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(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) The Yom Kippur War of 1973

Part Two

(U) The first part of this article reviewed events leading up to the Yom Kippur War and an intelligence failure which was precipitated by some analysts seeing only what they had mentally conditioned themselves to see. It also pointed out the lack of a reporting vehicle available for use by the one agency that had correctly evaluated the SIGINT evidence. Part 2 deals with the war itself, the initially shaky cease-fire, which led to a confrontation between the United States and Soviet Russia, and the costs of the Yom Kippur War.

(U) Hostilities Commence

(U) At approximately 1400 hours on 6 October, the Arab attack began on both the Golan and Sinai fronts. Hostilities began with air attacks, followed by intense artillery preparation, and finally by all-out armored assaults by the Syrian army upon the Golan Heights in the north; at the same time, the Egyptian army crossed the Suez Canal in the south. In both locations, understrength Israeli defensive positions were either overwhelmed or bypassed, and the situation soon devolved into a series of tank-to-tank battles. The Israeli air force suffered heavy casualties from the Arabs' SAM and anti-aircraft screens; the IAF lost six out of eight aircraft attempting to hit one target on the Golan Heights.

(U) The Israeli leadership decided to concentrate on fighting the battle for Golan first, because it was near population and industrial centers in Israel itself; SouthernCommand would have to fight a holding action along the Canal. With reinforcements, the Israelis pushed the Syrians back to the "Purple Line," the 1967 War cease-fireline, and by 11 October the Syrians were off the Golan Heights and the Israelis were astride the main road to Damascus.

(U) After eight days of grinding fighting in the south, the Egyptians launched a massive counterattack designed to rupture the Israeli defensive line in two places and push deeper into the Sinai en route to Israel. Some 2,000 tanks were engaged in one of history's biggest tank battles. The Egyptians lost more than 264 tanks to Israel's 6. This was the turning point of the war in the south.

(U) At 1700 hours on 15 October, the Israel Defense Forces in the Sinai went over to the

offensive; by 0135 on the 16th, approximately 200 Israeli troops had established a beachhead on the west bank of the Canal. By late morning, the beachhead was three miles wide. The Egyptians were incredulous and underestimated the situation. The beach-head was described as "an armored raid" designed to boost morale in Israel. Sadat himself described it as "a spectacular 'television operation', no more."

~~(TS//SI)~~ (U) On 19 October reality set in for the Egyptians - Israel was on the west bank of the Canal to stay, and the Egyptian Third Army was surrounded and trapped on the east bank of the Canal, in a pocket extending from the junction of the Bitter Lakes in the north to Abu Rudeis and the Gulf of Suez in the south. Sadat requested Soviet Premier Kosygin to broker a cease-fire through the United Nations Security Council. On 22 October, the UNSC passed Resolution 383, calling for a cease-fire to begin within 12 hours, and not later than 1852 hours that same day. Syria declined to accept the cease-fire. Seizing upon the Syrian refusal, the Israelis continued to hammer away at the Egyptian Third Army, trapped in the Sinai. The Soviet Union, not wanting to see its clients totally humiliated, suggested that the USSR and the United States jointly impose a cease-fire, using military force, if necessary. The United States, at the urging of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, declined to intervene. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Although Sadat convinced Syria to accept the cease-fire on 24 October, the two superpowers continued their eyeball-to-eye-ball confrontation through 25 October, when they managed to settle their differences.

(U) A United Nations peacekeeping force soon moved in to separate the combatants, and although negotiations over lines of demarcation would intermittently continue until 4 September 1976, the Yom Kippur War had ended.

(b)(1)
(b)(3)-18 USC 798
(b)(3)-50 USC 403
(b)(3)-P.L. 86-36

(U) The Atonement

(U) Israel paid a dear price for its intelligence failure: approximately 3,000 killed or missing (the only available figure for wounded is 9,000, which seems rather unrealistic) from a fighting force estimated at 200,000. It lost an estimated \$5 billion in equipment - 115 aircraft, and 420 tanks. The 1967 war cost about \$100 billion per day, but the Yom Kippur war cost \$250 billion per day. Britain, France and some other European states strongly criticized Israel for its intransigence which precluded meaningful negotiations after the war, and 28 African countries, including several long-standing allies, broke diplomatic relations with Israel. Her total defense imports for 1973 were put at \$1 billion 800 million and amounted to one third of her total imports for that year. Next to her casualties, Israel lost something just as irreplaceable: her deep-felt feeling of invincibility.

(U) An Intelligence Retrospective

~~(TS//SI)~~ The U.S. intelligence community, by and large, did not distinguish itself in

predicting and covering the Yom Kippur War. [REDACTED]

Because of the provisions of NSCID-6, NSA was not allowed to produce “finished intelligence,” such as a war warning, a predictive report. Fortunately, this defect was corrected in later years. There is also the question as to why [REDACTED] when she gave her briefing to the intelligence community, did not have sufficient senior-level support, which would have increased her credibility before the elders of the community. Was it an attempt to construct the ultimate Win-Win Situation? If she convinced the elders of the IC that war was about to break out, NSA would look very good indeed. If not, there no blame would attach to Agency seniors; the lack of visible support from above made her deniable.

(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

(b) (1)
(b) (3) - 50 USC 403
(b) (3) - 18 USC 798
(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36~~(TS//SI)~~ [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Then, on 14 October, as the U.S. began flying replacement materiel into Israel's Lod International Airport, EUCOM directed round-the-clock advisory support for the resupply flights, changing our reconnaissance posture from intelligence to protection. In late October, when the Israelis continued to press the surrounded Egyptian Third Army, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Soviets apparently had much better information, when they threatened to unilaterally intervene to stop the combat. At the time, the U.S. believed that confrontation between the two superpowers was likely, with U.S. forces brought to DEFCON 3, the same state of readiness imposed during the Cuban Missile Crisis. However, the situation was quickly resolved.

(b) (3) - 18 USC 798
(b) (3) - 50 USC 403
(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36

~~(S//SI)~~ The analyst heading a CIA postmortem noted that the intelligence system had failed to provide good intelligence to Henry Kissinger and the State Department. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This led to the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. when the first cease-fire collapsed. The Soviets were incensed that the U.S. could not, or would not, see that the Israelis were taking advantage of the interregnum to surround, and continuing to cause casualties to, the Egyptian Third Army. [REDACTED]

(U) Former NSA historian Tom Johnson writes that “Self-delusion was a strong factor in the 1973 debacle,” noting that U.S. intelligence had concluded that the Arab military armies possessed a questionable prowess. “It was supposed that the Arabs themselves understood this and would thus never think of attacking impregnable Israeli forces.” Then, too, there was the plethora of “exercises” that the Egyptians and Syrians had conducted in

the recent past - it is so easy and tempting for analysts to think, "This is just another routine exercise, we've seen it all before." But perhaps the major influencing factor was that the Israelis were sucked in, too. In short, none of the players believed their eyes, and there was much atonement to be done.

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