aqaba represented international waters. Nevertheless, he added that the United States government would continue to exercise the right of free and innocent passage as long there was not an overriding decision to the contrary as by the International Court of Justice.⁵⁴ Until the crisis in 1967, no international agreement regulating the status of the Straits of Tiran existed.

Egypt never abandoned its sovereign rights of the Straits as national territorial waters. During the crisis of May-June 1967, Israel contacted Eisenhower, the U.S. former President, to know exactly the nature of the U.S. pledges to Israel regarding

⁵³ The pre-1956 status entailed prohibition on both ships flying the Israeli flag and strategic materials bound for Israel including oil. See: Document 206, *M. Roux, Ambassadeur De France Au Caire, A M. Couve De Murville, Ministre Des Affaires Etrangeres* (Le Caire: 24 Mai 1967) [Annex IV]; Indar Jit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force Leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 74.

⁵⁴ Document 78, *Aide Memoire form the Department of State to the Israeli Embassy* (Washington: February 11, 1957) [Annex II].

the Straits. Eisenhower confirmed that the United States government considered them as international waterways, but he added that Nasser never accepted that.⁵⁵

Though Egypt declared the Straits closed to Israeli shipping, Egypt was willing to settle its legal status in pacific ways through the International Court of Justice.

Nasser first conveyed his opinion about the Straits in a meeting with U Thant on May 24 in Cairo. Nasser believed that if Israel and the United States wished to dispute Egypt's sovereign right on Tiran, he would be ready to go to the International Court of Justice.⁵⁶ The State Department documents reveal that in a meeting between Nasser and Robert Anderson on May 30, Anderson asked Nasser about the possibilities of referring the matter of the Straits either to the United Nations or to the World Court [The International Court of Justice]. Nasser indicated that he would not submit the matter to the United Nations "because the Israelis normally treated the resolutions of the U.N. not favorable to them as pieces of paper." With regard to the International Court of Justice, he said, "he did not have sufficient knowledge of the World Court to answer specifically about referring the matter to the World Court for decision but would consult his legal advisers." Anderson further added in the document that Nasser "did not rule out completely possibility of a World Court review if it could be done speedily."⁵⁷ Nasser-Anderson's meeting was secret. Yet, the press revealed the matter and it became known to the Israeli Embassy in Washington the same day.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 129-130.

⁵⁶ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 74.

⁵⁷ Document 123, *Telegram from the Embassy in Portugal to the Department of State* (Lisbon: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

⁵⁸ At the beginning of his report, Anderson guessed that the Israeli intelligence would "pick it up," and he meant that they would know about his visit. Brecher and Geist believe that Anderson's conclusions about Nasser's visit were that, "there was little chance to persuade Nasser to accept any compromise on the Straits." This is of course not true, as we have just seen in Anderson's report to President Johnson.

Egyptian officials conveyed the same proposal to the American administration through intelligence channels. After the Egyptian decision to close the Straits of Tiran, the CIA contacted Salah Nasr, the Chief of Egyptian Intelligence, and Nasr asserted to them that Egypt would refer the issue, of the Straits, to the International Court of Justice.⁵⁹ Anthony Nutting, who held several meetings with Nasser during the crisis, expressed the same version. According to him, Nasser informed Washington and other European Capitals that he was ready to refer the matter of the Straits to the International Court of Justice in order to determine whether or not Egypt did exceed its rights by closing the Straits in face of enemy shipping.⁶⁰

Yet, before Nasser decided to introduce his offer to settle the issue of the Straits through legal channels, the blockade orders themselves were a lot more flexible than what is depicted.

On May 22, the Supreme Command of the Egyptian Armed Forces issued instructions signed by Deputy Supreme Commander Abdul Hakim Amer. The most interesting point in these instructions was point number seven that reads as follows:

"Ships escorted by warships are authorized to pass and are not to be intercepted or engaged either with it or with the escort even if the escorted ship is flying the Israeli flag."⁶¹

Oren, citing a CIA estimate, claims that Egypt left Israel no choice and that even the idea of finding an escort to Israeli ships was out of the question because, "the

Gluska believes the same as Brecher and Geist. See: Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 158;

Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 246.

⁵⁹ During the crisis, there were secret contacts also between Nasr and the Italian Intelligence about the Gulf of Aqaba. See:

نصر، مذكرات صلاح نصر، 268؛ أندرو ولسلي كوكبيرن، *علاقات خطيرة: خفايا الروابط الوثيقة والنشاطات الاستخباراتية الأميركية والإسرائيلية* (عمان، الأردن: الأهلية للنشر والتوزيع، 1991)، 151.

⁶⁰ أنتوني ناتنج، ناصر، مترجم (القاهرة: مكتبة مديولي، 1993)، 462.

⁶¹ صورة من تعليمات القيادة العامة للقوات المسلحة بقتل خليج العقبة في ممدوح أنيس فتحي، *مصر من الثورة إلى النكسة: مقدمات حرب يونيو/حزيران 1967* (أبو ظبي: مركز الإمارات للدراسات والبحوث الاستراتيجية، 2003)، 423؛ هيكال، *الانفجار*، 518؛ محمد فوزي، *حرب الثلاث سنوات 1967-1970: مذكرات الفريق أول محمد فوزي وزير الحربية الأسبق* (دمشق: دار طلاس للدراسات والترجمة والنشر)، 82.

Egyptians were almost certain to fire on any American ship attempting to ply the Straits."⁶² However, this is entirely untrue.⁶³ Not only did Egypt provide an opportunity for an American military escort to Israeli ships, but also the same opportunity was allowed to Israeli military vessels.

Israel, in effect, was aware of the Egyptian instructions not fire against United States vessels, in particular, if they escorted Israeli ships. The State Department records also clarify that matter. In a meeting between Ephraim Evron, Minister Plenipotentiary of the Israeli Embassy in Washington, and Walt Rostow, Evron "referred to intelligence which we [the Americans] share that Nasser's response to a U.S.-escorted probe would be not to fire."⁶⁴ Badran expressed the same information to Kosygin on May 26. He revealed,

*"If an Israeli flagged ship entered the Gulf under the protection of U.S. military ships or otherwise, we are not going to intercept them because in that case it is enough for us to expose the conspiracies of Colonialism and its protection to the Israeli ships"*⁶⁵

The Israeli government deliberations during the crisis denote that Rabin mentioned to the cabinet that Egypt was not going to fire against Israeli-escorted ships, but at the same time stressed in the same time that they should deal with this information in a top-secret way.⁶⁶ Rabin, of course, was keen not to make this information publicly known, because it gave Israel an appropriate way out of the

⁶² Oren, *Six Days of War*, 164.

⁶³ An indicator for Oren's falsification of archival material.

⁶⁴ Document 131, *Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant [Rostow] to President Johnson* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 137, *Memorandum from the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs [Hoopes] to Secretary of Defense McNamara* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

⁶⁵ محضر اجتماع السيد أليكسي كوسيجين رئيس الوزراء السوفياتي والسيد شمس بدران وزير الحربية (موسكو: 26 مايو 1967).

⁶⁶ According to Segev, Rabin said to the cabinet "I alert you to the fact that this is extremely confidential material." Rabin was bluffing and deceiving his cabinet. Instructions about the Gulf were announced publicly. See: Segev, *1967*, 240-242.

blockade giving Israel no proper pretext to go to war in a reaction to the Egyptian move.⁶⁷

This point denotes that the closure of the Gulf to Israeli ships was not absolute and that there was an exit strategy out of that impasse without resorting to force.

The Blockade and the First Shot

In 1967, Israel claimed in the diplomatic deliberations that preceded the war that it was entitled to use the right of self-defense, to strike first, against the Egyptian aggression. According to Israel, the Egyptian decision to close the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping gave Israel the legal right to resort to arms to defend its right of navigation. However, as was mentioned earlier, the Israeli right of free navigation through the Gulf was disputed. In an endeavor to settle the dispute, Egypt suggested to present the case to the International Court of Justice. The Egyptian decision to close the Gulf restored the *status quo ante* of the Gulf that dominated the region before the 1956 war. Accordingly, Israel's claim that it was acting in self-defense is also controversial.

The Israeli version in 1967 was an embodiment of a system of *casus belli* or acts of war, which Israel developed in the wake of the 1956 war. By then, Israel's decision-makers envisioned certain situations or redlines⁶⁸ that gave Israel the right to resort to arms in self-defense if they were to be breached. One of these redlines was the closure of the Straits of Tiran, claimed by Egypt to be territorial waters.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ The United States could have provided a good opportunity to avoid war by providing an escort to Israeli ships. One of the goals of Eban's mission to the States was to extract security guarantees from the U.S. to Israel. Though the administration was not capable of doing so due to the lack of congressional support, providing an escort to Israeli ships was a feasible alternative.

⁶⁸ David Rodman, "Israel's National Security Doctrine: An Introductory Overview," *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (September 2001) on:

<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2001/issue3/jv5n3a6.html> Accessed November 14, 2011

⁶⁹ On these *casus belli* see: Allon, *The Making of Israel's Army*, 80-81; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 36, 86, 158; Michael Brecher, *The Foreign Policy System of Israel: Settings, Images and Process* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 51, 67; Janice Gross Stein and Raymond Tanter, *Rational Decision-Making: Israel's Security Choices, 1967* (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1980), 110.

The Israeli claim was not convincing during Eban's external tour, particularly in Paris. According to Eban, de Gaulle began his meeting by saying "Ne faites pas la guerre." [E.T:⁷⁰ Do not make war] De Gaulle differentiated between closure of the Gulf and starting hostilities. For him, starting hostilities meant taking the initiative and firing the first shot. Eban, in turn, tried to promote his government's position that Egypt had already started hostilities by closing the Gulf. Yet, de Gaulle did not accept his argument.⁷¹

The French documents reveal that de Gaulle was concerned with preventing the crisis from deterioration and hence his focus was on the starting of hostilities. He expressed his opinion not only to Eban but also to the Egyptian Ambassador to Paris and to the King of Saudi Arabia. After Eban left Paris, de Gaulle received the Egyptian Ambassador to Paris on May 25. De Gaulle was clear in his statement that "L' essential est donc que personne ne prenne l'initiative des hostilities."⁷² [E.T: The essential point is thus that no-one should initiate hostilities] He expressed the French official position also to Faysal by saying, "Donc, l'Etat qui userait le premier, des armes, n'aurait ni notre approbation ni notre appui."⁷³ [E.T: Therefore, the State first resorting to arms would have neither our approval nor our support].

Eban's final destination in his external tour was the United States. Though the United States acknowledged Israel's right of navigation through the Gulf, Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, was concerned with who was the first to fire. According to William

⁷⁰ English Translation.

⁷¹ Unfortunately, the official report of Eban-de Gaulle meeting in the French archives is still classified. On Eban's conversation with de Gaulle see: Eban, *Personal Witness*, 373-375; Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 133; Kimche and Bawley *The Sandstorm*, 296; Oren, *Six-Days of War*, 100-101.

⁷² Document 213, *Compte Rendu: Entretien entre le General de Gaulle et l'Ambassade d'Egypte* (Paris: le 25 Mai 1967) [Annex IV].

⁷³ Document 243, *Compte Rendu: Entretien entre le General et le Roi Faycal d'Arabie Saoudite* (Paris: le 2 Juin 1967) [Annex IV].

Quandt, Rusk expressed the view that "no overt act of war had yet occurred."⁷⁴ This means that as long as Egypt did not resort to arms, Israel had no right to act in self-defense.

On June 2, Evron, Minister Plenipotentiary of Israeli Embassy in Washington, asked Walt Rostow, Special Assistant to the President, whether the United States would "...stand by its political commitment in 1957 that Israel under these circumstances [closing the Straits] was asserting a legitimate right of self-defense." Fearing that he might be trapped by providing an answer that might be taken by Israel as a pretext to attack, Rostow "replied that this was not a question to which I could give a responsible answer." He added, "...the scenario he [Evron] outlined was not the one raised by Foreign Minister Eban with the President..."⁷⁵

The official American and French versions, as expressed by de Gaulle and Rusk to Eban and by Rostow to Evron, was to set a clear boundary between imposing the blockade as a political decision and firing the first shot as a military move. Consequently, their version was totally against the casus belli system as envisaged by Israel.

In the Security Council debate that followed the war, Israeli version was under heavy attack by Security Council members. For them, there was no such thing as a system of casus belli subjectively envisioned in the post-Charter era.

The question of the Straits was going to be of significance in the visit of Egypt's Vice President, Zakaria Mohieddin, to Washington scheduled June 7. Egypt

⁷⁴ Document 132, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II]; William Quandt, *Decade of Decisions: American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967-1976* (California: University of California Press, 1977), 52.

⁷⁵ Document 131, *Memorandum of the President's Special Assistant [Rostow] to President Johnson* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

also agreed to receive the American Vice president Hubert Humphrey.⁷⁶ On June 3, in a circular telegram to American Embassies in Arab Capitals, Rusk believed,

*"There may be some flexibility in what Cairo would be willing to do before major hostilities. The Straits of Tiran is a key issue. The free passage of crude oil is a major part of that issue. We shall not know details until further explorations of the problem with Cairo or intermediaries."*⁷⁷

Israel knew about the forthcoming visit of Egypt's Vice President on June 2 in a meeting between Hraman, the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, and Undersecretary Eugene Rostow.⁷⁸ However, Israel terminated this diplomatic channel by its attack on June 5.

Rabin argued that the Americans urged Israel not to initiate war "as long as political contacts were in progress." He added in a conversation with Shapira, "I don't want to go to war either, but there is no way out if the American political efforts fail."⁷⁹ Yet, if Israel were willing to avoid war, it would have waited for Egypt Vice President's visit to Washington.

Nasser, after the war, felt that the United States betrayed him and did not exert enough pressure on Israel to avoid war. He expected that Anderson's visit was a positive step towards minimizing the tension in the region. That is why he spoke with bitterness about the United States after the war. Vinogradov, the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, reported to Moscow about Nasser's perception of Anderson's visit saying, "The gist of the matter is that Nasser does not trust the Americans [and] considers them as crooks."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Document 134, *Telegram from the Embassy in the United Arab Republic to the department of State* (Cairo: June 2, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 145, *Telegram from the United Arab Republic to the Department of State* (Cairo: June 4, 1967) [Annex II].

⁷⁷ Document 141, *Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Arab Capitals* (Washington: June 3, 1967) [Annex II].

⁷⁸ Document 132, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

⁷⁹ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 72, 81.

⁸⁰ *Polish Record of Meeting of Soviet Bloc Leaders and Tito* (Moscow: November 9, 1967) [Annex III].

A final question about the Straits of Tiran is of significant value. Were the Straits that vital to Israel's prosperity and survival? The study does not elaborate on that matter but it conveys two opinions one from an Israeli source and another from an American. Israel's Chief of Mossad, Meir Amit, said to McNamara, Secretary of Defense, on June 1 when asked by the latter about the issue of the Straits, "that while they [the Straits] are not crucial, loss of free passage has become a political symbol and that therefore we must go through the motions of solving that problem."⁸¹ On the second day, June 2, McNamara expressed the same opinion, conveyed earlier to him by Amit, to a British delegation. McNamara, "observed that Israeli access to Eilat is not really vital in an economic sense. The question is rather political."⁸²

The Arab Military Alliances

Alliances are,

*"written agreements signed by official representatives of at least two independent states that include promise to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, to remain neutral in the event of conflict, to refrain from military conflict with one another or to consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military conflict."*⁸³

Five basic promises are included in this definition of alliances: defensive cooperation, offensive cooperation, neutrality, nonaggression and consultation.⁸⁴

Examination of the military agreements signed among the Arab states certainly lies under the first rubric, defensive cooperation. Most importantly, these

⁸¹ Document 124, *Memorandum for the Record: Conversation between Major General Meir Amit and Secretary McNamara* (Washington: June 1, 1967) [Annex II].

⁸² Document 130, *Memorandum of Conversation: Middle East* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

⁸³ Brett Ashley Leeds, Jeffrey M. Ritter, Sara McLaughlin Mitchell and Andrew G. Long "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944," *International Interactions*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2002): 237-260 (238); Brett Ashley Leeds, "Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes," *American Journal of Political Science Association*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (2003): 429.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

agreements were no secret; their contents were publicly known and nothing in their content carried in any way offensive suggestions against Israel.⁸⁵

During the crisis that led to the war, Egypt was supposedly in command of the armies of another two Arab countries, Jordan and Iraq, in addition to expeditionary forces from other Arab countries. Accordingly, if Egypt were not going to start any offensive against Israel, so it would be with the other countries.

In a meeting between Nasser and Robert Anderson, Nasser stated,

"...that under present circumstances Jordanian troops, in so far as the Israeli problem was concerned, were under UAR [Egypt] command. This of course is applicable to other troops such as Iraqis and Algerians who were reporting for duty."⁸⁶

Anderson then added in his report about the meeting,

"...I want to make clear as I understand it UAR has military command over its troops, the Jordanian troops as related to any Israeli problem, the troops committed by Iraq, Algeria or any country sending troops, but does not include command over Syrian troops. It is because of the latter situation, which I think bothers Nasser as to whether or not the Syrians might undertake unilateral action designed to force a confrontation. It was because of his concern on this subject that he was asked if he would intervene even if the Syrians acted against UAR desire and the reply was affirmative."

Nasser was ready, as Anderson understood, to intervene on the Syrian side even if Syria started operations against Israel. Nevertheless, did Syria ever consider that possibility? Was Syria ready to initiate an attack during the crisis?

⁸⁵ Some military alliances' treaties include provisions requiring the signatory members to keep portions of the treaty content or the existence of the alliance it-self secret. One of the classic examples of this is the Sevres Protocol signed by Israel, France and Britain in 1956 to invade Egypt. Article six of the Sevres Pact stipulated, "The arrangements of the present protocol must remain strictly secret." For article six of the Sevres Protocol see: Avi Shlaim, "The Protocol of Sevres, 1956: Anatomy of a War Plot," *International Affairs*, Vol. 73, No. 3 (1997): 509-530.

⁸⁶ Document 123, *Telegram from the Embassy in Portugal* (Lisbon: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

The answer to this question is difficult in light of the inadequacy of Syrian and foreign archival materials related to that matter. Yet, Syrian attitude before and during the crisis might shed light on this matter.

The Syrian leadership, in power since February 1966, was aware of its military weakness. In light of that weakness, Egypt decided to conclude a defensive treaty with Syria on November 4, 1966. Yet, confusion existed as to when Egypt should come to the aid of Syria. On November 18, 1966, Heikal published an article in which he elaborated, "The Joint Defense Treaty [between Egypt and Syria] does not mean the immediate Egyptian military intervention against any [Israeli] raid on the Syrian posts." A French document during the crisis adopted the same version about the Egyptian behavior.⁸⁷

On April 7, 1967, an Israeli-Syrian border clash escalated to trans-border tank, artillery and aerial battles that resulted in downing six Syrian MiG-21 fighters. Despite the presence of a Joint Defense Treaty, Egypt did not intervene on the Syrian side which practically supported the views elaborated by Heikal in his article few months before the incident. Even after that incident, Syria did not take any significant military move apart from intensifying its artillery bombardment across the borders⁸⁸ and encouraging Palestinian guerilla operations. The Syrians could have used that incident to start a war and draw Egypt to its help but they did not have the political will to do so. What was applicable to the Syrian attitude before the crisis was applicable to the crisis that resulted in the war in 1967. In fact, one of the strong indicators of the Syrian weakness was, as this research suggested before, their support

⁸⁷ Document 204, *Note De La Sous Direction Du Levant: Crise Israelo-Arabe* (Paris: 23 Mai, 1967) [Annex IV];

محمد حسنين هيكل، من الكونجور إلى الأردن (جريدة الأهرام، 18 نوفمبر 1966) على: <http://nasser.bibalex.org/Besaraha/BesarahaBrowser.aspx?BID=422&PDFStart=null&PDFEnd=null&dir=next&activeLink=1&lang=ar> Accessed January 1, 2012.

⁸⁸ أحمد حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو [الجزء الثاني] (القاهرة: الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 2002)، 119.

and embracement of Palestinian guerilla operations. The Egyptian political and military leadership was aware of this. Murtagi, for example, asserted that the Syrians never wanted to fight Israel.⁸⁹ Dayan also doubted that Syria was going to participate in the war. He asserted, in light of the Syrian weakness, "This is a war against Egypt."⁹⁰ These views show clearly that the Syrians were not interested in provoking war. Rather they meant to harass Israel because of the chronic Israeli-Syrian issues of contention. After the incident of April 7, Sidqi Mahmoud, Chief of the Egyptian Air Force, visited Syria under instructions from Amer in order to discuss the recent Israeli-Syrian escalation. In his testimony to the Committee on the Recording of the History of July 23 Revolution, Sidqi asserted that he concluded his meetings with the Syrians by clarifying, "...the status of the Egyptian fighter-bombers does not allow them currently to launch a comprehensive strike [against Israel]." He advised the Syrians to react to the Israeli provocations on the same scale and if the Israelis sent tractors to plough in the DMZs, the Syrians should do the same.⁹¹ The views expressed by Sidqi in Damascus were an indicator for the Egyptian perception of the Joint Defense Treaty.

There was no doubt among the Israeli leadership that Egypt was the main enemy and Syria did not have either the intention or the capability to get involved in war with Israel.

When Fawzy, the Chief of Staff, visited Syria early in the crisis to confirm the truth about the Israeli troop concentrations, he discussed with the Syrians the

⁸⁹ عيد المحسن كامل مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي يروي الحقائق: قائد جبهة سيناء في حرب 1967 (الوطن العربي، 1976)، 56.

⁹⁰ Martin Van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israeli Defense Force* (New York: Public Affairs, 2002), 182; Edgar O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War* (London: Archon Books, 1972), 40; Oren, *Six Days of war*, 154; Eban, *Personal Witness*, 367; Morris, *Righteous*

Victims, 314; 149، علاقات خطيرة، كوكييرن،

⁹¹ شهادة الفريق أول محمد صدقي محمود قائد القوات الجوية في سليمان مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو: نصوص شهاداتهم أمام لجنة تسجيل تاريخ الثورة (القاهرة: دار الحرية، 1990)، 107؛

Slater, *The Rabin of Israel*, 119; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 67.

activation of a joint military plan code-named Walid, drafted in January 21, 1967, that was supposed to be implemented if Israel threatened either of the two countries. However, the Syrians refused Fawzy's suggestion believing that "this is an unwarranted escalation of the situation."⁹²

The French archives provide good indicators on the Syrian attitude. On June 1, President de Gaulle received the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim Makhous. Here is how the conversation went between them:

Le General: Vous attaquez ou vous n'attaquez pas?

[E.T: The General: Are you attacking or not?]

*Le Ministre: Nous n'attaquons pas et je peux vous assurer que jusqu'a present la Republique Arabe Syrienne n'a pris que des mesures purement defensives.*⁹³

[E.T: The Minister: We are not attacking and I can assure you that up until now the Syrian Arab Republic has only taken purely defensive measures]

The Syrians were clear that they had taken defensive measures and they would not initiate hostilities and attack Israel.

While Makhous was meeting de Gaulle in Paris, the Syrians told an Egyptian delegation headed by the Vice President in Damascus that, "the Soviet help was to prevent war not to ignite it."⁹⁴

Unlike what Rikhye, Wagner and Salibi believe,⁹⁵ that the Egyptian-Jordanian alliance revived the Unified Military Command, it is essential to note that these mutual pacts were collective Arab military pacts outside the framework of the UAC.

⁹² Oren, however, believes that Syria refused to coordinate its military plans with Egypt to assume its own path of contemplating war with Israel. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 162; زيارة الفريق أول محمد فوزي إلى سوريا يوم 14 مايو 1967، دار المحفوظات المركزية للقوات المسلحة، ملف رقم 5/151/22 في فتحي، مصر من الثورة إلى النكسة، 581 [هامش رقم 316].

⁹³ Document 238, *Compte Rendu, Entretien entre Le General de Gaulle et Le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères de La Republique Arabe Syrienne* (Paris: Jeudi 1er Juin, 1967) [Annex IV].
⁹⁴ أمين هويدي، الفرص الضائعة: القرارات الحاسمة في حربي الاستنزاف وأكتوبر (بيروت: شركة المطبوعات للتوزيع والنشر، 1992)، 70.

⁹⁵ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 149; Kamal Salibi, *The modern History of Jordan* (London: I.B. Tauris and Company, 2006), 220; Wagner, *The Six-Day War*, 210.

Amer, Commander in Chief of the UAC, in two of his reports to the Joint Defense Council in December 1966 and to the Secretary General of the Arab League in August 1968, criticized the defense agreements concluded outside the framework of the UAC. He believed, “these agreements resulted in the alienation of the UAC from the scope of its powers and responsibilities.”⁹⁶ The UAC practically stopped working months before the crisis in May-June 1967, and hence it had no value in the Arab military effort against Israel when military operations started in June 1967.

The Status of the Sinai: Was the Sinai Demilitarized?

After the Suez war of 1956, Sinai was subject to a new regime according to which the United Nations Emergency Force [UNEF] was stationed along the Israeli-Egyptian armistice lines, in Gaza Strip and in Shram El Sheikh. These new arrangements were contemplated in a series of United Nations resolutions issued after the war. Despite the deployment of that force on Egyptian territory, no further constraints were imposed upon Egypt or its military in the Sinai. Egypt enjoyed, as usual, full sovereignty that enabled it to deploy its forces to the Sinai several times before the 1967 war without the slightest condemnation from the United Nations. In addition to this, the Egyptian army established a series of fortified defensive lines in the northeastern part of Sinai and permanently stationed thousands of troops there.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, researchers usually describe the deployment of Egyptian forces to the Sinai in 1967 as remilitarization.⁹⁸ It is more accurate to describe the presence of the Egyptian army in the Sinai in 1967 as either deployment or mobilization but the term

⁹⁶ خطاب الفريق أول علي علي عامر القائد العام للقيادة العربية الموحدة لجيوش الدول العربية إلى الملوك والرؤساء والأمين العام للجامعة العربية بمناسبة قرب انتهاء خدمته في هويدي، *الفرص الضائعة*، 545-549؛ حمروش، *ثورة 23 يوليو*، 118.

⁹⁷ Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 122; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 63; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 26.

⁹⁸ See on this: Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 158-159, 180; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 38; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 61; C. Ernest Dawn, "The Egyptian Remilitarization of Sinai, May 1967," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 3, No. 3, (1968): 201-224; Roland Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly into the Six-Day War," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2006): 305; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 305.

"remilitarization" tacitly entails suggestion that the Sinai was demilitarized. Apart from linguistic connotations, some historians believe that Sinai was demilitarized and that Nasser's decision to send his forces there in 1967 was illegal. Among them is the British historian Martin Gilbert and the Israeli historian Benny Morris.

In his encyclopedic book about the history of Israel, Gilbert described the mobilization of the Egyptian army during the crisis as follows:

*"Beginning on May 13, Egyptian troops moved in large numbers into the Sinai, from which Israel had withdrawn nine years earlier and which had been demilitarized as security for Israel after her withdrawal."*⁹⁹

There is not a single proof on Gilbert's views about the demilitarization of the Sinai. Not a single international resolution¹⁰⁰ or archival material supports his version. Was it difficult for the distinguished British Historian to consult the international documents of the post-1956 settlement in order to validate his views about the Sinai? Or is it just the strong psychological motive of adopting blindly the Israeli versions?¹⁰¹

Even Benny Morris, the Israeli new historian, falls into the same mistake. According to Black and Morris,

*"It's [Sinai] effective demilitarization [the Egyptian maintained only one division in the area before 1967] and the positioning of a United Nations Peace Keeping Force [UNEF] along the Egyptian side of the border were the preconditions for Israel's withdrawal from the peninsula following the 1956 war."*¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008), 366.

¹⁰⁰ United Nations Security Council Resolutions during the crisis in: George J. Tomeh, ed., *United Nations Resolutions on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Volume One 1947-1974* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1975), 31-49.

¹⁰¹ His book contains also trivial mistakes like describing Amer as Minister of war while the Minister of War was Badran. He also mentions that the Soviet Minister of Defense, Grechko, visited Egypt during the crisis to encourage Nasser. However, that visit did not actually happen.

¹⁰² Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 210.

Though Egypt indeed maintained only limited forces in Sinai after 1956, the rationale behind this was not to allow the encirclement of the Egyptian army in the Sinai like what might have happened in 1956 when the Egyptian army faced the Israeli forces from the east and the British and French forces cutting Egyptian lines in the west. Egypt unilaterally maintained a small force in the Sinai to avoid any possible entrapment if Israel would collaborate with other countries again and repeat the 1956 scenario.

Black and Morris fall into a contradiction when they mention, "Once before, in February 1960...Egypt had surprised Israel and sent large forces into Sinai with the aim of deterring Israel from attacking Syria."¹⁰³ If the Sinai were demilitarized, the United Nations, which mediated the 1956 settlement, would have warned Egypt in 1960 not to violate its obligations. Yet, Egypt unilaterally withdrew its forces without the slightest criticism for its move.¹⁰⁴

Indeed, there was a patrol zone of five kilometers by day and two kilometers by night directly adjacent to the international borders in which UNEF forces had the right to move freely and no Egyptian troops would be stationed in or patrol these zones.¹⁰⁵ Yet, Egypt unilaterally decided to evacuate that zone in order to facilitate the mission of UNEF. In his report to the Security Council on May 26, 1967, U Thant, the Secretary General of the United Nations, revealed in paragraph six of his report,

¹⁰³ Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, 210; Uri Bar-Joseph, "Rotem: The Forgotten Crisis on the Road to the 1967 War," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 3, (1996): 547-566; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 14; Segev, 1967, 226; Slater, *Rabin of Israel*, 121; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 68; صلاح الدين الحديدي، شاهد على حرب 67 (بيروت: دار الشروق، 1974)، 203؛ شهادة الفريق أول محمد فوزي في مظهر، *اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو*، 53.

¹⁰⁴ Bailey, citing Rikhye and Ben-Gurion, believes that Egypt withdrew its forces in 1960 when the UNEF Commander stressed that the Egyptian deployment of forces to the Sinai "contravened the post-Suez accords." However, this is not true. Nothing in the post-Suez settlement restricted the Egyptian deployment of forces to Sinai. Rikhye himself denied this version in his memoirs. See: Sydney Dawson Bailey, *The Making of Resolution 242* (Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1985), 19; Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 64-65.

¹⁰⁵ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 162.

"UNEF functioned exclusively on the United Arab Republic side of the line in a zone from which the armed forces of the United Arab Republic had voluntarily stayed away for over ten years. It was this arrangement, which allowed UNEF to function as a buffer and as restraint on infiltration. When this arrangement lapsed United Arab Republic troops moved up to the line as they had every right to do."¹⁰⁶

Surprisingly, Eban in his address to the United Nations made it pretty clear that "...in the absence of an agreement to the contrary, it is of course legal for any state to place its armies whenever it chooses in its territory."¹⁰⁷

The Withdrawal of Egyptian Forces from Yemen

Israeli and pro-Israel's writings also believe that Egypt was willing to withdraw its forces from Yemen in order to consolidate the Egyptian military presence in the Sinai to face Israel. According to Kimche and Bawly, the Egyptian army in the Sinai did include conscripts direct from garrison duty in Yemen. In his study, Oren asserts that there was an influx of tens of thousands of men to the Sinai theatre including reservists and newly repatriated units from Yemen. The Israeli military intelligence pointed to "...the transfer of four brigades from Yemen to Sinai." According to Black and Morris, the Israeli military intelligence discovered, "...the Egyptians had ordered three of their brigades stationed in Yemen to return home and, on May 20, had taken over Sharm El Sheikh..." Edgar O'Ballance wrote, "On June 4, two infantry brigades and some logistic units and about 10, 000 soldiers, were in transit back to Egypt..." The Egyptian decision to deploy forces from Yemen to the Sinai, in the Israeli claims, was an indicator for the Egyptian determination to settle the crisis with military means. Prime Minister Eshkol considered the transfer of troops

¹⁰⁶ See the report in Theodore Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, 168. According to El Hdidy and Hamroush, this patrol zone was ten kilometers. Yet, Rikhye's numbers as a chief of staff of UNEF must be more accurate. In both cases, Egypt, according to U Thant, evacuated that zone voluntarily. See:

الحديدي، شاهد علي حرب 1967، 64؛ حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 141.

¹⁰⁷ Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six-Day War*, 141.

from Yemen "...the most diagnostic indicator of the likelihood of attack." The Egyptian decision to withdraw forces from Yemen "... had a decisive impact on his [Eshkol's] choice to mobilize large numbers of reserve forces."¹⁰⁸

In fact, the opposite was true. The Fourteenth Armored Brigade commanded by Abdul Mone'im Wasil, was about to leave to Yemen during the crisis on May 17 to replace the Fifteenth Armored Brigade scheduled to return from Yemen. According to Wasil, the vanguards of the Fifteenth Armored Brigade did arrive to Egypt from Yemen and his brigade was ready to leave Egypt to replace it. Yet, when the Egyptian command announced general mobilization, cancellation of his orders followed and he moved with his forces to the Sinai.¹⁰⁹

The following table [Table No. 1] illustrates the number of Egyptian troops in Yemen as mentioned in Egyptian and foreign sources on the war:¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ On the withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen see: Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 159; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 93, 97; Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, 217; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 96; Stein and Tanter, *Rational Decision Making*, 154; Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ عبد المنعم واصل، الصراع العربي الإسرائيلي: من مذكرات وذكريات الفريق عبد المنعم واصل (القاهرة: مكتبة الشروق الدولية، 2002)، 125؛ عبد المنعم واصل في عصام دراز، ضباط يرنيو يتكلمون: كيف شاهد جنود مصر هزيمة 1967 (القاهرة: المنار الجديد، 1989)، 57-65.

¹¹⁰ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 19, 21; Andrew Cockburn in Richard B. Parker, "Conspiracy Theories," in *The Six-Day War: A Retrospective*, ed. Richard B. Parker (Florida: University Press Florida, 1996) 252; Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 110; Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 32; Office of National Estimates, "Nasser's Problems and Prospects in Yemen," *Central Intelligence Agency, Special Memorandum No. 9-65* (February 18, 1965): 2 [Annex II].

محمد عبد الغني الجمسي، حرب أكتوبر 1973: مذكرات الجمسي (القاهرة: الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1989)، 62؛ كمال حسن علي، مشاوير العمر: أسرار وخفايا سبعين عاما من عمر مصر في الحرب والمخابرات والسياسة (القاهرة: دار الشروق، 1994)، 178؛ فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 24؛ مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي بروي الحقائق، 47؛ طه المجذوب، هزيمة يرنيو حقائق وأسرار: من النكسة حتى حرب الاستنزاف (القاهرة: دار الهلال، 1988)، 63؛ محضر اجتماع القيادة السياسية الموحدة للجمهورية العربية المتحدة والعراق بقصر القبة (القاهرة: 19 مايو 1965).

Source	Number of Troops	Year
Fawzy	70, 000	1964
Kamal Hassan Ali	70, 000	1963-1965
Murtagi	55, 000	
Oren	50, 000 and 70, 000	
Parker	70, 000	
Laquere	60, 000	
Brecher and Geist	70, 000	
Nasser	50, 000 then 60, 000	January 1965
CIA	35, 000	May-June 1967

The withdrawal of Egyptian forces from Yemen is not mentioned in any Arabic study on the war particularly those published by Egyptian military leaders like Fawzy, Murtagi, El Qadi, Wasil and El Hadidy. Heikal was the only one who mentioned this in a series on the war that was published in *Ma' ariv* on November 9, 1973. According to him, "sizable units with armor were returned from Yemen only toward the end of the crisis period."¹¹¹ Yet, it must be noted that Heikal did not say that Egypt withdrew these forces from Yemen to the Sinai. Additionally, he did not specify the goal of withdrawal. The troops could have been on their way back to Egypt. Egypt used to replace its troops regularly by sending fresh troops in replacement of the repatriated ones.¹¹² This is probably why the Arabic literature written by Egyptian military leaders does not refer to that. The repatriated forces did not represent an asset to the forces in the Sinai. What supports this version is an Israeli intelligence officer whom Stein and Tanter interviewed. According to him, the Egyptian command did not deploy the Egyptian forces withdrawn from Yemen to the

¹¹¹ See on Heikal's views: Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crises*, 110; Stein and Tanter, *Rational Decision Making*, 146.

¹¹² On receiving repatriated forces from Yemen on October 22, 1963, Nasser discussed briefly how Egypt used to send and repatriate forces. See:

كلمة الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في السويس في حفل استقبال القوات العائدة من اليمن (22 أكتوبر 1963) على:
<http://nasser.bibalex.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=1060&lang=ar> Accessed December 3, 2011.

east of the Suez Canal. Furthermore, Heikal said that these forces were returned toward the end of the crisis while, according to Israeli military intelligence estimates cited in some accounts on the war, these forces took over Sharm El Sheikh on May 20.¹¹³

In March 1966, the CIA estimated that Egypt had seventy thousand soldiers in Yemen.¹¹⁴ Even in the height of the 1967 crisis, the CIA estimated that Egypt still had thirty-five thousands in Yemen.¹¹⁵ Egypt was as militarily committed to the Yemen theatre as the Sinai. The Egyptian deployment of forces to Yemen started in 1962 in order to support the Yemeni Revolution against the Royalists. Egypt increased its forces gradually in Yemen until they reached, by some accounts, ninety five thousand soldiers.

Before the 1967 war, Nasser declared that his forces were going to remain in Yemen not only to guarantee the success of the revolution but to put an end to the British presence in Aden as well. The CIA estimated in 1965 that Nasser's "scheme of things was to...eliminate [the] British influence from Aden and South Arabia." The same CIA report concluded, "Nasser's several interests in Yemen and the extent of his commitment there make an outright withdrawal highly unlikely in the foreseeable future."¹¹⁶ The intensification of the Egyptian military operations in Yemen was a direct consequence of the failure of the Jeddah agreement of 1965¹¹⁷ between Nasser and Faysal and this was the trend in the Egyptian policies until Egypt decided to withdraw its forces after the 1967 war. In a speech on June 22, 1966, Nasser linked

¹¹³ Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, 217; Stein and Tanter, *Rational Decision Making*, 146.

¹¹⁴ Directorate of Intelligence, "Soviet Military Aid to the United Arab Republic, 1955-66," *Intelligence Report* No. 67-9 (March, 1967): 17.

¹¹⁵ Document 76, *Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

¹¹⁶ Office of National Estimates, "Nasser's Problems and Prospects in Yemen," 1, 5-7.

¹¹⁷ On August 24, 1965, Nasser visited Jeddah and met with Faysal and it was agreed that the Egyptian forces should be withdrawn from Yemen before July 1966.

the withdrawal of his forces from Yemen to the withdrawal of the British forces from Aden scheduled to be in 1968.¹¹⁸ Salah Nasr, Chief of General Intelligence, supports also this version. He said to Emam, "Nasser decided not to accept any policies that entail the withdrawal of his armed forces from Yemen unless the last British soldier had left."¹¹⁹ It is inconceivable to believe that Nasser was ready to withdraw his forces from Yemen leaving the newly borne Republic under the mercy of the Saudi-backed Royalists. This would represent a new blow to his prestige in the Arab world keeping in mind that one of the reasons behind his intervention in Yemen in 1962 was to restore the pride of the Egyptian image after the dissolution of the United Arab Republic in 1961. Even after the 1967 war, Egypt did not withdraw its forces from Yemen completely until November 29, 1967, more than six months after the war, in a temporally close coincidence with the withdrawal of the British forces from Aden.

It is also extremely relevant to note that Israel first conveyed its claim of the Egyptian decision to recall forces from Yemen to the Sinai in a telegram to Eban, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, while he was in Washington.¹²⁰ It will be established later in this paper that the contents of the telegrams Eban received during his stay in Washington were either fabricated or largely exaggerated and that the aim was to extract U.S. security guarantees for Israel.

To sum up, in this chapter the following conclusions could be drawn:

[1] The Syrian support to FATEH was to a large extent a reaction rather than an action toward the Israeli aggressive policies in the DMZs.

¹¹⁸ خطاب الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في الاحتفال بالعيد الرابع عشر للثورة من ميدان الجمهورية (22 يوليو 1966) على: <http://nasser.bibalex.org/Speeches/browser.aspx?SID=1175&lang=ar> Accessed December 3, 2011.

¹¹⁹ Nasr-Emam dialogue in:

عبد الله إمام، صلاح نصر: الثورة-المخابرات-النكسة (القاهرة: دار الخيال للطباعة والنشر والتوزيع، 2002)، 195.

¹²⁰ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 102.

[2] The Sinai was never demilitarized after the 1956 war, and Egypt enjoyed full sovereignty, which enabled it to deploy its forces several times between 1957 and 1967.

[3] There was not an Egyptian decision to withdraw the Egyptian forces fighting in Yemen to the Sinai, and Egypt was militarily committed to Yemen even after the beginning of the crisis with Israel in May-June 1967.

[4] The mutual Arab defense pacts were all defensive and contained no offensive articles.

[5] Though Egypt persistently claimed that the Straits of Tiran were territorial waters, Nasser suggested as a compromise to refer the issue to the International Court of Justice, which denotes his willingness to settle the crisis peacefully.

CHAPTER THREE
HISTORY OF THE ARAB MILITARY PLANNING 1964-1967:
DID THE ARAB COUNTRIES EVER HAVE AN OFFENSIVE
PLAN AGAINST ISRAEL?

After reviewing in the previous chapter the continuous Israeli provocative policies and their role in increasing the tension on the armistice lines, the study analyzes in this chapter both the Unified Arab Command and the Egyptian military plans before and during the crisis to see whether the UAC and Egypt devised offensive military plans against Israel or not.

The Unified Arab Command

In a reaction to the Israeli plans to divert the course of the Jordan River,¹ Nasser, in late 1963, called for an Arab meeting under the umbrella of the Arab League to formulate policies to face the Israeli plans. The summit, inaugurated in January 1964, was the first among three summits for the heads of Arab states before the 1967 war.

During the first summit, the Arab states agreed to establish a unified military command that would enable the Arab countries to hinder Israel from its plans to exploit illegally the Arab waters.²

Israel had alleged that in 1967 it was on the verge of facing collective attack by its neighboring Arab countries through mutual Arab military plans prepared within the Unified Arab Command [UAC]. It stressed by then that the Arab defense pacts concluded prior and during the crisis was a clear indicator on the hostile Arab policies aiming at destroying the Israeli state. Yet, the Israeli allegations in this regard were entirely unfounded. Furthermore, Israel knew very well years prior to the war, from secret channels with official Arab sources, that the UAC was nothing but "an empty shell."³

¹ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 55؛ محمد حسنين هيكل، "طلاس حرب 67" في مع هيكل: تجربة حياة (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية، 27 نوفمبر 2008).

Segev, 1967, 192; Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 203; Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 146.

² The main motive for the Arab countries to establish the UAC was the Israeli plans to divert the Jordan River, which they considered as an Israeli provocation directed against Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. Furthermore, its establishment was an embodiment of the Arab reactive policies. The link between the water issue and the UAC is clear in the resolutions of Arab summits before the war where Arab military preparations within the UAC would defend the Arab counter-diversion projects. However, it is unlikely that the dispute over the water issue was one of the elements that precipitated the war in 1967, though some scholars argue in favor of this. On the last narrative see: Ofira Seliktar, "Turning Water into Fire: The Jordan River as the Hidden Factor in the Six Day War," *MERIA*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Article 4 (2005) on:

<http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/2005/issue2/jv9no2a4.html> Accessed on June 1, 2011.

³ Moshe Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six-Day War: The Crystallization of Arab Strategy and Nasser's Descent to War 1957-1967* (Eastbourne: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 154.

Two important questions assume certain significance in relation to the UAC. First, did the UAC ever consider offensive military plans against Israel between 1964 and 1967? Second, was Israel aware of the obstacles that limited the efficiency of the UAC as an Arab military entity?

Israeli sources claim that Israeli Military Intelligence was in possession of information that the Arab leaders discussed secret plan for the annihilation of Israel in Casablanca in 1965.⁴

In this part of the research, the history and evolution of the UAC are traced, depending primarily on primary archival material of the UAC, in order to refute the Israeli allegation about the offensive approach of the UAC prior to the war.

The main duty of the UAC, established according to the resolution of the first Arab summit in Cairo in 1964, was to confront the Israeli plans to divert the water of the Jordan River. The Arab countries discussed possible military means to confront the Israeli policies and established the Unified Arab Command to coordinate policies in this regard.⁵

In the second Arab summit in 1964, the Arab countries agreed that their military goal would be of two phases.⁶ The ultimate national goal was the "Liberation of Palestine" from Zionist colonialism and the primary immediate goal was the reinforcement of Arab defense.⁷

⁴ This was Yariv's, Israel's Chief of Military Intelligence, estimates to the General staff meeting on December 13, 1965. See: Gluska, *Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 60, 282.

⁵ *قرارات مؤتمر القمة العربي الأول (القاهرة: 13-17 يناير 1964) على:*
http://www.arableagueonline.org/las/arabic/details_ar.jsp?art_id=394&level_id=202 Accessed July 25, 2011.

According to this resolution, the United Arab Republic was in charge of choosing the Commander in Chief of the UAC.

⁶ *قرارات مؤتمر القمة العربي الثاني (الأسكندرية: 5-11 سبتمبر 1964) على:*
http://www.arableagueonline.org/las/arabic/details_ar.jsp?art_id=395&level_id=202 Accessed July 25, 2011.

⁷ Israel's propaganda always exploited the Arab calls to liberate Palestine in order to claim that the Arab states were willing to annihilate the Israeli state. However, taking into consideration the Egyptian

The last Arab summit before the 1967 war was in Casablanca in 1965 hosted by King El Hassan II of Morocco. This summit proved the fiasco that overshadowed the Arab policies in the military field.

In the closed session of the last summit, the Syrian President, Amin El Hafez, inquired how the UAC would "Liberate Palestine." Answering the question, the Commander in Chief, Ali Ali Amer, clarified that he had produced some guidelines in this regard while asserting the fact that these guidelines were nothing but "a theoretical attempt."⁸ Although the problem of Palestine was a prominent subject on the agenda of the Arab summits, Arab states had never formulated offensive military plans against Israel. Nasser always envisaged the Syrian proposals about going to war with Israel as naïve and that they tended to completely ignore the real balance of power between the Arab countries and Israel. His Chief of Intelligence, Salah Nasr, elaborated Nasser's perceptions in the third summit vis-à-vis Israel as follows:⁹

- [1] The capabilities of all the Arab states combined were no match for Israel.
- [2] Nasser advised the Arab countries to dedicate their efforts to training and necessary coordination to catch up with Israel instead of the babbling and threats that were deceiving no one.

Some Israeli scholars, however, argue that Egypt misperceived the Israeli capabilities in 1967 and that Egypt was willing to crush Israel once hostilities began. Yet, in theory, underestimation of adversary capabilities generates military overconfidence and this increases the probability of war. It is true that the estimates of

central role in the Arab world, Nasser calls to liberate Palestine meant the execution of the United Nations resolutions with regard to Palestine and in the forefront was the Partition plan of 1947.

⁸ هيكل، الانفجار، 213-217؛ محمد عبد الفتاح أبو الفضل، *تأملات في ثورات مصر: 23 يوليو 1952* [الجزء الثاني] (القاهرة: الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1995)، 197-198، 206، 208.

⁹ صلاح نصر، *مذكرات صلاح نصر*، 89؛ هيكل، *الإنفجار*، 210-218؛ هيكل، "طلسم حرب 1967" في *مع هيكل: تجربة حياة* (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية، 27 نوفمبر 2008) على:

<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/F20E5568-45D9-410A-AB03-6F882FF11A2B> Accessed January 21, 2012.

the Egyptian intelligence in 1967 were in favor of Egypt when compared to Israel. However, there is a higher probability to believe that Nasser did not share this view, as previously elaborated, unlike his deputy Amer.¹⁰

Furthermore, Nasser's main motive not to strike first against Israel, as will be shown, was the United States probable intervention if Egypt decided to attack Israel and Nasser could not have absolutely mistaken Egypt's capabilities if compared to those of the United States. Even if the high political and military echelons of Egypt believed that they were superior to Israel, which is doubtful, Egypt could not ignore the United States. Nevertheless, Egypt could have ignored these facts if it secured guarantees for Soviet intervention on its side, which was unfounded scenario.

The Joint Defense Council Meetings

The resolutions of the Arab Joint Defense Council [JDC] clearly elaborate the activities of the UAC and provide an important insight on whether or not they included mutual offensive military plans against Israel.

Between 1964 and 1967, the Arab officials concerned held seven sessions of the Joint Defense Council. The examination of the resolutions issued by the JDC reveals the following facts:

[1] The Syrian delegation was the most extreme in its approach towards Israel. In the fourth session,¹¹ Syria suggested that the goal of the reinforcement of Arab forces was to create a springboard to finalize a plan to liquidate Israel completely. The Iraqi delegation, however,¹² objected.¹³

¹⁰ فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 120-121.
¹¹ قرارات الدورة الرابعة (العادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 6-7/9/1964)، 3.
¹² المرجع السابق، 2.

¹³ Mohammed Fawzy testified to the Committee on the Recording of the History of the July 23 Revolution that there was not a unified Arab policy with regard to Israel. He classified the Arab countries with regard to Israel into two categories: the first was the countries willing to destroy Israel [Syria] and the second was the countries willing to stop the expansionist Israeli policies [Egypt]. See: شهادة الفريق محمد فوزي أمام لجنة تسجيل تاريخ ثورة 23 يوليو في صبري، السادات، 374-375.

[2] Lebanon and Jordan were the most reluctant countries with regard to engaging in the activities of the UAC. In the fourth session, Lebanon suggested not to activate the diversionary projects of the Jordan River unless all the military preparations were completed.¹⁴ Furthermore, in the fifth session, Lebanon decided that it was not going to allow the deployment of Arab forces on its territory without a prior consent from both the Executive and Legislative Authorities [Decision 4].¹⁵

[3] The deployment of Iraqi and Saudi forces in the Jordanian territories was proposed in the fifth session but was referred in the same session to the next meeting of the Council of Prime Ministers of the Arab states [Decision 4].¹⁶ In the sixth session, both Lebanon and Jordan expressed their reservation on the deployment of Arab forces in their territories [Decision 3, Article 4].¹⁷

[4] In the seventh session, Lebanon and Jordan also rejected the decision taken by the Council for compulsory conscription of Palestinians in Arab states in order to strengthen the Palestine Liberation Army [PLA] [Decision 1, Article 1, 3rd point].¹⁸

[5] In the ninth session, a decision was taken to deploy Iraqi and Saudi forces in the Jordanian territories within two months [Decision 8]. This decision was taken after the famous Israeli raid on the Samu' village in the West Bank. The decision was a defensive move in light of the last Israeli aggression.¹⁹

[6] In the seventh session,²⁰ the Commander in Chief proposed a plan²¹ and referred it to the Council of the Kings and Presidents of the Arab League countries [Decision 5].

¹⁴قرارات الدورة الرابعة لمجلس الدفاع المشترك، 3.

¹⁵قرارات الدورة الخامسة (العادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 1965/1/10-9)، 2.

¹⁶المرجع السابق.

¹⁷قرارات الدورة السادسة (غير العادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 1965 /5/30-26)، 3.

¹⁸قرارات الدورة السابعة (غير العادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (الدار البيضاء: 1965/9/11)، 4 و 5.

¹⁹قرارات الدورة التاسعة (الغير عادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 1966/12/10-7)، 3.

²⁰قرارات الدورة السابعة لمجلس الدفاع المشترك، 6.

²¹ It is worth noting that the term "Annihilation of Israel" was usually used by the Syrian regime even before the rise of the left wing of the ruling Ba'ath party in Syria in 1966. The resolutions of the JDC show the Syrian determination to speak about the "Annihilation of Israel." Amer, the Commander in Chief of the UAC, in his reports to the Arab summits or to the JDC preferred mostly to use the term

This was the "theoretical attempt" of Amer, which was presented in the closed session of the Arab summit in Casablanca in 1965. However, Amer's report did not contain any offensive plans against Israel. The report consisted of four sections. The first was about defining the total size of forces each Arab country should provide to the UAC. The second and third sections detailed the methods of providing funds for these forces.²² The fourth section was about the expenses of establishment and management of the aforementioned military formations. There was no mention of any military plans in his report. It was only about reinforcing the existing Arab forces. Fawzy testified that they ratified the proposed plan only in its financial form. For this to happen, they established a "support fund" within the UAC.²³

[7] In the sixth session, a suggestion was raised to modify the Joint Defense and Economic Co-operation Treaty of 1950, however, it was rejected [Decision 2, Article 1].²⁴

The UAC itself was still functioning under the umbrella of the 1950 agreement among the Arab countries, which was nothing more than a defensive agreement without any offensive connotations.

[8] Decisions taken in the last three sessions of the UAC before the 1967 war give a clear impression about the effect of the inter-Arab rivalries on the UAC and how the latter was negatively affected. Furthermore, it was apparent in these sessions that the

"Liberation of Palestine." This was because, as an Egyptian, he supported Nasser's vision in this regard which differentiated completely between the "Elimination of Israel" and the "Liberation of Palestine" or because he was well aware of the real Arab capabilities and the balance of power of the two sides. For the Egyptian and Syrian visions see: National Intelligence Estimate "The Arab-Israeli Dispute: Current Phase," *Central Intelligence Agency*, NIE No. 30-67 (April 13, 1967): 3-4 [Annex II]; *قرارات الدورة الرابعة لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 6-7 سبتمبر 1964)*, 2-3.

For Amer's vision see:

مشروع قرارات مؤتمر الملوك والرؤساء الثالث المنعقد في الدار البيضاء في سبتمبر 1965 فيما يختص بالشؤون العسكرية في هيكل، *الانفجار*، 214؛ تقرير القائد العام للقيادة العربية الموحدة المرفوع لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 11 مارس 1967).

²² Three Arab countries were to receive funds from other League members. They were Jordan, Syria and Lebanon.

²³ شهادة الفريق محمد فوزي في صبري، السادات، 376.

²⁴ *قرارات الدورة السادسة لمجلس الدفاع المشترك*، 1.

Arab countries did not fulfill their financial commitments to the UAC. The JDC in its tenth session, called for the Arab countries to fulfill their financial obligations before July 1, 1967 [Decision 2, Section 1].²⁵

[9] The resolutions of the ninth session formulated rules of engagement in case of an Arab-Israeli military confrontation.²⁶ The atmosphere in the Arab region during the time was tense after the Israeli raid on the Samu' village. This could be a sufficient explanation for the formulation, for the first time in the meetings of the JDC, of military instructions to deal with any possible future confrontation with Israel. Nevertheless, these military instructions were nothing but directives in order to confront any further Israeli aggression. The resolutions devised three hypothetical conditions of possible military confrontations with Israel none of which was offensive in nature. They were all defensive to face any further Israeli aggression, limited or comprehensive, against any Arab country by land, air or at sea [Decision 9].²⁷

In late 1966, the UAC faced a practical test that proved completely how futile the Arab military preparations were. In a reaction to a Palestinian guerilla activity on the Israeli side of borders with the Jordanian West Bank, Israel decided to launch a reprisal attack against the Samu' village. The Israeli reprisal attack ignited a heated debate and a criticism for the UAC by Wasfi El Tal, then Jordanian Prime Minister. The incident came after the UAC and JDC adopted, according to Israel, offensive military plans against Israel. Surprisingly, these plans, if they did exist, were never

²⁵قرارات الدورة العاشرة (العادية) لمجلس الدفاع المشترك (القاهرة: 11-14/3/1967)، 1.

²⁶قرارات الدورة التاسعة لمجلس الدفاع المشترك، 5-6.

²⁷ The three scenarios were as follows: [1] An Israeli raid limited in force and in time whether by land, air or sea without an Israeli intention to occupy Arab territories; [2] An intensified Israeli bombardment on vital targets, strategic capabilities or armed forces of any Arab country; and, [3] A comprehensive military attack on any Arab country

In the first scenario, the defender country should depend on its own capabilities to counter the Israeli raid and would notify the UAC in order to react according to the development of the situation on the ground. In the latter two scenarios, which were rather broad in magnitude than the first one, the commander of the UAC was entitled to issue orders to the other Arab countries to react against the Israeli aggression. See: المرجع السابق

activated despite the relatively wide magnitude of the Israeli operation.²⁸ In a press conference after the incident, El Tal heavily attacked the UAC for what he considered a dereliction in confronting the Israeli aggression. He enumerated the Jordanian perception of the shortcomings of the command during the Israeli attack as follows:²⁹

First, the battle was a test for the UAC.

Second, the Jordanian forces operated without air cover, which was the responsibility of UAR [Egypt] in the theatre southern of Jerusalem.

Third, the other Arab countries were hesitant to launch an attack against Israel on their respective fronts, which might have lessened the military pressure on the Jordanian front.

Fourth, the UAC was responsible for issuing orders for the Arab forces to enter Jordanian territories in case of a wide scale confrontation with Israel.

In a response to the Jordanian accusations, Abdul Munim Riad, then Chief of Staff of the UAC, sent a message to the Secretary General of the Arab League in which he refuted the Jordanian allegations and held Jordan responsible for the outcome of the incident due to its negligence of the previous recommendations of the UAC. He confronted what El Tal announced in his press conference and elaborated the Jordanian behavior towards the UAC since its establishment as follows:

[1] Jordan always refused the placement of Arab air forces on its territories.

[2] With regard to the Samu' aggression, it was the sole responsibility of Jordan to defend itself as long as Israel did not occupy Jordanian territories.

²⁸ It was the biggest operation of the IDF since the Suez War. See: Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 223.

²⁹ Abdul Munim Riad summarized them in his message to the Secretary General of the Arab League.

See:

نص رسالة الفريق عبد المنعم رياض القائد العام للقيادة العربية الموحدة بالنيابة، إلى السيد عبد الخالق حسونة، الأمين العام لجامعة الدول العربية (القاهرة: 22 نوفمبر 1966).

[3] It was never the responsibility of the UAR [Egypt] to provide air coverage for Jordan.

[4] Jordan refused the entry of Saudi and Iraqi forces to its territories.³⁰

The Samu' aggression was a good example on the irrelevance of the UAC vis-a-vis Israel, even on the defensive level. It was never possible, considering the state of mistrust and rivalries among the Arab countries, to devise plans not only on the offensive level but also on the defensive one.³¹

Yet, if this really was the state of the command, how could Israel have knowledge of this? Building on the public statements of Arab countries and resolutions of the Arab summits, Israel might have considered the possibility that the Arab statements might materialize into offensive plans against it.

However, historical scrutiny refutes completely this assumption and proves in an ironclad manner, that Israel was well aware of the real condition of the UAC and that it did not represent a threat to Israeli security.

Did Israel Know about the Real Status of the UAC?

Tracing the Jordanian-Israeli relations³² provides a base to confront the alleged Israeli fears from the command. In 1963, King Hussein of Jordan started secret meetings with an Israeli emissary, Ya'acov Herzog, Director of the Israeli Prime Minister's Office through the intermediary of Hussein's Jewish physician in London. Before the war of 1967, King Hussein held three meetings with Herzog. He also met

³⁰ In one case, Riad mentioned that the Iraqi forces were once mobilized on the Jordanian borders and Jordan denied them permission to enter, in accordance with the decisions of the UAC, whereas they stayed on the borders for more than one year and finally were mobilized again to their base in Iraq.

³¹ The impact of the Samu' aggression was extreme on King Hussein. He believed the Israeli aggression was expressive of the Israel's ambitions to occupy the West Bank. Though he received a telegram from Johnson in which Johnson expressed the United States willingness to preserve the territorial integrity of Jordan, his doubts of the Israeli policies remained insistent. See:

Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 229 ;996-995 ،654 ،هيكل، الانفجار،

³² The clandestine meetings between Jordan and Israel began in 1960 on the military level. Later on, clandestine meetings on the political level between the King himself and Ya'acov Herzog started in 1963.

with Golda Meir the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs.³³ The meetings discussed the bilateral concerns of both sides including the Arab and Israeli diversionary projects of the Jordan River. Hussein-Herzog's first meeting was in London on September 24, 1963. They considered in the meeting a possible cooperation in the security field.³⁴ Their second meeting was on May 2, 1964 just few months after the first Arab summit in Cairo, January 1964. The dispute over the Jordan River was the principal issue in discussion. The third meeting was on December 19, 1964 few months after the second Arab summit in Alexandria, September 1964. In this meeting, Herzog raised the issue of the UAC and expressed the Israeli concern that the UAC opened up possibilities for gradual subversion on the part of the Egyptians.³⁵ To dispel the Israeli fears Hussein said, "I wish to assure you that only *defensive plans* have been brought before the UAC. No plans for *offensive action* have been considered." When Herzog expressed his opinion that Nasser wanted the destruction of Israel, Hussein felt, based on his private talks with Nasser, that Nasser would ultimately want a settlement.³⁶

³³ Three categories of literature exist: [1] Literature on the meetings and their significance with more emphasis on the issue of the Jordan River and the diversionary projects; [2] Literature that denotes the major topics of discussion in the meetings like security and intelligence cooperation; and, [3] Literature that includes complete details on the meetings and the issues of significance like the Arab summits, the UAC and the joint Arab military plans. By far, the most important category is the third and Avi Shlaim's study on King Hussein assumes the forefront among them.

For the first category see: Yehuda Lukacs, *Israel, Jordan and the Peace Process* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 4; Adam Garfinkle, *Israel and Jordan in the Shadow of War: Functional Ties and Futile Diplomacy in a Small Place* (Great Britain: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992), 38-43, 54-55, 70. For the second category see: Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall, Israel and the Arab World* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 226-227, 261, 262.

For the third category see: Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 198, 212-214.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ It is worth noting that even when speaking on Arab joint military plans within the UAC, Israel's main concern was Egypt, which confirms the Israeli perception of the Egyptian central position in any future military confrontation with the Arabs. See: Ibid, 212.

³⁶ King Hussein signed a Joint Defense Treaty with Nasser on May 30, 1967. Through this treaty, the Jordanian army was put under Egyptian command. Before the war, Egypt sent 800 commandos to Jordan to sneak from the West Bank into Israel should Israel started the war. Though Hussein was adamantly refusing to station foreign troops in Jordan, he decided to change his policy after the Israeli aggression on the Samu' village in the West Bank in 1966. In Hussein-Herzog's third meeting, Hussein assured Herzog that he would not agree to station foreign [Arab] troops in Jordan. However, he changed his position after the Samu' aggression. See: Ibid, 213-214, 230; 901، *هيكل، الانفجار*،

Immediately after the third Arab summit in Casablanca, 13-17 September, 1965, King Hussein flew to Paris where he met secretly with the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Golda Meir. In this meeting, Meir raised two issues, the Jordan River and the guerilla operations of FATEH.³⁷

Samir A. Mutawi, former Jordanian Minister of Information, retrospectively asserted that Shlaim's information about Hussein-Herzog/Hussein-Meir meetings was true.³⁸

Arab summits, as was shown, came as a reaction to the Israeli diversionary projects of the Jordan River. The Arab League established the UAC as a military tool to confront the Israeli projects to divert the Jordan River water outside the River Basin. Its establishment was an indicator of the Arab reactive, not proactive, policies against Israel. Furthermore, the divisions and rivalries among the Arab countries were the major obstacle that hindered the evolution of joint Arab military planning. Despite the Arab harsh rhetoric against Israel, the latter was in possession of good knowledge about the weakness of the UAC and hence the Israeli allegations about the UAC preparedness to annihilate Israel were unfounded. In addition to this, Arab countries had never drafted offensive military plans against Israel. Not only was Israel aware of the reality of the UAC but it also possessed information about its defensive plans.

Egyptian Military Planning

A lot of debate and controversies still surround the nature of the Egyptian plans in 1967. Some of the Israeli writings on the war argue that the Egyptian plans

³⁷ Ibid, 220.

³⁸ He added that Shlaim was among three scholars that based their research about King Hussein on Jordanian archival materials. The other two are Professor Nigel Ashton and James Lunt. See: سمير مطاوع، "هيكل ومصيدة التاريخ التي نصبها لنفسه"، *عمون* (2 أبريل 2009) على: <http://www.ammonnews.net/article.aspx?articleNO=36473> Accessed January 17, 2012.

were offensive and Israel was obliged to go to war in self-defense.³⁹ However, in revisiting the available writings on the Egyptian plan and from people who participated in formulating it, the conclusion is very different.

States usually draft military plans in accordance with and not in separation from its entire political strategy. Military plans, furthermore, should be commensurate with the capabilities of the country politically, economically, and militarily in order to provide for the necessary elements for success.

Each state has the ultimate right to draft military plans, whether offensive or defensive, for whatever reasons it envisages in order to protect its security.⁴⁰ Following this, these plans might be activated in times of crises and menace where military means become one of the available options to confront a threat.

Building on the former assumptions, both Israel and Egypt had the absolute right to prepare military plans suitable for defending their security as long as they come in accordance with the principle of self-defense.⁴¹

The Original Qahir

On the Egyptian level, the Casablanca Arab summit of 1965 was a major proof of the un-preparedness of the Arab countries in the military field. The political atmosphere in the Arab world at the time represented an impediment against the Unified Arab Command [UAC]. The Arab states failed to stand up to their obligations

³⁹ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 56-66; Gat, "Nasser and the Six-Day war," 608-635; Ginor and Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona*, 68-77; Tal, *National Security*, 136.

On the Arab aggression against Israel in 1967 in popular readership see:

David Meir-Levi, *Big Lies: Demolishing the Myths of the Propaganda War against Israel* (Los Angeles: Centre for Study of Popular Culture, 2005), 24.

⁴⁰ To elaborate further on this, in article number one of the Israel-Syria Armistice Agreement of 1949, distinction was made clear between taking aggressive actions by the armed forces of the parties concerned against each other and normal staff planning as generally practiced in military organizations. Therefore, each country has the absolute right to prepare its military plans against whatever enemy this country may envisage.

⁴¹ On this, Abdul Hamid El Degheidy, Chief of the Egyptian Air Force in the Sinai during the crisis says, "All countries have to prepare a defensive plan and an offensive plan in peace time and before war and to prepare theatre of operations to carry out both plans." See:

مذكرات اللواء عبد الحميد الدغدي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 58.

within the UAC, according to the resolutions of the Arab summits, and Israel was already aware, as demonstrated previously, of its weakness.

Based on the former perceptions, Egypt decided to assume its own path of military planning depending only on Egyptian capabilities on the assumption that the battle would be only on the Egyptian front without support from what was perceived as "the Eastern Front."

Pro-Israeli writings usually depict the 1967 war as if it was a war between Israel from one side and the entire Arab countries from the other.⁴²

Nasser always believed that the best defense for Egypt must come within a mutual Arab framework. In this framework, Egypt, Syria and Jordan had to bear the main responsibility in case of any military action against Israel.⁴³ Whereas, Syria was the best location through which Arab countries could launch air strikes against Israel, Jordan was the best place from which ground and armored forces could launch an offensive and penetrate through Israeli territory towards the Mediterranean.

However, after Casablanca Summit, Nasser issued orders to the Egyptian military command to devise a plan to defend Egypt against any future Israeli attack depending only upon Egyptian self-capabilities without even considering the slightest possibility of a unified Arab military action against Israel.⁴⁴ In 1966, the Egyptian command drafted a plan code-named Qahir. It was the outcome of an evolutionary

⁴²In his book, Flynn examines the 1967 war under the following title, "Being Everywhere at Once: Israel Defeats the Arab League, 1967." Tal also believes that the entire Arab nation was ready for battle with Israel. See: Flynn, *First Strike*, 183-202; Tal, *National Security*, 137; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 30; Allon, *The making of Israeli Army*, 90.

⁴³محمد حسنين هيكل، "طلاسم حرب 67 والخطة قاهر" في مع هيكل: تجربة حياة (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية: 14 مايو 2009) على: <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/31FE3635-9A87-4512-990E-4EE3EE19AE6C> Accessed January 7, 2012

In an interview in 1966, Nasser said that any attack against Israel from the south "from Egypt" was not possible from a military point of view. He added that the Arab countries could attack Israel only from the territory of Jordan and Syria. See: Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, 44

⁴⁴ According to Heikal, Nasser instructed the military command to devise the plan after he came back from the third Arab summit in Casablanca in September 1965. Fawzy testified that the plan was devised in December 1965. See:

هيكل، "طلاسم حرب 67 والخطة قاهر." شهادة الفريق محمد فوزي في صبري، السادات، 389.

series of Egyptian plans,⁴⁵ which the military command, began drafting from the beginning of the 1960s.

One of the fixed characteristics of these plans was its defensive not offensive approach.⁴⁶

According to the plan,⁴⁷ the Egyptian strategic deployment in the Sinai was essentially defensive and the essence of the plan was a tactic known as "mobile defense."⁴⁸ The ultimate goal of the plan was to prevent IDF from penetrating deep in the heart of the Sinai and, then, to destroy the attacking Israeli forces before they reach the Suez Canal as a prelude to launch an Egyptian counter-attack. Following the destruction of the attacking Israeli forces, only then could the command authorize an Egyptian [counter] offensive.⁴⁹

Moreover, in accordance with the Egyptian defensive orientation, Egypt was determined to receive the Israeli first strike in both land and air.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ In 1960 and 1961, there was a plan code-named [Saroukh] or Rocket and on December 12, 1962, there was another plan code-named [Zafer] or Victor, which witnessed modifications eight times between March 8, 1963 and November 14, 1964 in accordance with changes in the movement and deployment of the Egyptian troops in Yemen. However, in June 6, 1966, another plan code-named [Qahir] or Conqueror existed. Amer ratified in its final form on December 1, 1966.

فتحي، مصر من الثورة إلى النكسة، 569 [هوامش الفصل السادس، 114].

⁴⁶ On the defensive nature of the Egyptian plans see:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 99-100؛ الجمسي، منكرات الجمسي، 39 و58؛ حديث الفريق أنور القاضي لرئيس تحرير مجلة آخر ساعة بمناسبة مرور 21 عاما على حرب يونيو 1967 (8 يونيو 1988) في الجمسي، منكرات الجمسي، 63.

⁴⁷ On the details of the plan see:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 99-102؛ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 100-109؛ هيكل، "طلاسم 67 والخطة قاهر."

⁴⁸ DoD Dictionary defines mobile defense as "defense of an area or position in which maneuver is used with organization of fire and utilization of terrain to seize the initiative from the enemy."

⁴⁹ DoD Dictionary defines Counter-offensive as "a large scale offensive undertaken by a defending force [Egypt] to seize the initiative from the attacking force [Israel]." A counter-attack is "attack by part or all of a defending force [Egypt] against an enemy attacking force [Israel]." A counter-move is "an operation undertaken to or in anticipation of a move by the enemy." The following should be noted: [1] The Egyptian moves, according to the Egyptian plan, would always start from defense; and, [2] Counter-offensive or counter-attack strategy meant that Egypt would respond to an Israeli attack against Egypt or Syria and that the initiative to strike first was in Israel's hand while offensive strategy meant an Egyptian first strike.

⁵⁰ Abdul Mohsen Murtagi, Commander of the Egyptian Ground Forces, mentioned in his memoirs that Egypt was planning to gain the initiative in the air by striking against the IAF but Nasser rejected the plan as it interfered with his defensive strategy. To confirm this, Abdul Hamid El Degheidy, Commander of the Egyptian Air Force in Sinai, asserted that the Egyptian plan in the air was also defensive, "defensive Qahir in the air" as he said. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 100؛ مذكرات الفريق أول عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 192؛ مذكرات اللواء عبد الحميد الدغدي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 76.

However, critics of the Egyptian strategy towards Israel during the crisis hint that the Egyptian command did not implement the plan in its ratified form in 1966 and that it witnessed major adjustments in the deployment of forces in 1967, which practically transformed it from a defensive to offensive plan. Indeed, Qahir witnessed several modifications during the crisis due to political developments particularly the complete evacuation of UNEF forces from their posts. As will be shown in the next section, while these modifications seriously distorted the plan and negatively affected its coherence, they never transformed its defensive essence.

The Modified Qahir

When the Egyptian command issued its directives to mobilize the Egyptian army to the Sinai, Egyptian forces were supposed to mobilize according to Qahir. However, when the United Nations Secretary General did not accept to redeploy UNEF and insisted on their withdrawal, the Egyptian command faced a new situation that made the modification of its plan inevitable. The Original Qahir plan did not assign sizable forces to defend Sharm El Sheikh at the entrance of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Egyptian decision makers always believed that in case of mobilization of the Egyptian army for any reason, UNEF would still be functioning in their posts at Sharm El Sheikh. This scenario happened before in 1960 when the Egyptian command mobilized Egyptian forces in the Sinai close to the Israeli borders without obstructing the Israeli navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba. Yet, in 1967, a new situation emerged due to the complete evacuation of UNEF posts along the entire borders of Egypt with mandatory Palestine extending from Rafah to Eilat in addition to the Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh. Once the Egyptian request was enforced, the Egyptian military had to carry out the first modification of Original Qahir by assigning troops to replace UNEF forces evacuating Sharm El Sheikh. On May 18, Mohamed Fawzy,

the Egyptian Chief of Staff, expressed his refusal of the new modification of the plan. He told Amer that it was better not to close the Gulf because of the unavailability of forces, adding that the control of the eastern and middle zones of the Sinai was enough, from a military point of view, to protect Sharm El Sheikh itself. The Egyptian command created a new task force to be stationed at Sharm El Sheikh by withdrawing units from Egyptian forces already deployed in the Sinai.⁵¹

Following this line, Amer began to issue new orders to reinforce the defenses of the Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh itself. The new modifications were the result of two factors.

The first was Nasser's belief that that Egypt should defend Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh and the reason behind this was political not military.⁵² Although he was aware that the Strip was difficult to defend from a military point of view, he decided to reinforce the defenses of Rafah.⁵³ Nasser believed that Israel would not respond to the blockade with an all-out war and believed that Israel's reaction would be limited against either the Gaza Strip or Sharm El Sheikh.⁵⁴ During the crisis, Rabin indeed considered a limited operation against the Gaza Strip but Dayan refused it⁵⁵ and finally, they decided to launch a comprehensive attack.

⁵¹ In the Original Qahir, the Fourth Infantry Brigade was responsible for the defense of Sharm El Sheikh. But when Egypt terminated UNEF presence, the military command decided to dispatch military formations from all branches of the army, not only infantry, to deter Israel against advancing to occupy Sharm El Sheikh in a reaction to the blockade. See:

فوزي، المرجع السابق، 78-79 و 106؛ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 85 و 104؛ الجسمي، مذكرات الجسمي، 46.

⁵² مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي يروي الحقائق، 79؛ نصر، مذكرات صلاح نصر، 224.

⁵³ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 104؛ مرتجي، المرجع السابق، 71؛ شهادة الفريق أنور القاضي في مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967، 206-207.

⁵⁴ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 75; 91 و 71 و المرجع السابق، 554؛ مرتجي، المرجع السابق، 71 و 91.

⁵⁵ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 81, 90; Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 149-151; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 78-79.

The second was the belief of the Egyptian command that the expected Israeli attack would be from the south, and hence it decided to reinforce the southern sector of the Egyptian borders to meet that possibility.⁵⁶

Unlike the Original Qahir, the inclusion of the Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh in the defensive lines of the plan resulted in the following:⁵⁷

[1] It elongated the lines of defense on the Israeli-Egyptian borders from the Gaza Strip in the north to Sharm El Sheikh in the south.

[2] It shifted the main duty of the Egyptian forces from the middle of the Sinai to its south, which negatively affected the defense of other areas including the strategic passes of the Sinai.⁵⁸

[3] It created new lines of defense that moved the Egyptian original lines of defense, according to Original Qahir, tens of kilometers to the east.⁵⁹

The modifications the plan suffered during the crisis did not aim at transforming the defensive nature of the plan into an offensive one.⁶⁰ Rather, they came as reaction to either political necessities or false intelligence information.

Israeli and western sources claim that Israel did capture Egyptian documents after it invaded the Sinai that included operational instructions to launch offensive operations

⁵⁶ In fact, the belief of the Egyptian command that the Israeli attack was coming from the south came as a response to an Israeli deception plan. Israel through this plan managed to deceive the Egyptian command and made them believe that the expected Israeli attack would come from the south. Therefore, Israel was well aware that the Egyptian deployment on the southern part of borders was to meet the purported Israeli attack. See: Michael Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis: Diplomats and Demagogues behind the Six-day War* (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 202; Barton Whaley, *Stratagem: Deception and Surprise in War* (Norwood: Artech House, 2007), 505-507; Oren, *Ibid*, 153. See also:

واصل، من مذكرات ونكريات الفريق عبد المنعم واصل، 106-107؛ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 105؛ علي، مشاوير العمر، 213 و 214؛ مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي يروي الحقائق، 85؛ نصر، مذكرات صلاح نصر، 266.
⁵⁷ مذكرات الفريق أنور القاضي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 263.
⁵⁸ المجدوب، هزيمة يونيو حقائق وأسرار، 108؛ مذكرات الفريق عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 173.
⁵⁹ مذكرات الفريق عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في المرجع السابق، 159 و 173.

⁶⁰ Hammel believes that Nasser refused to abandon Gaza because he thought he would be the one to strike first. He adds that the Egyptian army in the Sinai was preparing to attack Israel at a time of Nasser's choosing. Allon described Egyptian forces in the Sinai as offensive "...tantamount to the first phase of an attack." See: Eric Hammel, *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the 1967 Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 146; Allon, *The Making of Israeli Army*, 91, 93.

against Israel. While this might be true, these sources never clarified the details of these instructions.⁶¹

The Egyptian military command might have issued orders to launch offensive operations against Israel, but the political leadership did not authorize them. In that case, they were no different from any Israeli operational steps taken in the field during the crisis without Eshkol's authorization.

The Number of the Deployed Egyptian Forces

How many forces did Egypt deploy to the Sinai in May-June 1967? One of the traditional arguments about the 1967 war is that the Arab countries besieged Israel by forces that exceeded Israel's forces in both men and gear. Traditionally, writers on 1967 war tend to hold comparisons between Israeli forces and the Arab combined forces ignoring that it was practically inconceivable for the Arab countries to combine their forces in a battle against Israel.⁶²

The Arab expeditionary forces⁶³ that were sent during the crisis to Sinai were few in number, symbolic in fact, and all under Egyptian command and, accordingly, would not participate in any offensive operations as long as Egypt itself, the commanding state, assumed defensive approach.

The following table [Table No. 2] illustrates the number of Egyptian troops deployed to the Sinai as mentioned in Egyptian and foreign sources on the war:⁶⁴

⁶¹ Like the date of the execution, the type of the plan, offensive from the beginning or counter-offensive...etc.

⁶² Oren, *Six Days of War*, 164; Michael Howard and Robert Hunter, "Israel and the Arab World: The Crisis of 1967," in *The Evolution of Strategic Thought: Classic Adelphi Papers* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 146; Flynn, *First Strike*, 183-202.

⁶³ Egypt accepted symbolic number of forces from other Arab countries like Kuwait and Algeria. See: محضر اجتماع السيد أليكسي كوسيجين رئيس الوزراء السوفياتي والسيد شمس بدران وزير الحربية (موسكو: 26 مايو 1967).

⁶⁴ George Walter Gawrych, *The Albatross of Decisive Victory: War and Policy Between Egypt and Israel in 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli Wars* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2000), 21; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 137; 128; حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 156؛ مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي بروي الحقائق، 179; Herzog, *The Arab Israeli Wars*, 149; Peter Young, *The Israeli Campaign 1967* (London: William Kimber, 1967), 99; Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 112; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 99; Randolph S. Churchill and Winston S. Churchill Jr., *The Six-Day War* (UK:

Source	Number of troops
Gawrych and Oren	130, 000
Murtagi and Hamroush	82, 000
Creveld	100, 000
Herzog	100, 000
Bregman	100, 000
Kimche and Bawley	100, 000
Young	100, 000
O'balance	90, 000
Churchill	90, 000-100, 000

In 1967, Egypt, according to Murtagi, had to mobilize approximately one hundred and twenty five thousand soldiers to the Sinai.⁶⁵ According to Fawzy and El Gamasy,⁶⁶ Egypt lost seventeen percent⁶⁷ of the ground forces deployed to the Sinai as a result of the 1967 war. They added that between 1968 and 1971, Egypt, after contacting Israel and the Red Cross, estimated that it lost 9, 800 soldiers in the Sinai. Consequently,⁶⁸ Egypt did not deploy to Sinai more than 57, 647 soldiers.

During the crisis, Israeli Military Intelligence used to exaggerate numbers of Egyptian soldiers in the Sinai in order to attract sympathy. While the French archives estimated that Egypt until May 23 deployed five divisions to the Sinai, which means that Egypt deployed fifty-five thousand, Israeli Military Intelligence estimated the number of Egyptian forces in the Sinai as seventy thousand.⁶⁹ According to

Heinmann Book, 1967), 71. Roland Popp notes that the source of numbers mentioned in the first books written on the war was the Israeli Ministry of Defense. See: Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly," 300.

⁶⁵ Adding to those sixty thousand soldiers in Yemen would make the total number of the Egyptian army one hundred and eighty thousand in 1967. This number matches what David Wood of the Institute for Strategic Studies [ISS] announced to the press in June 6 and 7. It also matches what was said by Egyptian military commanders that one third of the Egyptian army was in Yemen [60, 000 out of 180, 000]. See: Howard and Hunter, "Israel and the Arab World," 192; Young, *Ibid*, 49.

⁶⁶ مذكرات الفريق أول محمد فوزي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية، 425: الجسمي، مذكرات الجسمي، 123.

⁶⁷ In this paper, this formula is called "Popp's Formula."

⁶⁸ The number of soldiers deployed would equal the result of $100 * 9800 / 17 = 57647$.

⁶⁹ Document 204, *Note De La Sous-Direction Du Levant: Crise Israelo-Arabe* (Paris: 23 Mai, 1967) [Annex IV]; Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 110.

O'Ballance, on May 21, Rabin told the Israeli cabinet that Egypt deployed eighty thousand to the Sinai.⁷⁰

On May 26, General Wheeler, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, in a meeting with President Johnson estimated the number of Egyptian forces deployed to the Sinai as "some 50, 000 troops." The CIA repeated the same estimates also on May 26 in a document titled "Military Capabilities of Israel and the Arab States."⁷¹

Literature on the war traditionally mentions that Egypt deployed seven divisions to the Sinai, which included one hundred thousand soldiers.⁷² This means that each division was comprised of 14, 285 soldiers.

However, one of these divisions was the 20th Palestinian Division [PLA], a divisional force, which was stationed in the Gaza Strip. The PLA was established in the Gaza Strip as a guerilla force in 1965. Ahmed El Shuqairy, Chairman of the PLO, announced on May 21, 1967 that the PLA was eight thousand strong. However, O'Ballance believes that El Shuqairy estimate "...is suspect and was considered greatly exaggerated."⁷³ Oren estimates the number of PLA forces in Gaza as ten thousand.⁷⁴

The PLA in fact lacked 40% of its personnel and 35% of its gear⁷⁵ leaving approximately six thousands and six hundred soldiers in Gaza. Although Oren, in his study, claims that the PLA was equipped with heavy weapons including tanks, Fawzy,

⁷⁰ O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 26.

⁷¹ Document 72, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 76, *Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

⁷² Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis*, 201; Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six-Days War*, 52; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 100; Kenneth Pollack, "Airpower in the Six-Day War," *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (June 2005): 475.

⁷³ O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 27.

⁷⁴ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 63.

⁷⁵ صايغ، *الحركة الوطنية الفلسطينية*، 189-190.

the Egyptian Chief of Staff, states that the tank support of the PLA, ten Sherman tanks, was stationed in El Arish in the Sinai and not in the Gaza Strip.⁷⁶

Accordingly, the PLA as a guerilla force should be excluded when calculating the Egyptian forces deployed to the Sinai in 1967. Following this, Egypt in effect only deployed six divisions to the Sinai.

The Egyptian division was comprised of eleven thousand soldiers in 1967.⁷⁷ Accordingly, Egypt deployed only sixty-six thousand soldiers. However, if consideration is given to Hammel's size of division, Egypt deployed some seventy thousand and eight hundred soldiers to the Sinai.

On June 1, Meir Amit, Chief of Mossad, in a meeting with McNamara, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, estimated that Egypt deployed six divisions to the Sinai.⁷⁸ Egypt, accordingly, deployed sixty-six thousand soldiers.

The Egyptian Fact Finding Mission on the Causes of the 1967 Defeat estimated in its report the shortage of soldiers in the ground forces as forty-five percent. Assuming that the total number of Egyptian forces in 1967 was one hundred and thirty thousand soldiers, Egypt deployed to the Sinai approximately seventy-one thousand and five hundred soldiers.⁷⁹

In his testimony to the Committee on the Recording of the History of July 23 Revolution, Murtagi asserted that Egypt had to withdraw seventeen brigades from the Sinai during the war.⁸⁰ The Egyptian Brigade was comprised approximately of four

⁷⁶ فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 101.

⁷⁷ Hammel, however, estimates the number of soldiers in the Egyptian Division between 11800 in Infantry and Mechanized Infantry Divisions and 11200 in Armored Divisions. To make them reach one hundred thousand soldiers; Oren estimates the number of Egyptian soldiers in each division as fifteen thousands. See: Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 141-142; 114, *الحديدي، شاهد على حرب 1967*; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 63.

⁷⁸ Document 124, *Memorandum for the Record: Conversation between Major General Meir Amit and Secretary McNamara* (Washington: June 1, 1967) [Annex II].

⁷⁹ See the conclusion of the mission in: 373 فتحي، مصر من الثورة إلى النكسة، *شهادة الفريق عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967*، 187.

thousand soldiers in 1967. Accordingly, Egypt mobilized sixty-eight thousand soldiers to the Sinai.

Yet, what is still unknown is the number of troops Israel assigned to its southern front with Egypt.⁸¹ Certainly, one cannot believe Rabinovic when he estimates the number of Israeli forces deployed to the south as thirty-five thousand soldiers facing one hundred and thirty thousand Egyptian soldiers, keeping in mind that Israel, according to Rabin, demobilized thirty thousand of its troops in the south on May 24.⁸²

Segev, Pollack and Riad estimate the number of Israeli troops in the south, on Egypt's borders, as seventy thousand.⁸³

The number of Egyptian forces deployed to the Sinai, as previously elaborated, varies according to sources. However, whatever the true number of forces deployed to the Sinai, it was certainly much less than one hundred thousand. This study estimates the number of Egyptian forces deployed to the Sinai in 1967 as between sixty-six and seventy-two thousands, which makes them approximately equal in number to the Israeli troops.

The following table [Table No. 3] illustrates possible numbers of Egyptian forces deployed to the Sinai based on Fawzy and El Gamasy's estimates of Egyptian casualties in the war, which they estimated as [17%]:⁸⁴

⁸¹ Hammel and O'Ballance mention that Israel refused for security concerns to reveal the truth about its forces in the war particularly in tanks and aircrafts. See: O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 51; Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 151.

⁸² Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 93.

⁸³ Segev, *1967*, 26; Pollack, "Air Power in the Six-Day War," 475; 70; هويدي، *الفرص الضائعة*، 70; Rabinovic, Abraham Rabinovic, "The War Nobody Wanted," *The Six Day War 36 Anniversary Special* on: <http://info.jpost.com/C003/Supplements/SixDayWar36/abrahr1.html> Accessed January 6, 2012.

⁸⁴ الجسمي، *مذكرات الجسمي*، 79; فوزي في الجوادي، *الطريق إلى النكسة*، 425. Oren, *Six Days of War*, 305; Churchill, *The Six Day War*, 198; Nadav Safran, *Israel: The Embattled Ally* (Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 1981), 246.

Source	Casualties	Forces Deployed
Fawzy and El Gamasy	9, 800	57, 647
Dupuy	7, 980	46, 941
Oren	10, 000-15, 000	58, 823-88, 235
Churchill	7, 000-10, 000	41, 176-58, 823
Safran	12, 000	70, 588

The Fourth Armored Division

Israel claimed that one of the alarming signs of an impending Egyptian attack during the crisis was the deployment of the Fourth Armored Division [FAD] from its bases in Egypt proper to the Sinai.⁸⁵

Oren notes that one piece of good news that was perceived by the Israeli leadership on May 14 "was that the Fourth Armored Division, Nasser's best, had yet to leave Cairo."⁸⁶ On May 23, Rabin asserted that the Egyptian build-up was not yet offensive because "the pivotal Fourth Armored Division was still on the western side of the canal." However, on May 25, Brecher and Geist note,

*"There was increasing pressure on Eshkol by Israeli military leaders to go to war...the trigger seems to have been the news that the Egyptian Fourth Armored Division had crossed into Sinai that morning."*⁸⁷

In light of previous estimates, not a single Egyptian military leader assigns any offensive duties for the Fourth Armored Division.

According to Wasil, the Fourth Armored Division represented the General Headquarter Reserve, Strategic Reserve,⁸⁸ which was inside the Sinai north of Bir Thamada. Its main mission was to launch a counter-attack against the Israeli forces

⁸⁵ It consisted of two Armored Brigades and one Infantry Mechanized Brigade with 188 tanks. See Sidqi El Ghoul in:

وجيه أبو ذكري، منبحة الأبرياء في 5 يونيو (القاهرة: المكتب المصري الحديث، 1988)، 404.

⁸⁶ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 62.

⁸⁷ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 77; Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 130.

⁸⁸ Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 145.

should they pass the first and second lines of defense in the Sinai or to launch offensive operations should the Egyptian forces succeed in its counter-attacks.⁸⁹

The Commander of the FAD himself, Sidqi El Ghoul, said in an interview in 1987, that he received orders to move to the Sinai and he arrived at Bir Thamada, in the centre of the Sinai, on May 27.⁹⁰ Even after the beginning of battles on June 5, Fawzy, the Chief of Staff, asserted that the orders that the Egyptian command had issued to the FAD, was to remain in its positions at the passes of the Sinai,⁹¹ approximately one hundred kilometers from the armistice lines. During the crisis, the Second Armored Brigade of the FAD received instructions, according to its commander Kamal Hassan Ali, to participate in an operation to isolate southern Negev and Eilat. However, these orders were later cancelled⁹² and it was reassigned again with its original defensive duty⁹³ so that the second brigade was at the passes of the Sinai when the war started on June 5.

The American archives provide an Israeli confirmation for the mission of the FAD. In a meeting between Meir Amit, Chief of Mossad, and McNamara, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, on June 1, Amit said, "...the most interior line to Egypt [of Egyptian lines of defense] being held by the Fourth Armored Division."⁹⁴

Accordingly, Israel was well aware the FAD was in the heart of the Sinai and not close to the Israeli borders when Israel began its attack on Egypt on the morning of June 5, 1967 four days after Amit's meeting with McNamara.

⁸⁹ واصل، من مذكرات وتكريات الفريق عبد المنعم واصل، 111-112؛ أبو ذكري، منبجة الأبرياء، 401. ⁹⁰ جريدة الوفد المصرية (11 يونيو 1987) في إبراهيم الخصري، "اللواء الغول: ضحية الأوامر المتضاربة"، جريدة المصري اليوم (6 يونيو 2008) على:

<http://www.almasry-alyoum.com/article2.aspx?ArticleID=108061> Accessed December 8, 2011

⁹¹ فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 149.

⁹² It is proved, as will be seen, in this paper that the political leadership represented by Nasser questioned the political outcome of the plan and decided not to authorize it.

⁹³ علي، مشاوير العمر، 212-213.

⁹⁴ Document 124, *Memorandum for the Record: Conversation between Major General Meir Amit and Secretary McNamara* (Washington, June 1, 1967) [Annex II].

The Shazly Division

The second main Egyptian armored force stationed in the Sinai was a divisional force named after its commander, Sa'ad El Din El Shazly.⁹⁵ It was comprised of 200 tanks and its main task was to penetrate the southern Negev and isolate the Israeli port of Eilat.⁹⁶ This entailed, in the Israeli perception, an offensive duty and proved that Egypt had aggressive intentions against Israel.⁹⁷ Sources that examined the mission of the force, though, assigned it to the Negev penetration and the capture of Eilat, did not indicate whether the mission was offensive or counter-offensive. Even if the force was close to the Israeli borders, as some authors say,⁹⁸ this did not mean that the force had offensive operations. Shazly himself said the following about his mission:⁹⁹

[1] The instructions he received changed several times in ten days.

[2] The last mission assigned to him was to block any Israeli advance in the zone between the middle and southern axes of Sinai.

⁹⁵ Hammel, Kimche and Bawly, O'Ballance and Herzog call it Shazly Force. Oren calls it Strike Force I. Brecher and Geist call it the Shazly Task Force.

⁹⁶ Oren, however, believes that the main task was to invade northern Negev along the Fourteenth Armored Brigade. Yet, this description is deceiving. According to Wasil, the Commander of the Fourteenth Armored Brigade, his brigade received orders for four different missions that changed frequently before the war:

[1] Counter-attacks in the sector of the Third Infantry Division at Jabal Libni between May 16/17 and May 26; [2] Limited offensive operations against the Israeli settlements opposite and south of Rafah between May 26 and May 29. However, the command cancelled this mission on May 29; [3] Counter-attacks in the sector of the Seventh Infantry Division at Rafah between May 29 and May 31; and, [4] Moving to El Hassana and working within the second line of defense Therefore, the Egyptian command cancelled the mission of the brigade, according to Oren, approximately one week before the war. See:

واصل، من منكرات ونكريات الفريق عبد المنعم واصل، 126-128.

⁹⁷ On the mission and structure of this force see:

Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 417; Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 155; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 98; Kimche and Bawly, *The Sandstorm*, 110-111

⁹⁸ Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 155; Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 417; Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six Days' War*, 54.

⁹⁹ شهادة الفريق سعد الدين الشاذلي في احمد منصور، شاهد على العصر: حرب أكتوبر كما يراها سعد الدين الشاذلي، ج 4 (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية: 27 فبراير 1999) على:

<http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/64E93708-0D92-4137-8F8C-C8AC0234ADB0.htm> Accessed December 18, 2011.

[3] When Israel started its attack on the morning of June 5, 1967, his forces were stationed approximately twenty kilometers from the armistice lines with Israel.

Writings on the Egyptian plans tend to ignore three important facets; the timing of the plan; the nature of the plan; and, the level of plan authorization.

With respect to timing of the plan, Egypt might have envisaged offensive plans against Israel in a certain phase of the crisis but before the commencement of military operations decided to shift its attitude to be purely defensive.

With respect to the nature of the plan, these writings also tend to confuse two forms of military operations: offensive operations *per se* and counter-offensive operations. If state [A] is launching a first strike against state [B], then the plan of state [A] is offensive. However, if state [B] strikes back immediately against state [A], then the plan of state [B] is counter-offensive.

The third facet is the level of authorization of the plan. Egypt might have envisaged offensive plans during the crisis but only on the theoretical level. That is to say, these plans were prepared on paper but lacked the political authorization.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Here is how the Egyptian plans were prepared and authorized on the military level in the Egyptian army in 1967 according to Mohammed Fawzy, the Egyptian Chief of Staff:

[1] The leadership of the army holds military meetings that end with taking certain decisions; [2] The next day, staff members begin ratifying the plans of the decisions taken in the previous day; [3] The Chief of Operations issues orders in accordance with the ratified decisions; and, [4] These decisions are then distributed in the form of military directives. President Nasser attended three meetings between May 15 and June 4 and he personally intervened in the plan and cancelled some of Amer's orders. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 123.

Report of the Special Committee on the Investigation of the Causes of the Defeat of June 1967: Committee of the Ten¹⁰¹

On June 20, 1977, a decade after the 1967 war, twenty members of the Egyptian Parliament signed a request to establish a special committee to investigate the causes of the 1967 defeat. Established on September 24, 1977, the committee membership included ten parliamentarians. It was comprised, in turn, of three sub-committees, political, military, and liaison, each assigned to handle specific issues related to the war.¹⁰²

One of the important issues the committee investigated in its report was the Egyptian plan of deployment in the Sinai. In elaborating on this matter, the report concluded the following:¹⁰³

[1] President Nasser declared publicly in more than one speech that Egypt did not have an offensive plan against Israel and added that Egypt would have to receive the first strike.

[2] Starting from May 23, 1967, the strategic decisions taken during the crisis by Abdel Hakim Amer, Deputy Supreme Commander, modified the plan and molded it with a dual character that combined offensive and defensive action so that the plan became offensive and defensive at the same time; defensive in the field army's perspective and offensive in the general command's perspective.¹⁰⁴ This means that

¹⁰¹ As far as this research is concerned, the results of the investigation carried out by this commission were never handled in academic or historiographic studies on the war apart from the book, which is of a journalistic nature, which annexed a complete text of the report that was prepared after the commission concluded its work.

¹⁰² The proceedings of the committee continued for approximately six months until May 13, 1978. It depended on the collection of its findings on the testimonies of 83 Egyptian officers who participated in the war in addition to official documents.

¹⁰³ The report threw the responsibility of the defeat entirely on Amer and his incompetence.

¹⁰⁴ In his testimony to Al Jazeera in 1999, Shazli said, "The deployment plan was so confused that it looked [counter] offensive at times and defensive other times." Yet, he highlighted that the last orders his forces were assigned to were of defensive nature. See Shazli in:

شهادة الفريق سعد الدين الشاذلي في أمّنصور، شاهد على العصر: حرب أكتوبر كما يراها سعد الدين الشاذلي، ج 4 (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية: 27 فبراير 1999).

the offensive plans were theoretical and did not leave the high command in the form of instructions to the field army in the Sinai; and,

[3] Amer changed the positions of the army in the Sinai so that they would appear offensive without taking the authorization of the political leadership.¹⁰⁵

However, does this mean that Amer was about to authorize an attack on Israel against Nasser's will?

In fact, this was unlikely. The movement of the Egyptian army in the Sinai was a sign of blunder and confusion not a sign of defiance. It came completely in accordance with an Israeli deception plan that made the military leadership believe that the Israeli attack would come on the southern axis and accordingly forces, like those of Shazli, mobilized to the southern axis in anticipation of the Israeli attack. In addition to this, according to the findings of the report, the duties of the field army, despite the changes Amer theoretically envisaged, were to remain defensive.

The Egyptian Air Force

One of the serious concerns of Israel in 1967 was the possibility of an orchestrated attack by the Egyptian Air Force against the Israeli population and industrial centers. The Egyptians, as they still argue, outnumbered Israel in the number of aircrafts and hence Israel was indeed vulnerable should the Egyptians decide to strike first. Yet, this was one of the common misbeliefs that obscured the true balance of forces between Egypt and Israel.

Israeli airpower played a pivotal role in the 1967 war. Although a good amount of data is available about the Egyptian-Israeli airpower balance, there are wide variations in this data that make them either incomplete or inconsistent.

¹⁰⁵ One of the shortcomings of the report is that it did not specify exactly the timing of the issued orders to mobilize forces in the Sinai. This is very significant because most of the participants, like Wasil and Shazli, asserted that their final orders close to the end of the crisis were entirely defensive.

For a functioning air power, three elements are necessary: aircraft, pilots, and maintenance.¹⁰⁶

Aircraft are not one category. They include combat, transport, reconnaissance, helicopters, and training aircraft.¹⁰⁷ Studies on the balance of forces between Egypt and Israel tend, for example, to compare between the total number of Egyptian aircraft and the Israeli combat aircraft, which make the comparison confusing. Furthermore, comparisons usually ignore the element of maintenance, which directly affect the serviceability. The number of operational aircraft is directly proportional to maintenance.

Therefore, in order to assess correctly the power of an air force, the analysis should be specific about the total number of aircraft, the number of combat aircraft, and the number of operational aircraft.

Below is a table [Table No. 4] of how the available sources present the balance of forces between Egypt and Israel in the air force.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Maintenance includes all actions taken to retain material in a serviceable condition or to restore it to serviceability.

¹⁰⁷ Combat Aircraft are those whose primary purpose is combat deploying weapons such as guns, bombs and missiles against the enemy. Major categories of Combat Aircraft are Fighters, Bombers, Fighter Bombers and, currently, Multi-Role Aircrafts. Reconnaissance, Training and Transport Aircraft are not included in Combat Aircraft even if they carry defensive armament or have secondary combat role. Reserve Aircraft, retained in the inventory, are also not included.

¹⁰⁸ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 170, 175-176; Michael B. Oren, "The Revelations of 1967: New Research on the Six Day War and its Lessons for the Contemporary Middle East," *Israel Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2004): 3; Weizman, *On Eagles' Wings*, 213; Oren, *Ibid*, 88; Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, 152; Popp, "Stumbling Decidedly," 299; Edward Luttwak and Dan Horowitz, *The Israeli Army 1948-1973* (Massachusetts: University Press of America, 1983), 218, 222; Robert Harkavy, *Preemption and Two-Front Conventional Warfare: A Comparison of 1967 Israeli Strategy with the Pre-World War One German Schlieffen Plan* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University, 1977), 21; Young, *The Israeli Campaign 1967*, 44, 48; O'Ballance, *The Third Arab-Israeli War*, 50, 56; Black and Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars*, 222; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 312; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 100-101; Simon Dunstan, *The Six-Day War 1967: Sinai* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2009), 25; Howard and Hunter, *Israel and the Arab World*, 191-192; Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947* (London: Routledge, 2004), 73, 76; Brecher, "The Middle East Subordinate System," 136; Rabinovic, "The War Nobody Wanted."

Source	Country			
	Egypt		Israel	
	Number	Category	Number	Category
Oren	420	Total	175-200	Operational
Oren	500	Combat	N.A.	N.A.
Weizman	N.A.	N.A.	196	Operational
Weizman	N.A.	N.A.	600	Total
Herzog	340	Serviceable	N.A.	N.A.
Popp	N.A.	N.A.	256	Operational
Luttwak	385	Operational	197	Combat
Harkavy	431	Total	290	Total
Young	450	Combat	320	Combat
O'Ballance	450	Combat	450	Total
			350	Front-line
Black & Morris	419	Total	N.A.	N.A.
Rabin	419	Total	200	Fighters
	242	Fighters		
Dunstan	431	Total	286	Total
			196	Front-line
Howard and Hunter	710	Total	337	Total
	500	Combat	280	Combat
Bregman	419	Total	247	Total
Rabinovic	420	Total	170-200	Operational
Brecher	500	Operational	450	Total
	400	Jets	200	Jets
Morris	N.A.	N.A.	192	Jets
Tal	N.A.	N.A.	247	Combat

N.B. [1] Serviceable=Operational; and,

[2] Combat=Fighter=Jet.

There are two available primary sources on the possible true Egyptian-Israeli balance of air forces. The first one is the CIA estimate of the Arab and Israeli air

force, and the second is the Egyptian estimates included in the Report of the Supreme Military Commission of Inquiry on the Status of the Egyptian Air Force before 1967.

[1] The CIA Estimates:

On May 23, the CIA prepared a memorandum for President Johnson under the title: "Overall Arab and Israeli Military Capabilities." The memo estimated the number of Israeli operationally assigned fighter aircraft at 256 compared to 222 for the neighboring Arab countries.¹⁰⁹ In making the comparison, the memo compared the Israeli and Arab operational combat aircraft instead of the total number of aircraft.¹¹⁰

[2] The Egyptian Estimates:

In the wake of the 1967 war, Egypt established a commission to investigate the status of the Egyptian Air Force before 1967 and its relation to the defeat. The commission issued a report in which it estimated that Israel had, during the 1967 war, 250-276 combat aircraft.¹¹¹ The same report added that the number of Egyptian combat aircraft was 177.¹¹² Consequently, there was 1.5 to 1 ratio of superiority on the side of Israel.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ This refutes what Oren mentions, "the Arabs outnumbered Israel three to one in aircraft." See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 89; Document 44, *Memorandum Prepared in the central Intelligence Agency* (Washington: May 23, 1967) [Annex II].

¹¹⁰ According to the Israeli Air Force, the Fouga aircraft, Israeli training aircraft, mission was limited at the beginning of war to the Jordanian front. There were 40-50 Fougas. See: Israeli Air Force, "Events Log: The Jordanian Frontier," *Israeli Air Force* (June 5, 1967) on: <http://www.iaf.org.il/3567-12815-en/IAF.aspx> Accessed January 7, 2012; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 101.

¹¹¹ The Egyptian estimates excluded from that number the Israeli training aircraft.

¹¹² Murtagi estimated the operational Egyptian combat aircrafts as 170. See:

مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي بروي الحقائق، 122.

¹¹³ The Egyptian estimates did not take into account serviceability on both sides. According to Dunstan and Safran, the serviceability in the Israeli Air Force was 90% while it was 30% for the Egyptian Air Force. Assuming their estimates are correct, Israel had 248 operational combat aircraft while Egypt had only 53 operational combat aircraft. Accordingly, there was 4 to 1 ratio of superiority for Israel. See: Dunstan, *The Six-Day War 1967*, 30; Safran, *Israel*, 241. Okasha, however, estimates the serviceability of the Egyptian Air Force at 70% and the number of the Egyptian combat aircrafts as 215, which means that Egypt had 150 operational aircraft. He estimates the number of Israeli combat aircraft as 208 and the serviceability at 98%, which means that Israel had 203 operational aircraft. See:

محمد عكاشة، صراع في السماء: الحروب المصرية الإسرائيلية 1967-1948 على:

<http://www.arabic-military.com/t15424-topic> Accessed January 4, 2012.

It is also worth noting that most of the Israeli Air Force was fighter-bombers while Egypt's main aircraft was the MiG-21, which was primarily an interceptor suitable for defensive duties. Egypt, by then, had three models of bombers: twenty-seven Ilyushin Il-28 light-bombers, twenty-three Tupolev Tu-16 medium-bombers and thirty Sukhoi Su-7 fighter-bombers. During the crisis, thirteen of the Sukhoi Su-7 fighter-bombers were still under assembly,¹²² its crews were also still under training, and this leaves only sixty-seven bombers for Egypt to use against Israel.¹²³

Israeli Perception of Egyptian over Flights

One example of aerial incidents that could have triggered an Israeli response was the penetration of Israeli airspace over Dimona nuclear reactor by Egyptian MiG-21 aircraft.¹²⁴

Ginor and Remez have an interesting theory about these incidents. They believe that MiG-25 aircraft flown by Soviet pilots not Egyptian MiG-21 aircraft executed the sorties over Dimona. In an interview broadcast on June 11, 2007, they criticized overdependence on Heikal's book on the war that referred to this incident.

They claim that failure of the Israeli air defense to intercept the MiGs indicate that they were sophisticated MiG-25 instead of MiG-21.¹²⁵

However, other Egyptian sources on the war referred to this incident as well. In his memoirs published years before Heikal's book, Mahmoud Riad, Egypt's Minister of Foreign Affairs, referred to this incident. During the crisis, Riad was in a

عكاشة، المرجع السابق؛ شهادة الفريق عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في مظهر، *اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967*، 194. ¹²² This makes them in the inventory and hence cannot be included in operational aircraft. See:

مرتجي، *الفريق مرتجي يروي الحقائق*، 123؛ عكاشة، المرجع السابق؛ فوزي، *حرب الثلاث سنوات*، 65. ¹²³ This is the sum of twenty-seven Il-28, twenty-three Tu-16 and seventeen SU-7 aircraft.

¹²⁴ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 75, 99; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 22; Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 128-130, 177-179;

حمروش، *ثورة 23 يوليو*، 168؛ محمد حسنين هيكل، "عند ساعة الصفر"، *وجهات نظر*، العدد 24، السنة الثانية، يناير 2001، 8-9.

¹²⁵ Ginor and Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona*, 133; Chris Gondek, "Interview with Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez," *Yale Press Podcast* (June 11, 2007) on:

<http://yalepress.yale.edu/book.asp?isbn=9780300123173> Accessed February 27, 2012.

meeting with Amer and Nasser during which Amer told Nasser about the over flight.¹²⁶

In addition to this, Sidqi Mahmoud, Chief of Egyptian Air Force, testified to the Committee on the Recording of the History of July 23 Revolution that during the crisis Egypt sent reconnaissance missions over Israel.¹²⁷

It was unlikely that Egypt had offensive intentions during these sorties for the following reasons:

[1] MiG-21 Egyptian aircrafts were, as previously mentioned, interceptors and not bombers.

[2] Egypt used two MiG-21 in one over flight and four MiG-21 in another one, which were not enough to intercept Israeli fighters should they come out for Egyptian bombers. One example to clarify is the aerial battle over Syria on April 7, which included, according to Oren, 130 planes.¹²⁸ Gluska notes that on April 7, the Israeli Air Force used most of Israel's fighter aircraft.¹²⁹ When Israel implemented Operation Opera in 1981 to destroy the Iraqi nuclear reactor Osirak, it used ten F-16 aircraft, including two in reserve, to bomb the reactor and six F-15 aircraft as an air cover.¹³⁰

[3] If Egypt were willing in these over flights to bomb the nuclear reactor at Dimona, Egyptian MiG-21 should have accompanied Egyptian bombers to bomb the reactor. However, Egyptian bombers never appeared in the Israeli airspace.

[4] These over flights happened on May 17 and May 26. The last one was eleven days before the Israeli attack on June 5.

¹²⁶ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, 22-23.

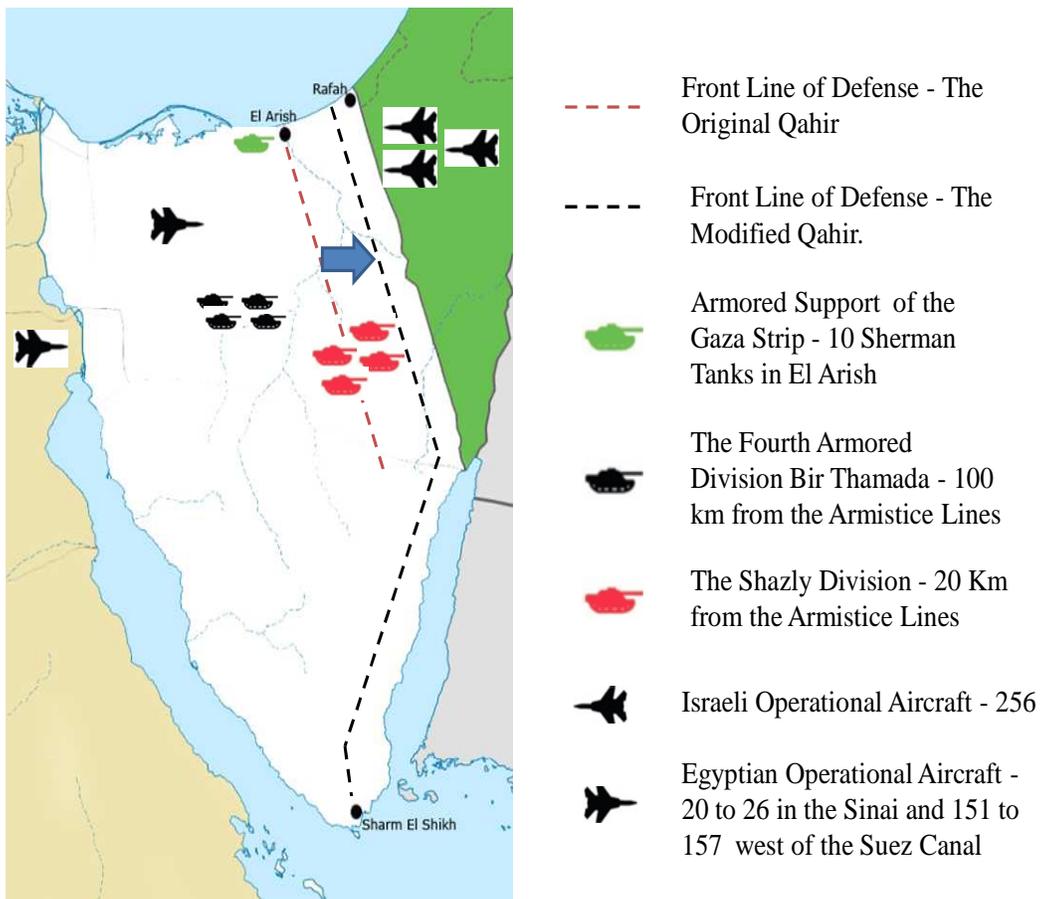
¹²⁷ شهادة الفريق محمد صدقي محمود في مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967، 144.

¹²⁸ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 46.

¹²⁹ Gluska, *the Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 100.

¹³⁰ Amos Perlmutter, Michael I. Handel and Uri Bar-Joseph, *Two Minutes over Baghdad* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 120-130.

Commenting on the accident on May 26, General Wheeler, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chief of Staff, referred to the over flights in a meeting with President Johnson believing, "Although there have been two over flight incidents, neither side looks as if it is readying for attack." Wheeler added, "UAR [Egypt] dispositions are defensive and do not look as if they are preparatory to an invasion of Israel."¹³¹



¹³¹ Document 72, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

CHAPTER FOUR

EGYPT AND THE FIRST STRIKE OPTION: DID EGYPT PLAN TO STRIKE FIRST?

This chapter begins by viewing Israel's and Egypt's official narrative about the commencement of hostilities and tests this narrative against the available primary sources on the matter.

Then, it reviews the Egyptian policies and its ramifications expressed in public as well as closed meetings of Nasser. The aim is to refute some of the historically wrong allegations like that of Oren, who believes that Egypt was about to launch a first strike against Israel, or like Ginor and Remez's, who believe that Egypt was conspiring with the Soviet Union to ignite a war with Israel to destroy its nuclear reactor. In addition to this, the study shows that President Nasser declined any proposed plans to deal a first strike to Israel. It also tests Oren's allegation about a split within the high Egyptian military and political echelons, between President Nasser the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and his Deputy Amer, by tracing the relationship between them before and during the crisis and to see whether or not this split affected the course of the crisis itself.

Egyptian versus Israeli Narrative:

Who Started Hostilities?

Almost all the available studies on the war assert the fact that Israel was the party that shot first in 1967. However, the majority also believe that Israel did it in self-defense to forestall and/or intercept an Egyptian attack.

Israel's propaganda machine managed brilliantly to exploit the feverish atmosphere in the Arab streets calling for its destruction to show to the entire world the horrible fate awaiting its citizens.¹ This image was cemented in the minds of observers and public opinion all over the world so that when Israel decided to attack Egypt on the morning of June 5, 1967 the blame was to be put on Israel's neighboring enemies. Although Egypt publicly, as well as privately, asserted its willingness not to strike first and Israel was aware of this fact, Israel managed to convince the entire world that it was acting in self-defense. Despite this dominant image, Israel created an alibi in order to justify the commencement of military operations on June 5, 1967.²

The IDF, Moshe Dayan, Minister of Defense, and Prime Minister Eshkol in his broadcast to the nation and in front of the Knesset asserted that on the morning of June 5, Israeli army was acting in self-defense to confront Egyptian armored and aerial forces that moved against Israel. Even after the war, Eshkol repeated the same allegations against Egypt in front of the Knesset members.³ Following the same line,

¹ General Odd Bull said, "An uncritical acceptance of the Israeli point of view in all its aspects was the rule." He also noticed that "...for a variety of reasons public opinion in Norway [his country of origin] has remained consistently favorable to Israel and unfavorable to the Arabs."

On the sympathy and understanding of Israel's strike among international public opinion see: Israel Government Year Book, *The Six-day War*, 2; Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, 127.

² Yigal Allon, then Minister of Labor, suggested that Eshkol could announce that the Egyptians had attacked and minutes later Israel would respond. See: Segev, *1967*, 336; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 169; Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 313.

³ Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, eds., *American Jewish Year Book 1968* (New York: The American Jewish Committee, 1968), 120; Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 101; Segev, *1967*, 340; Israel Ministry of Defense, *The Six Days' War*, 8.

Eshkol in his letter to President Johnson,⁴ delivered on June 5, 1967, accused Egypt explicitly of starting aerial bombardments on Israeli territories in Kisufim, Nahal Oz and Tsur Maon.⁵

However, retrospective commentaries of Israeli officials on the war reveal entirely different image.

In an interview with *Le Monde*, Yitzhak Rabin, Chief of the General Staff of the Israeli Army, said, "I don't believe that Nasser wanted war. The Two divisions, which he sent into Sinai on May 14, would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it, and we knew it." Ezer Weizman, Chief of Operations during the war repeated the same argument as he said, "There was never a danger of extermination. This hypothesis had never been considered in any serious meeting."

Other Israeli Generals, like Peled, Gavish, Bar-Lev and Herzog, denied any possibility of a threat to Israel's existence in 1967 and considered that to speak of such a possibility "does not only insult the intelligence of any person capable of analyzing this kind of situation, but is primarily an insult to the Israeli army." Moreover, Mordechai Bentov, Minister of Housing, asserted, "The entire story of extermination was invented in every detail, and exaggerated *a posteriori* to justify the annexation of a new Arab territory."⁶

⁴ What is ridiculous about this letter is that it was prepared on the night of the Israeli attack as if Israel possessed complete information about a possible Egyptian attack in the morning and hence Eshkol decided to prepare the letter in an anticipation of the war. The letter in fact intended to justify the Israeli first strike to the Americans and throw the blame on Nasser. See the message in: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 169; Document 158, *Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State* (Tel Aviv: June 5, 1967) [Annex II].

⁵ Brecher and Geist list June 4, 1967 as the chronological first day of the war. On this day, Israeli navy sent frogmen to the Egyptian port of Alexandria. See: Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 169.

⁶ All the previous commentaries of Israeli officials are in: John B. Quigley, *The Case for Palestine: An International Law Perspective* (Duke University Press, 1990), 162-164; John K. Cooley, *Green March, Black September* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 162; Alfred M. Lilienthal, *The Zionist Connection* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1978), 558.

On the Egyptian side, the Egyptian command issued sixteen military communiqués on June 5, 1967. In all of the Egyptian official communiqués issued after the start of hostilities, Egypt accused Israel of aggression and that Egypt was merely repelling the Israeli attack.

The eruption of hostilities the morning of June 5, 1967 was also a central concern for United Nations staff working in the region. In two separate meetings with Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Dayan, Major General Indar Jet Rikhye, Commander of United Nations Emergency Force in Sinai, directly inquired about the party responsible for initiation of hostilities.⁷ Neither of them mentioned or even hinted at Egypt being the party responsible for dealing the first blow. They spoke about the crisis in general and that the Egyptian escalation and Arab hostility was the main cause of the war.

However, on the morning of June 5, 1967, Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned General Odd Bull, Chief of Staff of UNTSO, and informed him that, "Egyptian planes had taken off against Israel but had been intercepted by Israeli planes."⁸

On the morning of June 5, the White House received an Israeli ticker saying, "UAR opened an offensive and Israel was containing that offensive." Walt Rostow decided that it was important to have an immediate objective assessment of how the war had begun and who had initiated it on the basis of intelligence and accordingly, he asked Clark Clifford and Harold Saunders to form a judgment for the President on who had initiated the war. Unfortunately, according to the Department of the State, there is no written record available for Clifford's report. Yet, in 1968, Rostow provided an oral session for recollections of June 5, 1967 of some of that report's

⁷ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 142, 148.

⁸ Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East*, 113.

findings. According to him, Clifford rendered his initial evaluation of how the war started and his view was that "the Israelis had jumped off on minimum provocation in a very purposeful effort to deal with air power and then go after UAR army" which of course had assembled in the Sinai. In 1968 and according to Saunders "it became very clear that the Israelis had launched a preemptive strike, pure and simple."⁹ State Department records reveal that Eban told the U.S. Ambassador to Tel Aviv on the morning of June 5 that Egyptian ground forces began the fighting by shelling Israeli border villages. An official Israeli report was passed to the U.S. Embassy, inter alia, said Egypt's Fourth Armored Division plus a mobile task force had teamed up "*with the apparent intention*"¹⁰ of striking across southern Israel toward Jordan.¹¹ The report said that Israeli armored forces had moved to engage the Egyptian armor and that Israel had attacked Egyptian airfields. Though Israel claimed from the beginning that it was reacting to an Egyptian attack, in the report passed to the U.S. Embassy the message was controversial and depended on an assessment that there was an apparent intention from the Egyptian forces to attack rather than clear information about that.

The American concerns about who had begun the war in 1967, as indicated by Rostow's instructions to prepare a report on the matter, is an indicator that the blockade of the Straits of Tiran was a totally different issue than firing the first shot.¹²

⁹ Saunter's description of the Israeli strike as preemptive does not mean that it was like that. The term used to be confused with preventive war and sometimes both used interchangeably as previously elaborated. See: Document 149, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: November 17, 1968) [Annex II].

¹⁰ To reveal the Israeli fabrication, Shazly, the Commander of the Task Force, was member of a delegation of Egyptian military commanders meeting Amer, the Deputy Supreme Commander on the morning of June 5. So, how was he at the head of his forces to attack southern Negev? See: نص شهادة الفريق سعد الدين الشاذلي في منصور، شاهد على العصر: حرب أكتوبر كما يراها سعد الدين الشاذلي، ج 4 (قناة الجزيرة الفضائية: 27 فبراير 1999).

¹¹ It was determined previously how and where Egypt deployed these forces.

¹² De Gaulle kept urging all the parties in 1967 not to initiate hostilities, which means he did not consider that Egypt initiated hostilities by the blockade of the Straits of Tiran. He believed that the

In 1982, Stephen Green could not get an access to a CIA document concerning the 1967 war that dealt with that issue. That document was prepared on Saunder's instructions to the CIA on June 5, 1967. In 1982, only the title of the document was declassified. The document titled "The Arab-Israeli War: Who Fired the First Shot?"¹³ Luckily, now in 2012 more portions of that document are available, though nine lines are still classified. According to that document, the CIA believed that "an analysis of presently available information suggests that Israel fired the first shot today." The document continues to present the Israeli allegations announced publicly on the morning of the war in addition to the views expressed by Eban to the U.S. Ambassador to Tel Aviv.

At 05: 09 a.m. in the morning, Dean Rusk telephoned President Johnson to inform him about the eruption of hostilities in the Middle East. Rusk told him about the preliminary information available on the situation, particularly the Israeli allegations that they were repelling an Egyptian attack.¹⁴ The telephone conversation between Rusk and Johnson reads as follows:¹⁵

President Johnson: So, what-what does it appear to you? Does it appear to you reasonably sure that these [Egyptian] tanks kicked it?

Rusk: Well, the fact that the fighting has been occurring initially over Egypt is a little hard to sort out [two seconds excised material for national security purposes]. It is possible. But I

matter of the Straits was judicial. See: Document 213, *Compte Rendu: Entretien entre Le General de Gaulle et L'Ambassadeur d'Egypte* (Paris: 25 Mai, 1967) [Annex IV].

¹³ Document 169, *Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency's Office of Current Intelligence* (Washington: June 5, 1967) [Annex II].

¹⁴ That is why Dinstein and Wagner describe the 1967 war as interceptive. See: Dinstein, *War, Aggression and Self-Defense*, 173; Wagner, *The Six-Day War*, 216.

¹⁵ In 2007, the National Archives of the U.S. released the 1967 telephone conversations of Lyndon Johnson. The text of the above-mentioned conversation is retrieved from a study prepared by Robert David Johnson sponsored by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies established in 2004 by Tel Aviv University. See: Robert David Johnson, *Lyndon Johnson and Israel: The Secret Presidential Recordings* (Ramat Aviv, Tel Aviv: The S. Daniel Abraham Center, July 2008) on:

http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/abraham/publications/johnson_israel.pdf Accessed November 21, 2011; Document 150, *Editorial Note* (Washington: State Department) [Annex II].

would put more weight on the Israeli claim that they had a large number of Egyptian aircraft headed for Israel, from the sea. But I think it's just a little too early yet.

My instincts tell me that the Israelis probably kicked this off. But I just don't know yet, and I don't think we ought to make a preliminary judgment on that, because it's just hard to say.

President Johnson: Do they say to us that the Egyptians kicked it off?

Rusk: Well, they are both publicly-we have nothing, no message yet from the Israeli government, except that they have asked for a meeting of the [UN] Security Council. We have had no direct message from Eshkol or [Abba] Eban, or nobody.

Both [countries] publicly are claiming that the other started it. But the Israeli claim that a big tank column was moving toward Israel and that they went out to meet it-again looks just a little thin on the surface. [Two seconds excised material for national security purposes.]

...

My guess is the Israelis kicked this off.

The aforementioned conversation denotes the following:

- [1] The United States was particularly concerned about the party who initiated hostilities or "kicked it off" in Johnson's own words, which signifies that the U.S. did differentiate between firing the first shot and the blockade.
- [2] The fact the fighting was on Egyptian soil did indicate that Israel began the fight not Egypt though the conclusion of Rusk's remark is not yet available for national security purposes.
- [3] Rusk believed that Israel started the fighting not Egypt but he could not be sure about it.
- [4] Rusk considered the Israeli claim that an Egyptian tank column was heading towards the border as "thin on the surface."

Nasser's Discourse versus Policies

Nasser's decisions in the crisis that led to the 1967 war made some Israeli and Western scholars believe that his intention was to destroy the Israeli state and that he assumed hostile policies against Israel as a prelude to achieve this goal.¹⁶ However, careful and thorough study of Nasser's policies towards Israel starting from 1952 until the crisis of 1967 refutes these allegations.

Three successive strategies are observed on Nasser's perceptions of the Arab-Israeli conflict. First, Pacification and Containment¹⁷ from 1952 to 1956; second, Reaction and Crisis Management from 1957 to 1967; and, third, Confrontation from 1967 to 1970.¹⁸

In the first era, Nasser's only concern was the domestic situation of Egypt.¹⁹ It was only on February 1955 that Nasser began to pay more attention to Israel and its policies in the region after its notorious raid on Gaza.²⁰ The participation of Israel in the Tri-partite aggression against Egypt, in collaboration with Britain and France in 1956, aggravated his doubts. Nasser was willing to settle the Arab-Israeli conflict in

¹⁶ Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 68, 83; Gat, "Nasser and the Six Day War," 629; Randolph and Winston S. Churchill, *The Six Day War*, 47; Managing Team, "The Six Day War: Forty Years," *Honest Reporting* (June 4, 2007) on: <http://honestreporting.com/the-six-day-war-forty-years-on-2/> Accessed December 12, 2011; The Israel Project, "Six Day war 40th Anniversary Guide," *The Israel Project* on: <http://www.theisraelproject.org/atf/cf/%7B84DC5887-741E-4056-8D91-A389164BC94E%7D/SIX-DAY%20WAR%2040TH%20ANNIVERSARY%20GUIDE.PDF> Accessed December 12, 2011

¹⁷ King Hussein of Jordan said in April 1964, during an official visit to Washington, "the Arab policy at that time was the containment of Israel." See: Shlaim, *Lion of Jordan*, 207.

¹⁸ حسن نافعة، "عبد الناصر والصراع العربي الإسرائيلي بين الإدراك والإدارة"، في محمد السعيد إدريس، ثورة 23 يوليو 1952: دراسات في الحقبة الناصرية (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للدراسات السياسية والإستراتيجية، 2003)، 464.
¹⁹ مجموعة خطب وتصريحات وبيانات الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر 23 يوليو 1952-يناير 1958 (القاهرة: مصلحة الاستعلامات، دون تاريخ); حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 23; محمد حسنين هيكل، المفاوضات السرية بين العرب وإسرائيل [الجزء الثاني] (القاهرة: دار الشروق، 2001) 36-35.

Athina Kemou, "From Cairo to Tel Aviv: Nasser's Differential Accumulation of Power and Its Impact on the Relations between Egypt and Israel," *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterraneae*, No. 5, (Mayo-Agosto): 63-79

²⁰ On the raid on Gaza see:

حمروش، المرجع السابق، 30; محمد حسنين هيكل، حرب الثلاثين سنة: ملفات السويس (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 1986)، 339; محمد حافظ إسماعيل، أمن مصر القومي في عصر التحديات (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 1987)، 43.

accordance with the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181 of 1947²¹ and this denotes his willingness to accept the presence of Israel.

In the post-1956 era, Nasser's policies began to assume new approach, the essence of which was only to react against Israel's policies²² in the region.²³

After the 1967 war, the magnitude of the defeat strongly changed his behavior and made him believe in, what would be his famous dictum, "what was taken by force can only be restored by force."²⁴

In May-June 1967, the Arab-Israeli conflict witnessed an escalation that led eventually to the 1967 war between Israel and three neighboring Arab countries. Israeli and pro-Israeli writings depict Nasser's policies during the crisis as if Egypt was willing to annihilate Israel and that the Israeli people were about to encounter another holocaust. However, this depiction comes in complete contradiction with Nasser's own perception of the conflict. Although some scholars describe Nasser's moves in 1967 as irrational, examination of his moves refute this hypothesis.

In the ensuing pages, this study analyzes Nasser's discourse and policies during the crisis in order to get a clear understanding of the picture from the Egyptian side and to see whether or not Nasser considered the execution of a first strike against Israel.

²¹ On Nasser's acceptance of the U.N. resolution as a basis for a settlement with Israel see: حمروش، المرجع السابق، 42؛ هيكل، ملفات السويس، 337 و388؛ رؤوف عباس، محرر، 40 عاما علي ثورة يوليو (القاهرة: مركز الاهرام للدراسات السياسية والاستراتيجية، 1992)، 209؛ مجموعة خطب وتصريحات وبيانات الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر، 430؛ مجدي حماد، ثورة 23 يوليو 1952 (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، 1993)، 254.

²² Arthur Gold Schmidt Jr. said about this "he [Nasser] reacted more than he acted". See: Arthur Gold Schmidt Jr., *A Concise History of the Middle East* (Cairo: The American University Cairo Press, 1983), 263; 245، 1952، ثورة 23 يوليو، 462؛ حماد، ثورة 23 يوليو، 254.

²³ This era was described by some as "The Appeasement Era" see: بئينة عبد الرحمن التكريتي، جمال عبد الناصر: نشأة وتطور الفكر الناصري (بيروت: مركز دراسات الوحدة العربية، 2000)، 254. ²⁴ كلمة الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في افتتاح دور الانعقاد الخامس لمجلس الأمة (القاهرة: 23 نوفمبر 1967)؛ هويدي، حروب عبد الناصر، 146.

Nasser's Discourse during the Crisis

Starting from the beginning of April 1967, statements from both Israeli and Arab officials inflamed the situation in the Middle East. Whereas Rabin and Eshkol threatened to topple the Syrian regime as a reaction to the Palestinian guerilla activities backed by the Syrians, Nasser threatened Israel with war if the latter decided to act against Syria. However, it is extremely important to differentiate, at the outset, between statements coming from responsible politicians and decision-makers like those of Nasser, Rabin and Eshkol and those coming from common people.²⁵ Additionally, one must be careful when analyzing statements coming from people with absolutely no influence on the process of decision-making.²⁶

The turning point in the crisis of 1967 was the Egyptian decision to close the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and all other ships carrying strategic materials to Israel. Nasser announced this decision in a visit to Abu Soeir Air Base, the advanced headquarter of the Egyptian Air Force, on May 22. His statement was the first among others given by him during the crisis that ended by war on June 5.

In all his statements and speeches during the crisis, Nasser's message was clear and involved the following points:

²⁵ If, before the war of 1967, people in the streets of Arab countries were calling to destroy Israel, this did not mean that the decision-makers were going to comply and act accordingly to achieve this goal. On reviewing Segev's book, Michael B. Oren, accused Segev of engaging in "rhetorical acrobatics" accusing him of ignoring the Arab calls for the destruction of Israel and the pre-war demonstrations in Egypt calling for using poison gas against Israel. In fact, Oren's accusations are entirely naïve. Can we believe that Nasser could build his decision to attack Israel on his people's willingness to do so? Furthermore, if people's rhetoric really mattered, why did Oren undermine the threats of Rabin and Eshkol to topple the Syrian regime? For Oren's review for Segev's book see: Michael B. Oren, "Who Started It? On the Anniversary of the Six-Day War, An Israeli Argues that Israel did not Have to Fight," *Washington Post* (June 10, 2007) on: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/06/07/AR2007060701872.html> Accessed June 5, 2010

²⁶ Ahmed El Shuqairy the head of Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO], arguably, threatened a massacre against Israeli people during the crisis. However, it has to be noted that he was without any influence whatsoever on the decision-making process in any Arab country. Even the Palestine Liberation Army [PLA], stationed in Gaza, was under Egyptian command and thus was entirely dependent on Egypt and its policies. In addition, even if the head of PLO pledged something like this, did Oren really think that PLO could dictate an agenda like that on Egypt?

First, Egypt's strategy was defensive; and Second, Egypt would recourse to offensive strategy only in case Israel attacked Egypt, Syria or any other Arab country.²⁷ He repeated this message during the crisis not only privately but in open meetings as well.²⁸ Furthermore, Nasser declared several times that he would never take the initiative and strike first against Israel.²⁹

Critics of Nasser and his policies accuse him of planning, in 1967, to destroy Israel. They, arguably, quote him threatening to do so in one of his speeches during the crisis. Indeed, Nasser in one of his speeches during the crisis threatened once to “destroy Israel” but the context of his words³⁰ was completely within the boundaries of the strategy explained above. Moreover, his threats to launch “general war/battle”³¹ against Israel came in accordance with the same strategy, only if Israel attacked Egypt or Syria.

The following table [Table No. 5] indicates the frequency of repetition of the word “Israel” in Nasser's speeches and statements during the crisis first alone and then in combination with the word “destroy.” It illustrates additionally the frequency of repetition of the term “general war/battle” against Israel.

²⁷ Nasser in his strategy to come to the assistance of Arab countries considered the 1951 defense agreement among Arab countries under the umbrella of the Arab League and the mutual defense pact signed between Egypt and Syria in 1966.

²⁸ كلمة الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر أثناء زيارته لمركز القيادة المتقدم للقوات الجوية (سيناء: 22 مايو 1967); خطاب الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في أعضاء المجلس المركزي لاتحاد نقابات العمال العرب (القاهرة: 26 مايو 1967); حديث الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى ممثلي أجهزة الإعلام العالمية والعربية في المؤتمر الصحفي من قاعة الزهراء بمصر الجديدة بالقاهرة (القاهرة: 28 مايو 1967).

²⁹ He repeated twice in his press conference on May 28, 1967 that he left the initiative to Israel and Egypt would be ready to respond. See:

حديث الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى ممثلي أجهزة الإعلام العالمية والعربية في المؤتمر الصحفي من قاعة الزهراء بمصر الجديدة بالقاهرة (القاهرة: 28 مايو 1967): إسماعيل، أمن مصر القومي، 123.

³⁰ He said so in his speech to the members of the Central Council of Arab Trade Unionists on May 26, 1967. The exact words of Nasser were as follows:

[إسرائيل إذا بدأت بأي عمل عدواني ضد سوريا أو ضد مصر، فحتكون المعركة ضد إسرائيل معركة شاملة، ما هياش معركة محصورة في حنة قدام سوريا، أو محصورة في حنة قدام مصر، المعركة حتكون معركة شاملة، وحتكون هدفنا الأساسي هو تدمير إسرائيل]

³¹ According to the text of his statements, Nasser said that if war erupted between Egypt and Israel, it would not be limited to the frontiers between the two countries. This means that Egypt would bombard the interior of Israel and its heavily populated centers.

The word/The term	Frequency
Israel	252
Destroy Israel	1
General War/Battle	5

The table indicates that Nasser repeated the word “Israel” in his speeches and statements during the crisis 252 times while he mentioned the term “destroy Israel” only once³² and the term “general war/battle”³³ five times. Accordingly, the destruction of Israel was not a trend in Nasser’s speeches during the crisis.

Following the same context, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal, Nasser’s confidant and a famous political commentator, elaborated Egypt’s strategy in one of his articles during the crisis³⁴ in accordance with the same lines expressed above, as follows:

First, Egypt was expecting an Israeli first strike; Second, Egypt’s policy was to wait for this strike and absorb it to minimize its effect; and, Third, Egypt would then react against the Israeli move by a second strike.

As noted above, Nasser did not have the intention to strike first against Israel and his public and private meetings indicated the rationale behind this strategy.

³² When asked by Mayhew, the British Parliamentarian, about what he meant with the destruction of Israel. Nasser answered, "I used this word in its military meaning not the political one and that I meant the destruction of the attacking Israeli forces not the Israeli people." See:

أ. أ. أجاريشيف، ناصر (القاهرة: دار الثقافة الجديدة، 1977)، 291.

³³ Nasser also used the term “general conflict” once but it was in a different context.

³⁴ The significance of this article is two-fold: first, it came from a very close person to Nasser who was the exhibitor of Nasser’s views; and, second, it came one day after Nasser held his first meeting with the Egyptian military command on May 25. Thus, the Egyptian leadership adopted a decision not to strike first on May 25 and accordingly Oren’s allegation about a supposed Egyptian attack on Israel on the 27th is baseless. Furthermore, Ginor and Remez’s allegation about Egypt’s intention to get an approval from Moscow to strike first during the visit of Egypt’s War Minister to Moscow is also baseless since Egypt was determined before his meeting with Kosygin on May 26 not to strike first. See:

محمد حسنين هيكل، "الصدام بالسلح مع إسرائيل محتّم...لماذا؟" جريدة الأهرام (القاهرة: 26 مايو 1967).
Youssef Aboul-Enein, "The Heikal Papers: A Discourse on Politics and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War with Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser," *Strategic Insights*, Vo. IV, No. 4 (April 2005) on:
<http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA521546> Accessed January 12, 2012

محمد حسنين هيكل، كلام في السياسة: عام من الأزمات 2000-2001 (القاهرة: الشركة المصرية للنشر العربي والدولي، 2001)، 392-446؛ هيكل، الانفجار، 565.

Nasser had determinants³⁵ according to which he decided not to strike first against Israel.

First, Egypt in a reaction to the Israeli threats against Syria regained the initiative politically and took several escalatory steps to deter Israel from attacking Syria including closure of the Straits of Tiran. Following this, Egypt was waiting for the Israeli response against its moves, whether politically or militarily, in order to avoid any accusations of aggression against Israel; Second, if Egypt decided to strike first, the international community would stand against Egypt depicting its move as an explicit aggression against the tiny state of Israel;³⁶ and, Third, and most important,³⁷ was the reaction of the United States. Nasser was always cautious not to give the United States³⁸ a pretext to act militarily against him and striking first against Israel, in his mindset, was a suitable pretext to do so.

Consequently, Nasser would not have started a war by striking Israel because he was convinced that the United States would intervene militarily against him if he did so. Added to that is the condemnation Egypt might have faced from international public opinion.

It could be argued that Nasser's public discourse during the crisis about Egypt's strategy, not to strike first, was meant to deceive Israel and the international

³⁵ هيكل، الانفجار، 574.

³⁶ In his press conference on May 28, Nasser criticized the United States, Britain, Canada and West Germany for their support for Israel and praised General de Gaulle for his neutrality. See:

حديث الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى ممثلي أجهزة الإعلام العالمية والعربية في المؤتمر الصحفي من قاعة الزهراء بمصر الجديدة بالقاهرة (القاهرة: 28 مايو 1967).

³⁷ محمد حسنين هيكل، لمصر لا لعبد الناصر (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 1987) 113؛ وقائع محاكمة السيد شمس بدران وزير الحربية المصري السابق في الجمهورية العربية المتحدة حول بعض الملابس التي رافقت تطور الأحداث قبيل نشوب حرب يونيو 1967، جريدة الأهرام (القاهرة: 25 فبراير 1968)؛ بيان الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى الشعب والأمة بإعلان التنحي عن رئاسة الجمهورية من مبنى الإذاعة والتليفزيون (القاهرة: 9 يونيو 1967)؛ خطاب الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في الاحتفال بالعيد الخامس عشر للثورة (القاهرة: 23 يوليو 1967).

³⁸ In his press conference on May 28, Nasser answered a question about a possible intervention by the United States by making a comparison between Egyptian and U.S. forces and asserted the fact that Egypt could not stand militarily against the U.S. and its Generals but added that Egypt would defend itself if this happened. See:

حديث الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى ممثلي أجهزة الإعلام العالمية والعربية في المؤتمر الصحفي من قاعة الزهراء بمصر الجديدة بالقاهرة (القاهرة: 28 مايو 1967)؛ خطاب الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في الاحتفال بالعيد الخامس عشر للثورة (القاهرة: 23 يوليو 1967).

public opinion and that Egypt went ahead on its plan to attack Israel. The next section will test this hypothesis.

Israeli Historians' Allegations: Ginor and Remez versus Oren

Israeli Troop Concentration on Syrian Borders³⁹

There has been a lot of controversy about the role of the Soviet Union in the crisis that led to the 1967 war. While some accuse the Soviet Union of deliberately instigating the crisis from the beginning to achieve certain purposes, others deny this and see the role of the Soviet Union justified within the context of the crisis. Some researchers also allege that Egypt sought the consent of the Soviet Union during the crisis on a first strike against Israel and that the Soviet Union rejected the Egyptian proposal. Testing the validity of this fact is very important as it demonstrates whether Egypt was considering the first strike strategy or not.

The first information about Israeli troop concentrations was passed to the Egyptian General Intelligence by an intelligence operative working in the Soviet Embassy in Cairo on May 13, 1967.⁴⁰ On the same day, a message came with the same information from the Syrian Chief of Staff to his Egyptian counterpart.⁴¹ The Soviet Union insisted that the information was true and asserted to Egypt's Minister of

³⁹ The aim of this section is not to determine that the Israeli troop concentrations did or did not exist. The aim is to determine that Egypt seriously considered the Soviet information about the concentrations and that this information was the decisive factor behind Egypt's escalatory policies at the beginning of the crisis. Even after the Egyptian Chief of Staff visited Syria and did not find proof of this, Nasser still believed in the validity of the Soviet information. In 1970, the CIA believed that "Nasser apparently believed the reports given him by the Soviet Union." According to the CIA, "Nasser's willingness to believe the reports at this time may have been influenced by the Israeli air attacks on Syria in April as well as by Eshkol's sharp warning in May." See: Directorate of Intelligence, "Intelligence Report: Soviet Policy and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War," Central Intelligence Agency, No. 64 (March 16, 1970): 6 [Annex II].

⁴⁰ هيكال، الانفجار، 445.

⁴¹ الجسمي، منكرات الجسمي، 37؛ أمين هويدي، مع عبد الناصر (القاهرة: دار المستقبل العربي، 1985)، 160.

War, later on while he was in Moscow, that they even have the names of the Israeli field commanders.⁴²

Anwar Sadat,⁴³ Speaker of the Parliament, was on a visit to North Korea at the time and had stopped in Moscow where Soviet officials informed him about these troop concentrations. At the same time, the Egyptian Ambassador to Moscow, Morad Ghaleb, dispatched a cable to Nasser's office confirming the Soviet information. In this cable, the Soviets “advised⁴⁴ Egypt to be ready but to stay calm and avoid being drawn into a war with Israel.”⁴⁵ According to this cable, the Soviets were very cautious in their warning to Egypt and no indicators existed to support any hypothesis that they wanted to inflame the situation in the Middle East.⁴⁶

In a study recently published on the war, Ginor and Remez argue that the Soviet Union and Egypt devised a plan in 1966 to induce war between Israel and Egypt. The aim of the Soviets, according to the plan, was to intervene and use the chance to destroy Israel's nuclear plant at Dimona. The escalation, which preceded the war in 1967, was part of this plan that they code-named Gretchko-Amer plan.⁴⁷ The original hypothesis on this information was in a study published by Ben Tzur in 1975.⁴⁸ On a visit to Moscow, Ben-Tzur believes, Amer and top military officials

⁴² مراد غالب، مع عبد الناصر والسادات: سنوات الانتصار وأيام المحن (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 2001)، 121؛ محضر اجتماع السيد أليكسي كوسيجين رئيس الوزراء السوفييتي والسيد شمس بدران وزير الحربية (موسكو: 26 مايو 1967).

⁴³ In Moscow, Vladimir Semyonov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, told Sadat about Israeli troop concentrations. Morad Ghaleb also told him. See:

أنور السادات، البحث عن الذات: قصة حياتي (القاهرة: المكتب المصري الحديث للطباعة والنشر، 1978)، 186؛ برقية رقم 24 من السفارة المصرية في موسكو إلى السيد سامي شرف (موسكو: 13 مايو 1967)؛ بيان الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى الشعب والأمة بإعلان التنحي عن رئاسة الجمهورية من مبنى الإذاعة والتليفزيون (القاهرة: 9 يونيو 1967)؛ خطاب الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر في العيد الخامس عشر للثورة (القاهرة: 23 يوليو 1967).

⁴⁴ Morad Ghaleb repeated the word “advise” twice in his cable to stress on the estimation of the Soviets.

⁴⁵ برقية رقم 24 من السفارة المصرية في موسكو إلى السيد سامي شرف (موسكو: 13 مايو 1967).

⁴⁶ Brezhnev spoke with the same meaning in his report to the plenum of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party on June 20, 1967. Ginor and Remez described this narrative as conventional. See: Ginor and Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona*, 114.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁴⁸ According to Ben Tzur, Amer and Gretchko shaped the plan between November 22 and 25, 1966 when Amer was on a visit to Moscow. Ben-Tzur builds his hypothesis on a circumstantial link between the visit of Amer to Moscow and the ratification of the Egyptian plan [Qahir] in December 1966. See:

including Shams Badran, Minister of War and Salah Nasr, Chief of Egyptian General Intelligence, convened with the Soviets for this purpose.

Testing the validity of this information is very significant as it demonstrates if it is true that both Egypt and the Soviet Union had aggressive plans against Israel in 1967 and that Israel was acting, accordingly, in a defensive manner.

However, Ginor and Remez's hypothesis is easily refutable for the following reasons:

[1] Egyptian and Soviet sources, primary and secondary alike, did not mention this plan. Even the memoirs or testimonies of people that supposedly participated in its formulation like Badran and Nasr did not refer to that. Nasr published his memoirs and dedicated an entire volume of them to the 1967 and he did not refer to it. Additionally, Badran was on trial in 1968 and spoke in details about the events that preceded the war and did not refer to the existence of this plan. Badran could have announced the presence of this plan and this would have been more than enough for him to embarrass Nasser and the Egyptian regime particularly when he was about to be convicted and jailed. He could have declared that the escalation that happened in May-June 1967 was a premeditated plan organized by Egypt and the Soviet Union against Israel.⁴⁹ Moreover, Badran was not famous among the Egyptian political circles for a close relationship or affiliation with the Soviets and hence we cannot attribute his silence in the trials about the role of the Soviet Union, if it was true, to his affiliation. Additionally, he could have blamed the Soviets for the military defeat either because they prevented Egypt from launching the first strike or because they did not interfere in support for Egypt when the war began. If this information is true

Avraham Ben-Tzur, *Soviet Factor and the Six-Day War* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat Poalim, 1975) 157-173 cited in *Ibid*, 234.

⁴⁹ In his trial, Badran tried to abide by secrecy and not to divulge information, which he saw as confidential. However, the presiding judge advised him not to do so and asked him to speak with complete openness. Therefore, we cannot argue that Badran was deliberately silent on important issues related to the Soviet Union because of the role it was playing, for example, in rebuilding the Egyptian military capabilities after the war.

and such a plan really existed, why did not Badran declare it during his trial? In fact, Badran did not refer to its existence because it did not exist at all.

[2] Ginro and Remez's hypothesis ignore completely the role of the Warsaw Pact countries. One cannot imagine that the Soviet Union sought to induce a crisis between Egypt and Israel and Soviet intervention would follow without the slightest coordination with the rest of the members of the Eastern Bloc. Recently declassified documents from former Warsaw Pact countries might shed the light on the events that preceded the war from Soviet perspective. Todor Zhivkov, Secretary General of the Bulgarian Communist Party and Prime Minister, on June 14, 1967 in a plenary session of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party⁵⁰ criticized what he considered the absence of coordination between the Arab leaders from one side and the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc from the other side. He enumerated the Politburo's activities during the crisis, which included among other things, constant contact with the Soviet Communist Party, the Soviet high command, the high command of the Warsaw Pact and President Nasser himself. If a plan like this really existed, he should have referred to its existence. The Soviet Union could not have risked a split within the Eastern Bloc by not informing his allies previously about his plans. The position of Romania after the war was a clear indicator of the difficulties the Soviet Union might have faced if it drafted a plan like this without sharing it with its allies. After the war, the Warsaw Pact countries decided to sever diplomatic relations with Israel and the only country that refused to do so was Romania. Shmuel Mikunis, Secretary General of the Israeli Communist Party, praised the Romanian position later on in a meeting in Tel Aviv with a Romanian Envoy on June 20, 1967.⁵¹

⁵⁰ *T. Zhikov's Report at the CC BCP Plenary Meeting on the Middle East* (Sofia: 14 June 1967) [Annex III].

⁵¹ *Telegram from Valeriu Georgescu, Extraordinary Envoy and Plenipotentiary Minister of Romania in Tel Aviv, to Petru Burlacu, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Romania,*

In fact, Semyonov conveyed the same message to Ambassador Ahmed Hassan El Fiqy in a meeting in Moscow during the crisis. According to El Fiqy, Semyonov conveyed to him the necessity to "take into consideration that our forces [Soviet forces] are not forces of the Soviet Union alone but they are forces of the whole Eastern Bloc." What Semyonov conveyed was a warning to Egypt to avoid any further escalation and to take into consideration the Soviet unwillingness to witness any confrontation with the United States.⁵²

[3] Finally, Ginor and Remez seem to be unaware of Nasr's accusations against the Soviet Union. In his memoirs, he accused the Soviet Union explicitly of conspiring against Egypt in 1967 and that the Soviet Union was one of the main reasons behind the Egyptian defeat.⁵³ If Nasr was that critical of the Soviet Union and its role, why did not he disclose the Soviet purported plan?

Keeping all of this in mind, the existence of the Gretchko-Amer plan is unlikely.

Moscow and Egypt's First Strike

As shown above, the Soviet Union was cautious not to let the situation be more inflamed or reach a point of conflagration between Egypt and Israel. Ghaleb's cable to Cairo and Brezhnev report to the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party were clear indicators of this.

However, during the crisis, Egypt's Minister of War, Shams Badran, visited Moscow on May 25 for direct consultation with the Soviet leadership. Rumors and

Regarding the Position of the Israeli Communist Party vis-à-vis the Israeli Conflict with Arab Nations (Tel Aviv: 1967) [Annex III].

On the position of Romania vis-à-vis the Soviet Union see: Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967*, 40.

⁵² El Fiqy in 1979, on President Sadat's instructions, admitted a report on his visit to Moscow with Badran. He was Deputy Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs and he participated in the meetings of the Egyptian delegation with Kosygin in Moscow. See:

تقرير السفير أحمد حسن الفقي، سفر مفاجئ مع الوزير شمس بدران إلى الاتحاد السوفييتي (القاهرة: 4 أبريل 1979).

⁵³ Nasr went so far in his memoirs as to accuse the Soviet Union of conspiring to kill the visiting Egyptian delegation to Moscow in 1966. In this visit, Amer and Gretchko were arguably, according to Ginor and Remez, devising a plan to induce war between Egypt and Israel. See:

نصر، منكرات صلاح نصر، 184.

suggestions spread about the purpose of this visit. Whereas some scholars⁵⁴ suggest that his visit aimed at getting the consent of the Soviet Union for a first strike against Israel, others,⁵⁵ including Badran himself, argue that the visit was theatrical and meant to show to the world that a direct consultation on a high level was going on between Egypt and the Soviet Union during the crisis. It was nothing more than a matter of an Egyptian propaganda during the crisis.

On the fortieth anniversary of the war, Poghos Pavel Akopov, a former Russian Ambassador, in an interview with the Russian news agency, Novosti, introduced his version of Badran's visit to Moscow in 1967.⁵⁶

Akopov declared that he attended the meetings between Badran and the Soviet leaders as an adviser from the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs and that Badran in his first meeting with Kosygin, on May 26, conveyed a request from Nasser to strike preventively against Israel, however, Kosygin rejected it.

Akopov's interview denotes two important things. First, he denies the hypotheses suggesting that there was a deliberate Soviet policy to induce war between Egypt and Israel; and, Second and most surprising, Egypt did seek to strike first against Israel but the Soviet rejection tied its hands. The Soviet rejection of the Egyptian request was the fact upon which he built his conclusion that the Soviet policy meant to prevent war. However, by revisiting the official records of Badran-Kosygin's meetings, we come across a different conclusion.

⁵⁴ Ginor and Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona*, 113-120; L. Carl Brown, "Origins of the Crisis," in *The Six Day War: A Retrospective*, ed. Richard B. Parker (Florida: University Florida Press, 1996), 38-39.

⁵⁵ شمس بدران، حديث مع مجلة الحوادث (6 سبتمبر 1977) في عكاشة، مذكراتي في السياسة والثقافة، 909.
⁵⁶ يوري زينين، "موسكو تكشف للمرة الأولى مضمون محادثات كوسيجين مع القيادة المصرية عشية حرب يونيو 1967"، جريدة الحياة اللندنية (لندن: 4 يونيو 2007) على:

<http://www.daralhayat.com/special/issues/06-2007/Item-20070603-f28111be-c0a8-10ed-01b1-699654795105/story.html> Accessed June 5, 2007. The same meaning could be found attributed to Akopov under the following title: *Middle East 1967: Pogos Akopov Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary* on: www.mirros.ru/politics/1967 Accessed April 13, 2011; Brown, "Origins of the Crisis," 38-39.

According to the report, the participants from the Soviet side were Alexei Kosygin, Andrei Gromyko, Andrei Grechko and Vladimir Semyonov⁵⁷ and the meeting was in Kosygin's office.⁵⁸ During his presentation on the military situation, Badran asserted that Egypt meant, with its deployment in the Sinai, to oblige Israel to withdraw a major fraction of its forces from its northern borders with Syria. He added "We will not initiate hostilities" and stressed that Egypt could not begin military operations. In the second meeting of May 27, he said, "I would like to confirm what the President [Nasser] has told me. We do not want war at all."

In the Egyptian records, Egypt did not ask, explicitly or tacitly, for the consent of the Soviet Union for an Egyptian first strike against Israel.

There is another document in support of the first one; Ambassador El Fiqy reported to President Sadat retrospectively in 1979 about Badran's deliberations and he did not refer to this.

Although, Ghaleb, the Egyptian Ambassador to Moscow, said in his memoirs⁵⁹ that Badran described the Egyptian deployment as offensive, what he really meant was that it was counter-offensive because the Egyptian attack would only begin after the Israeli one. Badran told Kosygin on May 26 that Egypt would not attack Israel unless it decided to attack Syria and this was the same line of strategy outlined by Nasser during the crisis. Therefore, Egypt's reaction to an Israeli attack would be counter-offensive not offensive. Furthermore, Badran asserted that Nasser would not start the war and hence his strategy would not match an offensive policy but would be counter-offensive.

⁵⁷ The attendants in order were Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defense and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs.

⁵⁸ According to L. Carl Brown, Pavel Akopov and Alexei Schiborin also participated in the meeting. See: Brown, "Origins of the Crisis," 39.

⁵⁹ غالب، مع عبد الناصر والسادات، 104.

One of the common facts about Badran's visit to Moscow is that Nasser did not see the records of Badran's meeting with the Soviet leadership in Moscow. The first time he saw them was on June 13, 1967 after the ceasefire.⁶⁰ Some historians argue that Nasser believed that the Soviet Union was going to support Egypt even if the crisis resulted in war and that is why he pursued escalatory policies until the end of the crisis.⁶¹

However, does this mean that Nasser did not at all know about the proceedings of these meetings? The answer is of course no. Though Nasser did not indeed see the records of Badran's meetings, he knew about them from different sources. The first source was the Egyptian Ambassador to Moscow Morad Ghaleb. Ghaleb, a veteran diplomat, knew that the situation was serious and that what the Soviet leaders conveyed to Badran was very important as it indicated in a clear manner that the Soviet Union was against any further escalation. He wrote in his handwriting the proceedings of Badran's first meeting with Premier Kosygin and sent them directly to Nasser's office with the Governor of Cairo, Hamdy Ashour, who was on a visit to Moscow.⁶² The second source was Ambassador Ahmed Hassan El Fiyy. El Fiyy, a member of the Egyptian delegation to Moscow, was advised by his assistant, Salah Bassiouny, to convey directly to Nasser the proceedings of Badran's meetings in Moscow when he felt that the Minister of War did over-estimate the Soviet pledge to Egypt. Once they arrived in Cairo, El Fiyy rushed to the supreme headquarters where he informed President Nasser about the Soviet position.⁶³

⁶⁰ Shemesh, *Arab Politics, Palestinian Nationalism and the Six-Day War*, 207; حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 150; 76، 1967، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967، شهادة الفريق أول محمد فوزي في مظهر،

⁶¹ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 118

⁶² غالب، مع عبد الناصر والسادات، 107-108; حمروش، المرجع السابق، 147; هويدي، مع عبد الناصر، 161.

⁶³ Brown, "Origins of the Crisis," 44;

عبد الله إمام، عبد الناصر: هكذا كان يحكم مصر (القاهرة: مدبولي الصغير، 1996)، 362; نصر، مذكرات صلاح نصر، 222.

In this regard, an important point needs to be addressed. How did Nasser perceive the role of the Soviet Union during the crisis? Did he believe that the Soviet Union would intervene on Egypt's side in case of war? The answer to this question is important because some historians over-emphasized Badran's perception of the Soviet Union role and believe that Nasser was really expecting Soviet help even against Israel alone.

Nasser did not at all consider that the Soviet Union would have to participate on Egypt's side if military operations would commence. In a meeting with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ibrahim Makhous, on May 16, Nasser elaborated his perception of the expected Soviet Union's role during the crisis as follows: First, the ability of the Soviet Union to help Egypt [and the Arab countries] might be limited; and, Second, the Soviet assistance would not exceed the moral and political support and may be the warning of the United States and Israel.⁶⁴

During the crisis, on May 22, Nasser told the Soviet Ambassador, Dimitry Bojidaev, that if the Soviet Union was to issue a warning against any party, it should be against the United States.⁶⁵ Nasser perceived the role of the Soviet Union as a neutralizer to that of the United States. Though the message he received from Badran exaggerated the help Egypt might get from the Soviet Union, it was clear that Egypt would likely expect this help in case the United States participated with Israel against Egypt.⁶⁶ Hence, if Israel was acting alone, Egypt had to defend itself alone. There is no logic to believe that Nasser was expecting a Soviet help in case Israel attacked alone. The CIA estimated in 1970 that "The only fairly clear commitment the Soviets

⁶⁴ Nasser-Makhous conversation in:

حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 137؛ هيكل، لمصر لا لعبد الناصر، 116-117.

⁶⁵ Nasser-Bojidaev conversation in:

هيكل، الانفجار، 525؛ هيكل، لمصر لا لعبد الناصر، 117.

⁶⁶ شمس بدران في طارق حبيب، ملفات ثورة يوليو: شهادات 122 من صناعاتها ومعاصريها (القاهرة: مركز الأهرام للترجمة والنشر، 1997)، 332-333؛ سامي جوهر، الصامتون يتكلمون (القاهرة: المكتب المصري الحديث، 1975)، 128؛ ناتنج، ناصر، 458.

made [for the Arabs] was to support the Arabs if the United States intervened on behalf of Israel."⁶⁷

In fact, Nasser's perception of the gradual diminution of the Soviet Union's role vis-à-vis the United States was not new. He figured this out in the mid-sixties years before the crisis. An important Egyptian document sheds more light on this. In a meeting with an Iraqi delegation in Cairo in 1965, Nasser described the Soviet policies as follows:

[1] The Russians today are proceeding in a policy of peaceful coexistence [vis-à-vis the United States] and have many internal problems.

[2] Russia vis-à-vis the United States [in case of a crisis] cannot do anything.⁶⁸

Nasser expressed the same views in his meeting with the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs during the crisis as previously elaborated. Accordingly, there is no way to believe that Nasser suddenly shifted his perception on the Soviet policies and believed they would come to his help in case of war.

Nasser-Amer Relationship and its Impact on the Army

In his study on the war, Michael Oren constructs his perception of Nasser-Amer's relationship as follows:

[1] Nasser was completely detached from the military establishment.

[2] Nasser was not capable of defying Amer's authority inside the army to a degree that would enable Amer to bypass Nasser and initiate an offensive against Israel without Nasser's consent.

⁶⁷ Directorate of Intelligence, "Intelligence Report: Soviet Policy and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War," *Central Intelligence Agency*, No. 64 (March 16, 1970): 9-10 [Annex II].

⁶⁸ محضر اجتماع القيادة السياسية الموحدة للجمهورية العربية المتحدة والعراق بقصر القبة (القاهرة: 19 مايو 1967).

[3] Amer was about to initiate an offensive against Israel during the crisis in 1967 but "the Egyptian offensive was all but dead, struck down by a chance intervention just short of H-hour."⁶⁹

For Oren, the disagreement between the two persons reached a degree by which Amer managed to establish his ultimate authority over the Egyptian army so that he could easily wage war against Israel without even informing Nasser.

Though the relationship between the two persons witnessed vicissitudes, it did not reach a point of conflagration that Amer could authorize a military attack without Nasser's consent. Witnesses on the relationship between the two persons even assert that the tension was not between Nasser and Amer but between the two men's entourage.⁷⁰ The dispute between the two men began after the 1956 Suez War. The performance of the military commanders during the war did not come to Nasser's expectations and he decided to terminate their presence as commanders of the army.⁷¹ However, Amer managed to convince Nasser that he could not blame them for mishandling a war with three countries two of which, Britain and France, were great powers.⁷² When Nasser blamed Amer for the dissolution of the UAR in 1961,⁷³ they agreed to establish Presidential Council as an instrument for collective leadership. One of the essential tasks of this council was to organize some of the affairs related to the armed forces including officers' promotion. By then, the most notable point of the struggle between the two men inside the Council was the promotion of high-ranking military commanders.

⁶⁹ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 121.

⁷⁰ توفيق عبده إسماعيل في طارق حبيب، *ملفات ثورة يوليو*، 319؛ مراد غالب في المرجع السابق، 322؛ حديث صدقي محمود الذي أدلى به لمجلة الوادي (أغسطس 1982) في رشاد كامل، *حياة المشير: محمد عبد الحكيم عامر* (القاهرة، دار الخيال، 2002)، 37؛ عبد المحسن كامل مرتجي في المرجع السابق، 38؛ محمود الجبار، "الأسرار الشخصية لجمال عبد الناصر"، *روز اليوسف*، العدد 2482، السنة 51، (الاثنين 5 يناير 1976): 10.

⁷¹ كامل، المرجع السابق، 129 و 132؛ عبد الناصر في إمام، *عبد الناصر*، 374.

⁷² المرجع السابق، 129.

⁷³ شهادة الفريق محمد فوزي في صبري، *السادات*، 369.

Amer thought that the formation of this council was a step toward minimizing his role inside the army and he offered his resignation but Nasser rejected it.⁷⁴ In the mid sixties, when Nasser insisted on the appointment of Mohammed Fawzy as Chief of the Staff, Amer created a new command for the ground forces to bypass the newly appointed Chief of Staff. The struggle between the two persons was essentially on matters related to the internal organization of the army but Amer did not ever question the hierarchy of the political leadership represented by Nasser and its monopoly of taking a crucial decision such as going to war. Oren also seems to forget that Nasser, as President of Egypt, was the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces and the head of the National Defense Council and one of his main authorities were to appoint the General Commander of the Armed Forces,⁷⁵ who was by then Amer. Furthermore, the Council of the Nation [The Egyptian Parliament] issued a decree during the crisis, on May 29, which granted Nasser the right to rule by decrees in all matters related to the security of the state during the crisis.⁷⁶ In fact, most of the Egyptian officials that witnessed the crisis that led to the war asserted that, Nasser was the sole decision-maker⁷⁷ during the crisis and that his deputy, Amer, did not question this status. Amer's usual recourse to resignation whenever he faced a problem with Nasser was a sign of weakness not a sign of power or defiance. Oren's magnification of the disagreement between Nasser and Amer is meant to give credibility to his unfounded claim that Amer was about to initiate an attack against Israel which was cancelled at the last minute due to American and Soviet pressures on Egypt.

⁷⁴ Amer expressed his concern that it might affect the discipline inside the army. See:

كامل، حياة المشير، 133؛ نصر، منكرات صلاح نصر، 26-28.
⁷⁵ رمزي ميخائيل، تاريخ السياسة والصحافة المصرية: من هزيمة يونيو إلى نصر أكتوبر (القاهرة، الهيئة المصرية العامة للكتاب، 1995)، 10.

⁷⁶ حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 153.
⁷⁷ نصر، منكرات صلاح نصر، 145؛ هويدي، مع عبد الناصر، 155؛ حمروش، المرجع السابق، 143.

Fajr [Dawn] Plan

The offensive plan that Oren argues Amer was about to implement against Nasser's will was code-named Fajr or Dawn. The plan, Oren argues, was not limited to air strikes at strategic targets and the detachment of Eilat but included the entire Negev.⁷⁸

However, distinction should be made between drafting a plan whether offensive or defensive and operationally activating this plan for implementation in the field. The military command's sole responsibility is to prepare military plans whether offensive or defensive. Israel's military command, for instance, devised military plans for war with Egypt years before 1967 war. Yo'ash Tsidon, Chief of Planning in the Israeli Air Force, said that Israel devised the idea of achieving air superiority by destroying the Egyptian airstrips in 1964.⁷⁹ Israeli pilots trained continuously on operation Moked [Focus] for two years.⁸⁰ The discussions of the Israeli military command during the crisis determine that offensive plans⁸¹ for war with Egypt were already available at the disposal of the political leadership.⁸² Yet, the latter delayed the implementation of these plans until the situation was ripe in 1967.⁸³ Egypt did the same. The Egyptian high command devised military plans for a possible war with Israel. The last of which was Qahir, which was drafted in 1966. The plan was

⁷⁸ This is not true. The plan was only limited to the southern Negev. There was another plan code-named Ghasaq or Dusk for northern Negev. See for Oren's narrative: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 92. For a counter-narrative see: 109 و 107 فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات،

⁷⁹ Battlefield Detectives, "The Six-Day War," *The History Channel*, Season 3, Episode 9 (December 30, 2005); Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 316.

⁸⁰ Battlefield Detectives, "The Six-Day War.," Oren, *Six Days of War*, 80.

⁸¹ Offensive doctrines and war plans contribute to the outbreak of war by increasing the incentives to strike first. A number of international relations theorists argue that offensive war plans and the pre-World War I "cult of the offensive"...contributed significantly to the processes leading to war by accelerating the perceived incentives to move quickly which minimized the opportunities for diplomatic initiatives that might defuse the conflict. See: Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 172

⁸² Rabin devised a plan code-named Atzmon to occupy Gaza Strip if Nasser blockaded the straits. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 80.

⁸³ Weizman, Israeli Chief of Operations, devised a plan code-named Kardom or Axe against Egypt. He disseminated orders to Israeli troops to implement the plan before even Eshkol knew about it. When told about it, Eshkol refused. See: Ibid, 92; Segev, *1967*, 244; Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 162.

essentially defensive but Egypt considered limited offensive operations as well. However, in 1967 they did not get the authorization of the political leadership. Oren is implying that the Egyptian offensive operations were brainchildren of the crisis. Amer, according to Oren, during the crisis modified the original Qahir transforming it into an offensive plan. Yet, this is not true. The original Qahir had limited offensive components. The final modifications the original Qahir witnessed, however, transformed it from a defensive plan with offensive component into a completely defensive plan.⁸⁴

Theoretically, military organizations tend to focus on the military aspects of policy and to minimize its political component. Accordingly, there is a resulting danger that military doctrine will follow "strictly instrumental military logic" and ignore important political considerations.⁸⁵ Therefore, it is essential for any country to integrate every minute detail of its political and military strategies in order to achieve the country's grand objectives.

The problem of low political-military integration exacerbates if political leaders are ignorant of the details of military plans because they may not realize the extent to which they lack the military options to support their foreign policy objectives.⁸⁶ This problem was manifest in the Egyptian political and military high echelons. Nasser was not entirely aware of the details of the plan designed to defend the Sinai and he interfered several times during the crisis in its components. The

⁸⁴ Egypt abandoned all the counter-offensive operations by May 29/30. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 110-109.

⁸⁵ Eban in his memoirs believed "in the axiom that it is the duty of soldiers to exaggerate their dangers. Military commanders have a professional commitment to anxiety. But it is the duty of ministers not to take reports of such dangers on trust". Quandt also argues, "One might expect that professional military men would tend to favor the use of military force." Murtagi as well believed that "Military customs puts offense in the first rank and considers it the best means to defense." See: Van Evera, *Causes of War*, 178; Eban, *Personal Witness*, 382; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 47; مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي بروي الحقائق، 42

⁸⁶ Nasser interfered in the deployment of the forces in the Sinai to reinforce the defenses of Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh. This, however, distorted the plan and affected its coherence. See: Van Evera, *Ibid.*

compliance of the Egyptian military command with Nasser's remarks on the plan went so smoothly in a way that refutes Oren's allegations about the defiance of the military leadership and its disobedience. While this problem affected the coherence of the Egyptian military plan due to frequent intervention by the political leadership, it did not result in any disobedience to Nasser's authority.

Nasser-Amer Hierarchy and Fajr

When he describes the Egyptian perspectives on Dawn, Oren classifies them into two schools of interpretation:

First, loyalists of Nasser like Heikal who insist that Nasser wanted a blueprint for attack and, while not directly involved in its drafting, implicitly approved it; and. Second, critics of Nasser who assert that Amer alone devised the operation in blatant opposition to Nasser's will.⁸⁷ Oren then argues himself,

"The truth, no doubt, lays somewhere between: Nasser was apprised of Dawn but lacked the political strength to override Amer's order. Also, the preparation of an Egyptian invasion of Israel had certain advantages for Nasser."⁸⁸

However, by reviewing Heikal's views on Dawn, there is a different conclusion. According to Heikal, on the morning of Saturday May 26, 1967, Nasser confided to Amer a few remarks on the meeting he had the previous day, May 25, in the headquarter of the military command.⁸⁹ Nasser expressed to Amer the following:⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Oren builds his argument on the memoirs of Amer's wife. However, it is noteworthy that Amer's wife, a former Egyptian actress, was an ardent critic of Nasser. She accused the regime of killing her husband [Amer] so that the secrets of the defeat would remain undisclosed. Hence, her testimony is unreliable. Furthermore, she admitted years after publishing that her book was weak with many historical mistakes. She decided, later on, to travel to the United States to look into the American archives related to this era and based on her new research published another refined version of her book. See:

فراج إسماعيل، "أرملة عيد الحكيم عامر تقول إنها توصلت لوثائق مهمة وتقرير اغتياله،" *قناة العربية* (ديي: 2007).

⁸⁸ Oren, *Six Days of War*, 92.

⁸⁹ هيكل، الانفجار، 573-574.

⁹⁰ Heikal believes that May 27 was the date of Nasser-Amer meeting. In his narrative, Heikal says that Nasser had few remarks on the meeting he had the previous day with the military command. Nasser met for the first time with the military command on May 25. Accordingly, Nasser-Amer meeting should have been on May 26 not 27.

[1] He [Nasser] referred to a limited offensive operation code-named Fajr or Dawn directed against the Israeli port of Eilat that Amer discussed in yesterday's meeting;

[2] He [Nasser] did not stress on his objection on the plan during the meeting for fear of misunderstanding by the military command; and,⁹¹

[3] He [Nasser] preferred that Amer cancel immediately the issued orders of operational readiness for the plan.⁹²

Heikal then asserts that Amer, while not convinced, would execute Nasser's instructions. Yet, Heikal further adds that Amer was reluctant throughout the day to cancel the implementation of the plan but he finally complied.⁹³

Heikal never said, as Oren argues, that Nasser wanted an offensive plan against Israel. Egyptian military commanders who tackled this meeting in their writings never said that Nasser wanted an offensive plan against Israel. They confirm that Nasser doubted the benefit of the plan and finally ordered its cancellation.

The second source upon which Oren builds his conclusion is the memoirs of Amer's wife. In her memoirs, she did mention that Amer issued a fighting order number one to implement Fahd or Leopard plan.⁹⁴ Yet, Oren ignores the rest of her commentary. She adds that Nasser called her husband Amer and insisted on the

⁹¹ According to Fawzy, after the meeting Nasser met with Amer in private. When their meeting was over, Amer cancelled Fajr. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 124.
⁹² هيكل، الانفجار، 573-574؛ هويدي، مع عبد الناصر، 159؛ مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي يروي الحقائق، 79 و 81؛ عبد الناصر في إمام، عبد الناصر، 375-376.

⁹³ Amer's reluctance indicates that the time of implementation of the plan was still due to come. Hence, the time of Nasser-Amer meeting was not on May 27 the supposed day of the implementation of the plan.

⁹⁴ The plan code-named Assad or Lion not Leopard. Leopard was another aerial counter-offensive plan designed to attack Israeli airfields and strategic sites once Egypt or Syria suffered from Israeli attack. Amer issued orders to implement Fahd on June 5 after Israel began its air strike. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 107 و 109؛ تحسين زكي قائد لواء السوخوي في دراز، ضباط يونيو يتكلمون، 12؛ محمود فوزي، مبارك والضرية الجوية في أكتوبر (العاشر من رمضان: هاتيه، 1993)، 38؛ شهادة الفريق أول محمد فوزي في مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967، 81.

cancellation of Amer's orders.⁹⁵ Amer objected but Nasser said, "This is a political decision that you should comply with."⁹⁶

Oren's two schools of interpretation of this event are actually one school.

Nasser knew about Fajr in his meeting with the military high command on May 25. However, he decided that Egypt would not attack first and ordered Amer to cancel any preparations to implement Fajr. Both sources assert Nasser's decisions.⁹⁷

Oren, in his efforts to assert Amer's offensive planning, further quotes him telling Murtagi "this time we will be the ones to start war." Indeed, Murtagi in his memoirs mentioned Amer's sentence. Nevertheless, Oren again ignores the rest of Murtagi's comment. When Murtagi referred to the bad condition of the army, Amer said to him,

*"Everybody must understand that this is the trend [that Egypt is going to war] so that they would be ready and take the matter seriously and prepare the preventive measures with enthusiasm and unwavering interest."*⁹⁸

Amer meant with his statement to raise the morale of the troops not to establish a policy.⁹⁹ A few days before when Nasser announced the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba on May 22, Amer behaved in the same way when he told the pilots that met with Nasser "Don't be sad boys. You are going to fight." The pilots were eager to fight and were disappointed when Nasser told them that Egypt would not initiate

⁹⁵ Oren in this part also misquotes from the sources to which he refers. He mentions a conversation between Amer and Sidqi the Commander of EAF that he believes was on the phone. Yet, Sidqi himself said that he was personally with Amer when Nasser cancelled the plan. Oren even adds events that not mentioned in that source. He says that Sidqi objected to the cancellation of the plan telling Amer "Why? Don't we trust that Allah will aid us?" However, by revising the source, this sentence was never part of Amer-Sidqi conversation. See:

شهادة الفريق صدقي محمود في مظهر، المرجع السابق، 142.

⁹⁶ She did not specify exactly on what day Nasser called her husband to cancel the operation. See:

برلنتي عبد الحميد، المشير وأنا (القاهرة: مكتبة مدبولي، 1992)، 211.

⁹⁷ When asked about her husband's responsibility for the defeat, Amer's wife asserted on the chain of command and that Amer as Deputy Supreme Commander was taking orders from Nasser as the Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces. See:

برلنتي عبد الحميد في طارق حبيب، ملفات ثورة يوليو، 323.

⁹⁸ مرتجي في الجوادي، مذكرات قادة العسكرية المصرية 1967، 197.

⁹⁹ This tour was on May 20, 1967 two days before Nasser declared the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba, which Israel considered casus bellum.

hostilities and would wait for an Israeli first strike.¹⁰⁰ Amer spoke with them in this way just to raise their morale.

The American and Soviet Influence

Oren's perception of the circumstances under which Egypt decided to cancel Dawn or Fajr¹⁰¹ led him to believe that American and Soviet pressures on Egypt were the main factors that led Nasser to cancel the implementation of the plan.¹⁰² According to him, Abba Eban, the Israeli Foreign Minister, received a cable from his government informing him that Israel was in possession of information about a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack against it.¹⁰³ By then, Eban was on a visit to Washington where he immediately informed Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, about his government's estimates on the afternoon of May 25.¹⁰⁴ The American Ambassador to Tel Aviv received the same information early that day from Israeli sources. Despite the sense of imminence the Israeli government tried to include in its message to American officials, Rusk asked for more time to verify its accuracy. Eban raised the issue again in a meeting with officials from both State and Defense Departments including Robert McNamara, Secretary of Defense, and General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, at 10: 30 a.m. Washington time on May 26. The

¹⁰⁰ According to Gordon Thomas, in the run up to the Six-Day War in 1967, there was either a Mossad Katsa [Field Mossad Officer] or an informer inside every Egyptian air base and military headquarters. Meir Amit recruited, according to him, three in the General High Command headquarters in Cairo. If this is true, this means that the Israelis should have known about the discussion that happened between Nasser and the EAF pilots on May 22 after he announced the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba in one of the Egyptian airbases, during which he asserted that Egypt was not going to strike first. They should have known, as well, about Nasser's instructions to his military commanders on May 25. See: Thomas Gordon, *Gideon's Spies: The Secret History of the Mossad* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 55; 73 . شهادة الفريق صدقي محمود في مظهر، اعترافات قادة حرب يونيو 1967 ، 55; 73

¹⁰¹ The tentative date of Fajr implementation was on May 29, 1967. The plan scheduled on May 27, 1967 was Assad or Lion, which was the aerial phase of Fajr plan that would continue for three successive days as a prelude to implement Fajr. See:

فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات ، 107.

¹⁰² Benny Morris adopts the same version as well. See: Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 307.

¹⁰³ Eban did not specify a time for the attack. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 107; Eban, *Personal Witness*, 382.

¹⁰⁴ Rusk asked Eban for more time to verify the accuracy of the information. See: Oren, *Ibid*; Segev, *1967*, 257; Eban, *Ibid*, 384.

Americans, during the meeting, asked Eban about the sources of the Israeli information but he did not answer. Eban raised the issue for the third time in a meeting with President Johnson that lasted from 07: 15 p.m. till 08: 40 p.m. Washington time who cited the conclusions of America's intelligence branches that "there is no Egyptian intention to...attack."¹⁰⁵ For two days, May 25 and 26, Eban had been deliberating with American officials and the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack did not materialize though Eban received confirmation of the information while he was meeting with McNamara and Wheeler on May 26, 1967. If Israel were quite sure about the imminence of the Egyptian-Syrian attack, Eban would have taken the matter more seriously and urged the Americans to do something instead of waiting for them to verify the information. More surprising was that Israel did not preempt the Egyptian attack, militarily, and decided instead to let the Americans intervene, politically. Oren does not bother himself to answer few important questions. Why did Israel take this risk? Why did not it preempt the attack if they had solid information about it? What would happen if the Americans, while verifying the authenticity of the information, and the Soviets failed to intervene and prevent Egypt and Syria from launching that attack?

Though the Americans did not believe the Israeli information on the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack, they decided on the same day Eban told them about it May 25, to inform the Egyptian side.

After this point, Oren begins to manipulate events more in order to prove his viewpoint about the imminence of the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack.

¹⁰⁵ Document 72, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 73, *Special Report of the Watch Committee* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 76, *Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

The American Intervention

On Johnson's instructions, Eugene Rostow, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, summoned the Egyptian Ambassador, Mustapha Kamel, to the State Department on May 25, 1967.¹⁰⁶ According to Kamel,¹⁰⁷ Rostow called him at 09: 30 p.m.¹⁰⁸ Washington time [04: 30 a.m. Cairo Time May 26] informing him about a very urgent and delicate matter that necessitated a meeting forthwith. He met with Rostow privately at 10: 00 p.m. Washington time [05: 00 a.m. Cairo time] in Rostow's office.¹⁰⁹ Rostow told Kamel the following:

[1] The Israeli Foreign Minister came to Washington and asked for a meeting with Dean Rusk Secretary of State.

[2] The Americans specified a time for the meeting.

[3] Two hours before the specified time, the Israeli Embassy called the office of the Secretary of State and asked for an immediate meeting for Abba Eban.¹¹⁰ The Embassy said that the matter was extremely significant and that they could not wait for two hours.

¹⁰⁶ Oren mentions that Kamel met with Walt Rostow. However, Kamel in his cable said that he met with Eugene Rostow. The State Department's memorandum on the meeting confirms this. Oren refers to Heikal's book on Kamel's meeting. Yet, by revising the pages he refers to, a very different meeting was there between Kamel and other State Department officials and the issue raised in that meeting was the evacuation of American personnel from Egypt and Israel. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 110-111; 565-564، الانفجار، هيكل،

Fathy lies in the same mistake. He believes that Walt Rostow not Eugene Rostow met with Kamel though, he refers to him as Undersecretary of State. See:

فتحي، مصر من الثورة إلى النكسة، 578.

¹⁰⁷ برقية رمزية واردة رقم 2960/174 (واشنطن: 1967/5/26).

¹⁰⁸ In this part, focus on the precise time and day of events is essential taking into account the difference in time zones in different countries for two reasons:

[1] The confusion that is encountered due to the variations different sources have on the temporal aspect of events

[2] Timing is very important, as will be seen, to invalidate the Israeli allegations on the purported joint Egyptian-Syrian attack

¹⁰⁹ Rostow asked his assistants to leave the place where he and Kamel met in private. See:

برقية رمزية واردة رقم 2960/174 (واشنطن: 26 مايو 1967).

¹¹⁰ Eban requested to advance his talk with Rusk scheduled for 05: 30 p.m. by two hours. See: Eban, *Personal Witness*, 382.

[4] Eban showed him an urgent cable from his government according to which Israel was expecting a surprise Egyptian-Syrian attack that was about to be expected from moment to moment.¹¹¹

[5] Rostow ruled out that possibility but Eban insisted on confirming it.

[6] Rostow said that Eban was currently in a meeting with the Secretary of State. Then added that despite the fact that they did not believe that Egypt was about to attack Israel, they did not want to take any chances in this serious situation. He asked Kamel to send an urgent message to the Egyptian government from the government of the United States conveying its strong appeal to abide by self-control and avoid any offensive military operations. He further added that these actions, which they did not believe, would result in serious consequences if they happened.

[7] Rostow also added that the American government from its part was exerting every effort to prevent Israel from launching military operations against Egypt.

[8] Rostow added that this matter was directly under the supervision of President Johnson and that what he conveyed to Kamel was under direct instructions from President Johnson himself.¹¹²

Kamel cabled his meeting with Rostow in the early hours of May 26.¹¹³

When Nasser got the message, at noon May 26,¹¹⁴ he called Amer and asked him to pass by whenever he could. When Amer came, Nasser gave him Kamel's cable and

¹¹¹ Again, Rostow did not specify a time for the attack. He just described it as imminent without a specific day or time.

¹¹² The American version of events is a little bit different in details though it followed the same line. Rostow conveyed to him the following message, "Your adversaries [Israel] believe that a surprise attack by UAR from Egypt and Syria is imminent from moment to moment. We know this is unthinkable. We cannot believe the government of the UAR would be so reckless. Such a course would obviously have the most serious possible consequences. Therefore we are continuing to advise restraint on the part of GOI." Rostow added that he was transmitting this message as a friendly act and described the Israeli information as "rumor". See: Document 65, *Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

¹¹³ Kamel sent his cable from the Egyptian Embassy at 01: 03 a.m. Washington time [08: 03 a.m. Cairo time] and Cairo received it at 11: 25 a.m. Cairo time. Heikal believes that Nasser got the message by noon on Saturday May 27, 1967. See:

told him that the Israelis might have known about Fajr plan and so he asked that the frequencies of the Egyptian army be changed every three days.¹¹⁵ Nasser's concerns were that the Israelis might have succeeded in breaking the Egyptian codes of communications.

The Soviet Intervention

At 03: 30 am Cairo time, May 27, 1967, the Soviet Ambassador called in asking to meet Nasser immediately. When Nasser received him, the Soviet Ambassador told him that he had an important message from Premiere Kosygin that entailed the following.¹¹⁶

[1] President Johnson called him [Kosygin] an hour ago on the hot line between the White House and the Kremlin;

[2] Johnson told Kosygin that Egyptian forces were preparing an attack on Israel and that attack was imminent;

[3] If this happened, the United States would not adhere to her previous commitments to the Soviet Union about self-control; and,

[4] Johnson did not wish to waste time in such dangerous hours that could seriously endanger the situation. Hence, he decided to use the hot line in a sincere attempt to rectify repercussions that could be serious.

¹¹⁴ If Kamel sent his cable in the early hours of May 26, why, according to Heikal, did not Nasser see the cable until the noon of May 27? In a crisis, Nasser should have seen significant cables like that of Kamel immediately. Accordingly, it is suggested in this paper that Nasser got the message on May 26 and that he met with Amer in the same day to tell him about the cable. If the attack was about to be launched on May 27, then it was useless for Nasser to tell Amer to cancel it hours after the attack's timing. One source supports this version. Munir Hafez, number two in Nasser's secretariat in 1967, indicated in a message to the weekly magazine Ruz El Yusef in 1976 that he got Kamel's cable from Washington on Friday May 26 in the morning and that they directly informed Nasser about it. See:

منير حافظ، "التاريخ السري لحكم جمال عبد الناصر: أسرار يذيعها أخيراً منير حافظ"، *روز اليوسف*، العدد 2496 السنة 51، 12، ابريل (1976): 10-15.
¹¹⁵ هيكل، الانفجار، 577.

¹¹⁶ Nasser told the Soviet Ambassador that Rostow delivered the same message hours ago to the Egyptian Ambassador to Washington [which confirms that Nasser saw Kamel's cable on May 26 not 27]. The Soviet Ambassador added that Eshkol was simultaneously receiving the same message. See: Eban, *Personal Witness*, 396; Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 90; Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis*, 128; Oren, *Six Days of War*, 119; Quandt, *Decade of Decisions*, 48; Stein and Tanter, *Rational Decision Making*, 185; 578، *الانفجار*، هيكل.

Oren's Construction of Events

Oren's narrative about the day during which the State Department summoned Kamel depicts the meeting as if it was on May 26 and that the White House simultaneously cabled the essence of Israel's warning to Moscow on the same day as well.¹¹⁷ Temporally speaking, he mentions Kamel's meeting with Rostow after he speaks about Eban's deliberations with McNamara, which was on May 26.

Oren also describes how the Americans summoned Kamel on the same day Nasser received Kosygin's message [after the midnight of May 26]. However, this is entirely not true. The Americans summoned Kamel on May 25 and he sent his cable to Egypt in the early hours of May 26. While Nasser received Kosygin's message in the early hours of May 27.¹¹⁸

Additionally, Oren, referring to Heikal, mentions that once Nasser got Kosygin's message, he rushed to the supreme headquarters for an emergency meeting with Amer. However, is it believed that Nasser was sleeping at his house while his army was on the verge of launching a military offensive against Israel within few hours, as Oren believes?

The conversation that Oren mentions in his book between Amer and Nasser, though mentioned in Heikal's study on the war, was on a very different occasion. Oren believes that the Nasser-Amer meeting came directly as a reaction to Kosygin's message. However, Heikal, with whom Oren argues, has a different narrative to tell. Analysis of Heikal's narrative reveals the following:

¹¹⁷ Oren, Ibid, 111.

¹¹⁸ In his resignation speech on June 9, Nasser mentioned that the two messages, the one through his Ambassador to Washington and the other he received from the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo, were in two successive days and not on the same day. See:

بيان الرئيس جمال عبد الناصر إلى الشعب والأمة بإعلان التنحي عن رئاسة الجمهورية من مبنى الإذاعة والتليفزيون (القاهرة: 9 يونيو 1967).

[1] The Nasser-Amer meeting was approximately in the after-noon of May 26 and not in the early hours of May 27 before the purported Egyptian-Syrian attack.

[2] There was not a sense of emergency in the meeting. Nasser called Amer at noon and asked to meet with him as soon as he could.¹¹⁹

[3] Nasser received Amer in his house not in the supreme headquarters, as Oren believes.

[4] Nasser asked to meet with Amer after he read Kamel's cable from Washington about his meeting with Rostow.

[5] There was not a single reference to Kosygin's message in the meeting, which indicates that Kosygin's message was on a different occasion.¹²⁰

To stress further on his theory, Oren mentions that Israel caught five Egyptian officers later on that morning [of May 27]. However, this is also not true. Israel captured those officers on May 28 not May 27.¹²¹ Oren mentions their capture on May 27 to give credibility to his assumption about the attack in the morning of that same day as if these officers were part of the force assigned to it. He even believes that the arrested officers were privy to the plan. However, Murtagi has different information to tell. According to him, the command disseminated orders to implement Fajr only to brigade commanders and did not reach the lower levels of the troops.¹²² The mission of those officers was a simple reconnaissance mission during which they stumbled and crossed into Israeli territories.¹²³

¹¹⁹ If the situation were urgent, Nasser would have asked Amer to meet him immediately instead of giving Amer the option to choose the proper time to pass by.

¹²⁰ This asserts the hypothesis of this research that Nasser-Amer meeting was on May 26 not May 27. That is because most of authentic sources assert that Nasser received Kosygin's message on the dawn of May 27 [the same time at which Eshkol received a similar message from the Soviet Ambassador]. If Nasser got both Kamel's and Kosygin's messages before seeing Amer, why did not he inform Amer about them both and instead told him only about Kamel's?

¹²¹ الحديدي، شاهد علي حرب 1967، 168؛ فوزي، حرب الثلاث سنوات، 114-115؛ مرتجي، الفريق مرتجي بروي الحقائق، 91.

¹²² مرتجي، المرجع السابق، 92.

¹²³ الحديدي، شاهد علي حرب 1967، 167.

Three years after publishing his book, Oren wrote an article in the Israel Studies periodical about the 1967 war. He repeats in this article his allegations about Amer's plan to attack Israel, yet, with a notable variation. Here is how Oren depicts Eshkol's cable to Eban in Washington in his article of 2005:¹²⁴

"As Eban landed, he was handed an ultra-secret cable directly from Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, which stated that Israel had learned of Egypt's intention to attack Israel within the next 48 hours to lead a war of annihilation..."

He added that Johnson cabled the following message to Kosygin: "We have learned from the Israelis, and, though we can not corroborate this information, they say that the Egyptians plan to attack Israel in the next 48 hours."

Oren's narrative in this article is different in a very significant detail from his book. In his book, published in 2002, he did not mention at all that Eban told the American officials that the Egyptian attack was within 48 hours. Eban told them that his government believed that the Egyptian attack was imminent without identifying a specific date or timing for the attack.¹²⁵

Why did Oren change his narrative?¹²⁶ There are two possible explanations for this; either new documents were released that revealed the information or that he deliberately changed his narrative to give credibility to his assumption about the Egyptian attack. The second explanation is the most probable. Oren's new narrative

¹²⁴ Oren "The Revelations of 1967," 1-14.

¹²⁵ In his meeting with Rusk, Eban quoted the following message from his government: "an all-out Egyptian-Syrian attack is imminent and could occur at any moment". This meeting was on May 25 and the Oren narrative in his book does not specify the 48 hours warning mentioned in his article. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 107.

¹²⁶ The way Oren handles archives is suspicious. Misquoting is a usual trend in his citation. For example, when he discusses Johnson's meeting with his aides on May 26, he cites Vice President Humphrey saying, "Israel's existence is at stake." He mentions that Humphrey said so when he referred to two Egyptian overflights. Oren mentions Humphrey's words within quotation marks and this means Humphrey literally said so. Yet, by revising the original document the following are noted:

[1] Humphrey said, "This [Tiran] is a matter of life or death" not "Israel's existence is at stake."

[2] Humphrey did not refer at all to the Egyptian flights but Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, did.

See: Ibid, 112-113; Document 72, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II].

contradicts all the available primary sources on the content of Eshkol's message to Eban. Not a single reference to the 48 hours warning exists in the following primary sources:¹²⁷

- [1] Kamel's cable to Cairo on his meeting with Eugene Rostow.
- [2] The Department of State cable to its Embassy in Cairo.
- [3] Memorandum of Conversation of Rusk and Eban.
- [4] Memorandum of Conversation of Eban, McNamara and Wheeler.
- [5] Memorandum of Conversation of Eban and President Johnson.
- [6] Johnson's message to the British Prime Minister Wilson.

Even other secondary sources, like the memoirs of Rabin and Eban in addition to Brecher and Geist account, do not refer to the forty-eight hours interval.

Given this, the important question to be answered next is, did Israel know about Fajr? Although the question seems simple, the answer is very important to invalidate Oren's assumption.

Israel and Fajr: Superb Intelligence Material or Mere Coincidence

When Eban landed in Washington, the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Harman, notified him of a cable the Embassy received from the cabinet about a possible Egyptian-Syrian attack against Israel that was imminent.¹²⁸ The cabinet asked Eban to convey the contents of this cable to President Johnson himself or to his Secretary of State Dean Rusk. This cable was the second of two cables Eban received in Washington. Nevertheless, he received the second cable first. The first cable,

¹²⁷ برقية رمزية واردة رقم 2960/174 (واشنطن: 26 مايو 1967):

Document 65, *Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 64, *Memorandum of Conversation* [Abba Eban and Dean Rusk] (Washington: May 25, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 69, *Memorandum of Conversation* [Abba Eban, Robert S. McNamara and General Earle G. Wheeler] (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 77, *Memorandum of Conversation* [Abba Eban and President Johnson] (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 66, *Message from President Johnson to Prime Minister Wilson* (Washington: May 25, 1967) [Annex II].

¹²⁸ Eban described this cable in his memoirs as the eccentric cable. See: Eban, *Personal Witness*, 382.

according to Eban, was a brainchild of Rabin in which he asked for security guarantees for Israel. The aim was to expose the United States unwillingness to help Israel and thereby make Israel's right of military reply self-evident as well as necessary.¹²⁹ Eban, surprised by the speed through which the military situation deteriorated to a level that made a possible Egyptian-Syrian attack imminent, conveyed the message to Rusk. Based on this second cable, the American administration decided to warn Egypt not to initiate hostilities by summoning its Ambassador, Kamel.

The American and, later on, the Soviet intervention, which prevented Egypt from launching its joint attack with Syria against Israel during the crisis, is the dominant scenario many studies adopt. However, this scenario poses an important question; did Israel know about Fajr? If the answer to this question is yes, then, why did not Israel preempt that attack? Additionally, if the answer was no, why did Israel convey that message to the United States? The answer of these questions lies in the details of Eban's visit to Washington and in the deliberations of the Israeli government members while Eban was abroad.

Two possible schools are dominant among researchers about this matter. Oren's narrative stipulates that Egypt was indeed about to launch an attack that was cancelled by a last minute intervention by the United States and the Soviet Union. He believes that Amer, the Deputy Supreme Commander, was about to initiate that attack against the will of Nasser. Gluska's narrative is as the same as Oren's but he believes that Nasser himself did authorize an attack against Israel and finally he decided to retreat when the Americans and the Soviets intervened.¹³⁰ He suggests a virtual

¹²⁹ Ibid, 382-383; Segev, *1967*, 258.

¹³⁰ Gluska builds a virtual scenario, based on Oren's narrative, about the possible course of events based on this information. See: Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 168-171.

scenario that Israeli intelligence encountered indicators about a possible Egyptian attack and that was the reason behind the cables.

In fact, both scenarios are weak and do not stand if scrutinized against the available literature, both primary and secondary.

In Rabin memoirs, the Israeli cabinet decided to send the cables to Eban after a briefing from General Yariv, Chief of Military Intelligence, during which he briefed his cabinet about the deployment of the Egyptian Fourth Armored Division to the Sinai.¹³¹ They decided to notify Eban about the recent Egyptian deployment and the inter-Arab military coordination.¹³² Later on, after a meeting with Eshkol during which Rabin expressed that he was not sure who would strike first, the cabinet decided to send a second cable in which Israel expected an Egyptian-Syrian attack. In Washington, Eban received the second cable first and notified the American officials. Nevertheless, Rabin never ascertained in his memoirs that they had solid information about an imminent Egyptian-Syrian attack.¹³³ Rabin memoirs, in this regard, are significant because he participated in drafting the cable to Eban.

Years later on, when the Israeli documents about the deliberations during the crisis became declassified, an entirely new narrative became available. In Segev's study, Yigal Allon, then Minister of Labor, suggested to invent a pretext to allow Israel to claim that the Egyptians had started the war. When Arye Levavi, the Director of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suggested that Israel should inform the United States that Israel was about to launch an all-out assault, Eshkol, in return suggested, to send

¹³¹ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 85.

¹³² When asked by the cabinet about the indicators of the increased level of inter-Arab coordination, Yariv said that the level of Egyptian-Syrian coordination had increased since the shooting down of the MIGs on April 7. Segev comments "not necessarily in the past 48 hours." This means that there were not any indicators about a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack. See: Segev, *1967*, 258.

¹³³ When asked by members of the Israeli government about the authenticity of the information sent to Eban in Washington, Rabin and Yariv admitted that they did not know exactly what the Egyptians were planning. See: *Ibid.*

a cable in which Israel believed that it was about to face an attack.¹³⁴ Then Rabin came up with the idea of a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack.¹³⁵ In accordance with that, it is noted that the Israeli cabinet invented the whole idea of the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack in order to find an alibi to strike Egypt.¹³⁶ When Israel decided to dispatch a cable to Eban in Washington, there was not any evidence in Israel that they had information about the Fajr plan that supposed to commence on May 27, as Oren believes. A study published by the Ministry of Defense in 2004, suggests that it "is extremely questionable" that Yariv, Chief of Military Intelligence, could have known about the Egyptian plan.¹³⁷

Reconstructing the Actual Events

In his study on the war, Draper believes that the two days of May 25-27 "will long provide one of the most intriguing and debatable episodes of the war." Reich also believes that May 25 was "...the most dangerous moment in the crisis."¹³⁸ This research provides for the first time the most reliable and detailed scenario about what happened in these two days.

The reconstruction of actual events begins from May 25, the day on which Nasser held his first meeting with his military commanders at 08: 30 p.m. Cairo time. Thirty minutes before that meeting at 08: 00 p.m. Cairo time, Amer issued instructions for readiness to implement an aerial offensive plan against Israel code-named Assad as a prelude to implement a ground operation code-named Fajr against Eilat and the southern Negev. During that meeting, Nasser knew for the first time

¹³⁴ Ibid, 255-256; Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War*, 175-176

¹³⁵ Yitzhak Rabin, "Six Days and Five More Years," *Ma'ariv* (June 2, 1972) in Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis*, 131.

¹³⁶ Eshkol wrote on a copy of the cable sent to Harman "All to create an alibi." See: Segev, 1967, 257

¹³⁷ Ami Gluska, *Eshkol: Give the Order* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv: Israel Ministry of Defense, 2004), 283 cited in Ibid , 259.

¹³⁸ Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, 100; Bernard Reich, "The Israeli Response," in *The Six Day war: A Retrospective*, ed. Richard B. Parker (Florida: University Florida Press, 1996), 142.

about Fajr. He questioned the political significance of the plan and preferred to reinforce the defenses of the Gaza Strip and Sharm El Sheikh instead. He then asserted that Egypt would not strike first against Israel and would wait for the Israeli strike. After that meeting, Nasser met in private with Amer for approximately thirty minutes during which they discussed the relevance of Fajr. Later on, Amer came out from his meeting with Nasser and cancelled his previous orders for readiness to implement the plan. Before meeting with Nasser on May 25, Amer issued his orders for readiness to implement the plan expecting that he would be able to convince Nasser with its validity. However, Nasser did not accept and issued his instructions to cancel it.

On the same night, the State Department summoned the Egyptian Ambassador to Washington, Mustapha Kamel, at 09: 30 p.m. Washington time [04: 30 a.m. Cairo time on May 26]. Eugene Rostow, Undersecretary of State, informed him of the Israeli estimates delivered to them earlier that day by Abba Eban, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, about an imminent Egyptian-Syrian attack against Israel. Kamel cabled the details of his meeting with Rostow to Cairo. According to Heikal, Nasser saw the cable on May 27. However, it is suggested in this paper that Heikal is mistaken about the day on which Nasser saw Kamel's cable and that Nasser saw it on May 26. In both cases, Nasser's decision to cancel the implementation of Fajr was not dependent on Kamel's cable and came when Nasser had not yet known the details of Kamel's meeting with Rostow. Nasser's meeting with the military command on May 25 during which he rejected any offensive operations against Israel started at 08: 30 p.m. [Cairo time]. State Department summoned Kamel on May 25 at 10: 00 p.m. [Washington time], which was 05: 00 a.m. [Cairo time] on May 26. Accordingly,

Kamel's cable had no influence on Nasser's decision not to initiate offensive operations.

When Nasser saw Kamel's cable, he called Amer and asked him to pass by as soon as he could. When Amer arrived, Nasser gave him a copy of Kamel's cable¹³⁹ and ordered that the military should change its frequencies of communications every three days. Nasser's concern was that the Israelis might have managed to break the communication codes of the Egyptian military and hence knew about Fajr. However, Nasser's estimates were wrong. The Israelis invented the issue of the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack to secure guarantees for their security from the American administration and to have an alibi to strike first. At night on the same day, May 26, Eban met with President Johnson in the White House for an hour and twenty five minutes between 07: 15 p.m. and 08: 40 p.m. Washington time [02: 15 a.m. and 03: 40 a.m. Cairo & Moscow times on May 27].¹⁴⁰ During or after that meeting, Johnson sent a message to Kosygin through the hot line conveying to him the Israeli estimates about the joint Egyptian-Syrian attack. Though Johnson in his meeting with Eban denied the credibility of the Israeli estimates, he decided to convey them again to the Soviets in order to warn Nasser for another time against starting hostilities. On the dawn of May 27, Nasser received the Soviet Ambassador to Cairo in his residence at 03: 30 a.m. Cairo time [03: 30 a.m. Moscow time on May 27]. The Ambassador delivered an

¹³⁹ Oren cites an interesting story about this. According to him, Amer dispatched a cable to Badran [Egyptian Minister of War] in Moscow saying, "Shams, it seems there is a leak." He considers this as a sign of behind-scenes collaboration between Amer and Badran against Nasser. However, this is also not true. The true story can be constructed as follows. Nasser gave Amer a copy of Kamel's cable and told him that the Israelis might have broken the communication codes of the Egyptian army and that was how they knew about Fajr. However, it is proved in this paper that Israeli officials fabricated information about a joint Egyptian-Syrian attack. Amer later on wrote on a copy of Kamel's cable the aforementioned message. Badran's hierarchy was second to Amer and it was normal for Amer to write instructions to him on official papers. Furthermore, the source that Oren cites never says that Amer sent a cable to Badran but "Amer wrote on the cable." Again, Oren deliberately misquotes to support his version. See: Oren, *Six Days of War*, 120. See on the true narrative: Brown, "Origins of the Crisis," 45; حافظ، "التاريخ السري لحكم جمال عبد الناصر،" 14؛ محضر الاجتماع الثاني بين السيد شمس بدران وزير الحربية ورئيس وزراء الاتحاد السوفييتي (موسكو: 27 مايو 1967).

¹⁴⁰ Cairo and Moscow times were the same in May 1967 and they were three hours ahead of Greenwich Time [UTC+3].

urgent message from Premiere Kosygin that had been conveyed an hour earlier [02:30 a.m. Cairo & Moscow times on May 27] by Johnson through the hot line to the Kremlin. In this message, Johnson reiterated the Israeli estimates. Nasser denied them and called Amer to make sure that he cancelled any issued orders to implement Fajr.

Egypt asserted to more than one person that it would not initiate hostilities. Nasser told U Thant, the United Nations Secretary General, Robert Anderson, Johnson's envoy to Nasser, and Christopher Mayhew, British parliament member, that Egypt would not fire the first shot. The Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs informed Charles Yost, the American envoy, with the same message.¹⁴¹ Nasser was not only exercising his own policy of self-restraint but also keeping promises he had made. Johnson warned Egypt three times during the crisis not to initiate hostilities. He sent a verbal note to Nasser on May 23.¹⁴² Nasser's Ambassador to Washington received the same message on May 25 Washington Time [May 26 Cairo Time]. The Soviets conveyed the same message to him on May 26 Washington Time [May 27 Cairo Time].

Israel was aware of the Egyptian position not to strike first. In a meeting with the Israeli Ambassador to Washington, Eugene Rostow said, "We have been told categorically that Egypt will not attack." Rostow added, "If we had these assurances from the Soviets in connection with our own security, the U.S. would not rush into a confrontation."¹⁴³

While Johnson was warning Egypt to exercise self-restraint, United States Ambassadors received an indication for contradictory policies.

¹⁴¹ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, 20-21; Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, 71-72, 78-79; حمروش، ثورة 23 يوليو، 170؛ ناتنج، ناصر، 461

¹⁴² Johnson sent a message and verbal note on May 22 to Nasser. State Department archives, however, do not contain a copy of the verbal note. Nevertheless, Riad and Nasr mentioned it in details. See: Document 34, *Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic* (Washington: May 22, 1967) [Annex II]; Riad, *Ibid*, 19; 215-213، مذكرات صلاح نصر، نصر،

¹⁴³ Document 132, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

American Ambassadors to Arab Capitals received a circular telegram from Rusk, the Secretary of State, on June 3 in which he said, "You should not assume that the United States can order Israel not to fight for what it considers to be its most vital interests."¹⁴⁴ The instructions of State Department to its Ambassadors in Arab Capitals came after two days of a meeting between McNamara, the Secretary of Defense, and Meir Amit, Chief of Mossad on June 1. In this meeting, the American administration knew that Israel was going to strike. Amit explicitly told McNamara "he feels extreme measures are needed quickly." Sensing that McNamara understood what was behind the formal words, Amit added, "His remarks were entirely informal, off the record, and should not be regarded as an official representation or request of the Israeli government." The document added, "He [Amit] was simply taking advantage of the opportunity to insure that the highest American authorities understand the picture as the Israelis see it."¹⁴⁵

While the American administration was urging Egypt to avoid initiation of hostilities and pledging to protect the territorial integrity of all countries in region, Israel was informing the United States that it was going to strike and the American administration did not interfere against this.

American officials demonstrated to Eban while he was in Washington that Israel was going to win in case of any military confrontation with its neighboring Arab countries even if the Arab countries initiated hostilities. Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, concluded in a meeting with Johnson "that in the long term Israel would prevail." The CIA and the National Security Council had the same

¹⁴⁴ Document 141, *Circular Telegram from the Department of State to Arab Capitals* (Washington: June 3, 1967) [Annex II].

¹⁴⁵ In a conference on the 1967 war in 1992, Amit said, "I told him [McNamara] that I am personally going to recommend that we take action, because there is no way out, and please do not react. He told me it was all right, the President [Johnson] knows that you are here and I have a direct line to the President." See: Reich, "The Israeli Response," 139-140.

estimates.¹⁴⁶ Israel also knew that it enjoyed superiority not only against Egypt but also against the neighboring Arab countries combined. Brigadier General, Joseph Geva, Israeli Defense Attaché in Washington, “agreed with that [General Wheeler’s] assessment.”¹⁴⁷ In fact, the CIA estimated early in the 1960s that Israel could defeat its neighboring Arab countries and occupy the same territories it occupied in 1967, which indicates that the military balance was always in favor of Israel.¹⁴⁸ Not only had the Americans made that assessment but the British did as well. Sir Burke Trend, Secretary of the Cabinet, in response to a question from McNamara, said, “...the U.K. military analysis of the Israeli capabilities was close to that of the U.S. ...”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Document 72, *Memorandum for the Record* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 76, *Intelligence Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency: Military Capabilities of Israel and the Arab States* (Washington: May 26, 1967) [Annex II]; Document 142, *Memorandum from Robert N. Ginsburg of the National Security Council Staff to the President's Special Assistant* [Rostow] (Washington: June 3, 1967) [annex II].

¹⁴⁷ Document 99, *Memorandum of Conversation* (Washington: May 30, 1967) [Annex II].

¹⁴⁸ National Intelligence Estimate, "The Outlook for Israel," *Central Intelligence Agency*, NIE No. 35-61 (October 5, 1961): 6 [Annex II].

¹⁴⁹ Document 130, *Memorandum of Conversation: Middle East* (Washington: June 2, 1967) [Annex II].

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

General Conclusions

This study has set out primarily to challenge the dominant belief that the 1967 war was preemptive through introducing a new version of the main events that culminated into the June 1967 war between Israel and its neighboring Arab countries. It challenges many of the taken-for-granted assumptions associated with the 1967 war by using available primary and secondary sources from all the relevant parties.

Although archives are still among the most authentic sources in the field of historiography, scientific detachment is still essential to reach honest findings.

One of the prominent findings of this research is the way Israeli and Western scholars handle Arabic sources on the war. Some entirely neglect them and consider only the Israeli version. Others manipulate the Arabic version and falsely integrate it with the Israeli one.

Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez could not have publicly announced their findings about the role of the Soviet Union in the crisis that culminated into the 1967 war, should they studied the available Egyptian documents on this matter. Among these Egyptian documents, the most significant are the records of meetings of Egypt's Minister of War Shams Badran with the Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in Moscow during the crisis. The records of these meetings completely refute Ginor and Remez's assumptions about the purported Egyptian-Soviet conspiracy against Israel.

Michael Oren, though extensively uses Arabic "secondary" sources on the war, did not also pay much attention to available primary sources. He deliberately misquotes from primary and secondary sources alike and even manipulates historical events to support his assumptions. This fact was easily detected by tracing many of

the footnotes mentioned by Oren at the end of his study. Oren not only misquotes from primary and secondary sources, but also fabricates evidence against the documentary narrative.

This illustrates the fact that archives could be used either to clarify history or to falsify it bringing to the forefront the issue of use and misuse of archives in the field of historiography.

Additionally, new research on the war tends to take for granted findings of old studies, though these studies depend almost completely on the Israeli version of events. Among those is Rachel Bzostek who adopts Michael Brecher and Benjamin Geist's version of the crisis of May-June 1967, which was entirely dependent on Israeli sources.

Another significant finding of this research is the necessity to integrate two levels of sources; first, primary sources from different countries; and, second, primary and secondary sources. This documentary battle of ideas guarantees the achievement of detached historical scrutiny.

As an advice for researchers in Middle Eastern studies, Arabic and Israeli sources should be equally used and contested against each other and against other primary and secondary sources to scrutinize historical narratives.

The Israeli Strike: Preemptive or Preventive

In order to reach a correct and scientific theoretical description for the nature of the Israeli strike against Egypt in 1967, the conclusion should be based on unbiased and documented historical data. The current research depends, whenever possible, on archival material to support its findings.

Almost all theoretical studies that refer to the 1967 war describe the Israeli strike on June 5, 1967 against Egypt as preemptive, because they are based on biased

and sometimes deliberately manipulated data that takes into account only the Israeli version of events. This research has set out to demonstrate that the Israeli strike was preventive not preemptive.

Having described in the theoretical part of this research the criteria of various forms of first strike and refuted Israeli and pro-Israeli version of the events that preceded and/or coincided with the crisis of May-June 1967, this section is divided into two parts.

The first part introduces the findings of the research on the narrative level through reviewing the main stations on the road to the 1967 war by classifying this period into two main phases: the pre-crisis phase and the crisis one.

The second part provides answers to questions, which are formulated along the criteria of the theoretical section in chapter one using the historical findings on the narrative level.

In doing this, this research combines theory with previously elaborated empirical data in order to pave the way for a clear conceptualization of the Israeli strike.

The Pre-Crisis Period

Arab countries had been accused of continuously harassing the Israeli state seeking its destruction and the annihilation of the Jewish people. In Israeli allegations, the convening of a series of Arab Summits in 1964 and 1965 and the establishment of the Unified Arab Command embodied this.

Before the 1967 war, the situation in the Middle East witnessed an inflammatory status specifically in late 1966 and the beginning of 1967. Yet, in order to understand correctly the atmosphere that led to the war, the situation on the armistice lines and the roots of the war must be traced from a few years earlier.

In 1964, Israel announced the inauguration of its National Water Carrier that would convey water from the Lake Tiberius to the Negev desert. The Arab countries considered the Israeli project as an aggression that necessitated counter measures in return. In a series of Arab Summits, Arab countries agreed to start their counter-diversionary projects that would enable them to exploit their share of the Jordan River water. To provide protection for these projects, the Arab countries decided to establish a military branch under the title of the Unified Arab Command. The Arab steps per se did not represent any aggression against Israel nor did they violate the Israeli rights in the Jordan River. The Arab countries always asserted that their projects would exploit the amount of water assigned to them in the Johnston Plan of 1955 which Israel had previously accepted as a basis for that. Israel, however, decided to halt the Arab projects in Lebanon and Syria by military means which resulted finally in their cessation in 1966.

Between 1964 and 1967, the Unified Arab Command held several meetings in order to formulate joint schemes to confront the Israeli policies. However, not a single offensive military plan was discussed in this respect. The inter-Arab rivalries rendered the coordination of Arab military activities inconceivable. As a result, some Arab countries decided to find other venues for military cooperation outside the Unified Arab Command. The Egyptian-Syrian treaty of 1966 and the Egyptian-Jordanian-Iraqi treaties in 1967 were concluded outside the framework of the Arab League. They were of defensive nature and did not contain, overtly or covertly, any offensive articles against Israel. Arab policies in general and Egyptian in particular were more of a reactive nature rather than proactive.

The situation on the Syrian-Israeli armistice lines was by far the main reason for the inflammatory situation in the Middle East. The main significant issue of

contention between Syria and Israel was the status of the Demilitarized Zones. The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization always denied any sovereign rights for both countries in these zones. Israel, however, was continuously seeking sovereignty over the Demilitarized Zones. In pursuing this, Israel used to harass the Syrian garrisons on the borders that would in most of the cases result in trans-border exchange of fire. United States archival material including those of the Central Intelligence Agency and State Department monitored in the sixties the Israeli policies with serious concern and illustrated how the Syrians in certain situations abided by restraint despite the continuous Israeli harassment. The Syrians believed that they would, eventually, lose the battle with Israel over the Demilitarized Zones amid an ongoing deadly silence from the United Nations organs.

In 1965, a new element began to come on the surface of events in the Middle East. At the beginning of the year, Palestinian infiltrators began a series of sabotage operations against targets inside Israel. It was later announced that they belonged to Palestine National Liberation Movement commonly known by its Arabic acronym FATEH. They usually used Jordanian and Lebanese territories to penetrate into Israel. In a reaction to these operations, Israel launched retaliatory actions against the countries from which it believed the infiltrators came and accordingly, Jordan and Lebanon were the targets of Israeli raids. In the beginning, Israel did not know that FATEH was harbored by Syria and it was not until 1966 that Israel began accusing Syria in the United Nations of providing safe haven and logistic support for FATEH operatives. This explains why Jordan and Lebanon, instead of Syria, were always the targets of the Israeli retaliatory raids.

Although Israel lacked the knowledge of the connection between Syria and FATEH, tension was always the dominant feature of the Syrian-Israeli armistice lines,

which indicates that the inflammatory situation on the armistice lines was not linked to Palestinian guerilla activities that began only in 1965.

Syria began to take into consideration the significance of FATEH and, in 1966, decided to throw its entire weight behind the movement, despite the fact that FATEH at the beginning was acting independent of Arab countries.

In 1966, Syria suffered two major blows from Israel. On one side, Israel was adamantly consolidating its anchor in the Demilitarized Zones at the expense of Syria. On the other, Israeli military intervention against the Syrian diversionary water projects of the Baniyas and Hasbani Rivers obliged Syria to halt its projects. It was also in 1966 that Israeli security agencies began to believe that Syria wanted to incorporate FATEH into the Syrian army.

In 1966, a new Syrian regime took over power in Syria. It is commonly believed that the ascent of this new regime was a factor behind the Syrian aggressive policies toward Israel before the war. Yet, archival material of the Joint Defense Council refutes that assumption. Syria was always the most bellicose against Israel in the meetings of the Arab League in both political and military venues. Syrian hostility against Israel predated the ascent of the radical left wing of the Ba'ath party in 1966, which indicates that other issues were behind that bellicosity.

It is assumed in this paper that Syria began to support FATEH operations against Israel to compensate for its military weakness, which did not allow for a conventional military confrontation against Israel. The pattern of the relationship between increased tension on the Syrian-Israeli armistice lines and increased frequency of the Palestinian guerilla activities was evident at the beginning of 1967 when Syrian-Israeli trans-border clashes over the Demilitarized Zones were often followed by sabotage operations inside Israel by Palestinian operatives.

The Crisis Period

Amid the then-on-going escalation on the Israeli-Syrian armistice lines, Israeli bellicose statements against the Syrian regime created an atmosphere that made the entire region believe that Israel was about to launch a large-scale retaliatory raid against Syria with the ultimate goal of toppling the Syrian regime. Bound by a mutual joint defense pact with Syria, Egypt decided to react to the gathered information on a possible Israeli invasion of Syria by mobilizing its army to the Sinai. The mobilization had to be quick because the Soviets as well as the Syrians believed that the Israeli plan of invasion would begin on an unspecified date between May 19 and May 22, 1967. Egypt was suspicious about the Israeli policies that began to assume a more aggressive form starting from late 1966. The destruction of the Samu' village in November 1966 and the Israeli raid on Syria on April 1967 made the Egyptian leadership believe that the Israelis were up to something militarily more comprehensive in the region. Wishing to confuse the Israelis and shift their focus to another front, Egypt decided to assemble its army in the Sinai. The Egyptian decision was more of a deterrent nature without any intention what so ever to expand the scope of the crisis or initiate hostilities. The Egyptian forces were deployed in accordance with the Qahir plan devised in 1966. The original plan was essentially defensive with offensive components as well. Yet, the plan witnessed serious modifications during the crisis, which changed it into a purely defensive plan; the Modified Qahir. Egypt decided to abandon completely any offensive operations, concentrate solely on absorbing the Israeli attack in the Sinai and destroy the attacking Israeli forces.

The entire Evacuation of UNEF from the Sinai, made it inevitable to close the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Knowing that Israel would not turn a blind eye to the Egyptian decision to close the Straits, Egypt decided to offer to settle the issue of

the Straits in the International Court of Justice. In fact, this was a total shift from the traditional Egyptian policy of viewing the Straits as comprising part of the territorial waters of Egypt. Before the crisis, Egypt did not question its sovereignty over the Straits, even in the presence of UNEF. Calling the International Court of Justice to look into the issue, however, was a fundamental concession and a major de-escalatory step, which Israel completely ignored. On the blockade itself, Nasser decided to send his Vice President, Zakaria Mohieddin, to Washington for more exhaustive discussions on the matter. It was perceived in Washington that Egypt was ready to lessen its measures in the Gulf.

Before the crisis, Israel did not envisage the possibility of war with Egypt before the 1970s. However, when its policies finally led to the crisis in May-June 1967, Israel decided to seize the opportunity in order to destroy the Egyptian army although the assembled forces of Egypt in the Sinai did not represent a serious threat to Israel. Nasser's striking forces were in Yemen and his military formations in the Sinai, mostly untrained reservists, were assuming defensive postures. Like any military in the world, the Egyptian army suggested seizing the initiative and striking first against Israel but Nasser until the end of the crisis did not approve. His views till the end of the crisis were utterly opposite.

On the morning of June 5, Israel alleged that Egyptian military formations including armored forces were about to strike against the Negev and hence Israel decided to act preemptively to terminate the Egyptian attack.

Conceptualizing the Israeli Strike

In the next section, the Israeli allegation is tested by providing answers to certain questions posed in accordance with criteria set in the first chapter for

preemption and other forms of first strike. The answer, of course, depends on the empirical data provided in the paper.

Was there an Egyptian decision to strike first?

There was not an Egyptian decision to strike first against Israel. Nasser's rationale behind this was not to give the United States a pretext to act against Egypt if an Egyptian attack was launched against Israel. Though during the crisis the Egyptian military leadership suggested using the Egyptian Air Force to attack certain Israeli targets as a prelude to start an offensive ground operation against the southern Negev, Nasser did not approve and decided to let Israel strike first. Egypt's decision, not to strike first against Israel, was taken earlier during the crisis on May 22 when Nasser announced the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. During his meeting with Egyptian pilots at one of the Egyptian airbases, the pilots expressed their eagerness to strike first against Israel. Yet, Nasser rejected their ideas. Accordingly, the allegations of Israeli historians about the Egyptian policies in this respect, whether envisaged by Nasser during the crisis as Oren suggests, or as a part of conspiracy with the Soviet Union as Ginor and Remez suggest, or as an Egyptian master plan as Gat suggests, are all baseless.

Did Israel get information about an imminent Egyptian attack and decided to preempt it?

In the absence of an Egyptian decision to strike first against Israel, Israel could not have had information about an imminent Egyptian attack. In fact, there is evidence to the contrary. The Israeli intelligence community bragged after the war about their success in penetrating the Egyptian military high command to a degree that Israel had in every Egyptian base an informer working for them. If this was the case, then Israel should have been aware of Nasser's meeting with the Egyptian pilots

on May 22 during which he rejected the pilots' proposals to strike first against Israel. Furthermore, they should be aware of the results of Nasser's several meetings with his military commanders during which he refused to start any offensive operations against Israel. Moreover, Israel was reassured from different sources that Nasser was not going to start military operations. Nasser asserted to U Thant that he would not initiate hostilities against Israel. The same message was reiterated to two American envoys, Charles Yost and Robert Anderson, who were sent to Egypt during the crisis. Israel was well aware of this, as it was informed about the results of Nasser's meetings.

Did Egypt take offensive steps to launch an attack against Israel?

The deployment of the Egyptian army to the Sinai followed the lines of the defensive Egyptian plan code-named Qahir. Though the plan witnessed many modifications during the crisis, these modifications did not change its defensive character. Even though the Egyptian lines of defense were moved close to the Israeli borders to defend the Gaza Strip, as Nasser wanted, no offensive missions were at all authorized. The deployment of forces opposite the southern Negev came in accordance with an Israeli deception plan the aim of which was to convince the Egyptian military that the Israeli attack would come from the south. Egypt took the bait and decided to deploy forces opposite the southern Negev. The Shazly Division, which was deployed opposite the southern Negev, was on the morning of June 5, 1967, approximately twenty kilometers deep in the Sinai and accordingly was in no position to start offensive operations against Israel. Furthermore, Shazly himself was on the morning of June 5, 1967 a member of a delegation waiting for Amer's visit to the front. Accordingly, he was not on the head of his forces to start the alleged Israeli attack. The Fourth Armored Division, the most notable among the Egyptian armored

forces, was deployed to the rear in the Sinai about one hundred kilometers from the armistice lines with Israel.

On the air force level, the original plan of the Egyptian Air Force was also defensive. Yet, there were two offensive aerial operations the first code-named Assad or Lion and the second code-named Fahd or Leopard. The first was meant to be activated as a prelude to an offensive ground operation code-named Fajr or Dawn that was directed against the southern Negev. However, it was never authorized, as Nasser questioned its political outcome. The second was a counter-offensive aerial operation, which would be activated in case Israel started an attack against Egypt. Orders to implement Fahd or Leopard were issued by Amer after Israel had already started Operation Moked or Focus against the Egyptian Air Force on June 5, 1967.

Were there any major accidents during the crisis that confused the Israeli decision makers and made them believe Egypt was about to attack?

It can be argued that Israel might have misperceived one of the Egyptian moves during the crisis that made it believe that Egypt would strike against it and hence decided to attack. One such incident was an Egyptian decision to send two-reconnaissance missions inside Israel. During the crisis, Egyptian MiG-21 aircrafts carried out two-reconnaissance missions. The mission could have been perceived as a prelude for the Egyptian Air Force to start bombarding Israeli targets. Yet, not a single major incident happened during the crisis that made Israel believe that Egypt would strike. Even in the case of the two-reconnaissance missions, the limited number of aircrafts could not be confused and thought of as a potential Egyptian assault. When Israel launched its attack against Syria on April 1967 directly before the crisis, tens of Israeli aircraft were used during the attack. In another parallel, in 1980, Israel

launched an attack against the Iraqi nuclear reactor Osirak using eighteen aircraft to execute the mission.

Was Israel unaware of the Egyptian intentions or capabilities?

It cannot be argued that Israel was unaware of either the Egyptian intentions or capabilities. Israel received information from the United States that there was no indication of an Egyptian plan to start an attack against Israel. The United States' estimates were further confirmed by estimates of both Britain and the United Nations. With regard to the capabilities, Israel was well aware of its military superiority over its neighboring Arab countries. The U.S. Joint Chief of Staff told Eban that Israel enjoyed military superiority over the combined Arab forces. During the crisis, Johnson instructed his aides to do an assessment of an outcome of a possible Israeli-Arab military confrontation, and he was assured that Israel would prevail. The Israeli defense attaché in Washington was supportive of the United States' estimates.

Were all the available means to avert war exhausted and therefore Israel decided to recourse to preemptive war?

Israel could argue that it exhausted all the available means before launching its strike in 1967. In fact, a recent study that handled the war suggests this scenario, asserting also that Israel took into consideration the legal aspect of the conflict before resorting to preemption. However, archival material denotes something different. Egypt's decision to legally settle the question of the Straits of Tiran was a major de-escalatory step. Close to the end of the crisis, the United States was considering a policy of mediation between Israel and Egypt. The Egyptian suggestion to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice was a deviation from the Egyptian traditional policy, which considered the Straits part of the Egyptian territorial waters. If Israel was really interested in settling the crisis peacefully, it would have considered

the Egyptian proposal. This refutes the claim that Israel exhausted all the available means before taking the decision to preempt. When the crisis was about to de-escalate, Israel launched its attack on June 5. The attack terminated the visit of Egypt's Vice President to Washington, which was considered a new step on the path to settle the crisis politically.

Was the Israeli military operation proportional to the Egyptian actions prior to the war?

Egyptian decision-makers knew that Israel considered the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba as casus belli. Yet, what Egypt did not expect was that Israel would respond to this decision with an all-out aerial and ground attack against Egypt. Nasser believed that Israel would respond to his decision either by attacking the Gaza Strip and use it as bargain chip to open the Straits or by attacking Sharm El Sheikh and forcefully open its way through the Gulf of Aqaba. That was why Egypt decided to move its positions forward close to Gaza to reinforce its defenses and to reinforce as well its forces in Sharm El Sheikh. Even if Israel was really preempting an Egyptian attack on June 5, it could have attacked only the Egyptian offensive means, like its air forces and air bases, leaving the Egyptian army without air cover and launching limited ground operations without the conquering of the whole of the Sinai. Accordingly, the Israeli attack was disproportional to Egypt's actions prior to the war.

Was there a strategic parity between Egypt and Israel?

Years before the crisis, the military balance was in favor of Israel against the combined neighboring Arab countries. The CIA estimated at the beginning of the sixties that Israel could militarily defeat the neighboring Arab countries and conquer the same territories it conquered later on in 1967. During the crisis, Israel as well as United States were well aware of the Israeli capabilities.

Were there vulnerable offensive weapons on both sides?

In this paper, only one aspect of offensive weapons, the air force was addressed. The Egyptian Air Force was more vulnerable than its Israeli counterpart in light of two factors. First, the number of Egyptian operational aircraft was less than Israel's. In fact, Israel enjoyed superiority in operational aircraft over all of its neighboring Arab countries. Second, the Egyptian military air bases were less than Israel's as well. This resulted in the Egyptian aircraft being based in fewer locations due to the small number of its air bases. While Egypt had about eleven air bases in 1967, Israel dispersed its aircraft in about fifty-four air bases, which rendered them more secure than Egypt's.

The Final Conclusion

After reviewing in this paper the main events before and during the crisis that led to the 1967 war, the paper should provide an answer to the main question; was the 1967 war preemptive or preventive?

Using the answers of the questions that are formulated in chapter five, the following conclusions could be noted:

[1] The 1967 war was not inadvertent. Until the morning of June 5, 1967, no serious incident had happened and made Israel believe that Egypt was on the verge of launching an attack. The Israeli allegations that Egypt fired the first shot on June 5 were mentioned in Eshkol's message to Johnson drafted on June 4, which indicates that Israeli allegations were nothing more than an alibi to justify the Israeli strike scheduled the next day.

[2] The 1967 war was neither interceptive nor preemptive. There is a thin line between interception and preemption. However, if Egypt decided to abandon the first strike option, and accordingly, there was not a political decision to strike, what would

Israel intercept? The 1967 war was not preemptive because there was not an imminent threat that made Israel strike to neutralize it. It is proved in the study that there was not any intention on the part of Egypt to strike against Israel until hostilities began on the morning of June 5, 1967. The Egyptian forces allegedly moving against Israel on June 5 were stationed deep in the Sinai and its commander was on his way to meet Amer, the General Commander, who was on a scheduled visit to the front.

The 1967 war is a classic example of preventive war. There was not any imminent threat against Israel on June 5, 1967. The danger in fact was non-existent in light of Egypt's decision to abandon first strike. An American Senior official told the Israeli ambassador that Egypt would not strike adding that if the United States had such confirmation from the Soviet Union in relation to its security, it would not rush to war. Israel, however, decided to exploit the situation and launch its attack while it enjoyed unwavering support from the United States in 1967. The situation in 1967 was significantly favorable for Israel due to the following reasons:

- a) The Egyptian military effort was dispersed in two fronts with thousands of miles apart in Yemen and the Sinai;
- b) Egypt's striking forces were still fighting in Yemen when Egypt deployed its army to the Sinai; and,
- c) Israel enjoyed military superiority not only against Egypt but against the neighboring Arab countries collectively. In offensive weapons, like air force, the superiority was not only qualitative but quantitative as well.

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