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Crisis Decisions Making in Israel: The Case oif the October 1973 Middle East War

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The Yom Kippur War of 1976 has proven to be a fertile source of analyses and commentaries. One of its striking features was that, unlike 1956 and 1967, Israel did not initiate hostilities because Israeli Government decisionmakers assumed that the Egyptians would not attack first since they could not "win." Major McKenzie-Smith analyzes the Israeli decision to forbear a preemptive attack in light of the surrounding circumstances. He concludes that the decision itself was rational, but more important, he points out that rationality does not necessarily preclude error.

CRISIS DECISIONMAKING IN ISRAEL:

THE CASE OF THE OCTOBER 1973

MIDDLE EAST WAR

by

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The Israeli Government, facing the crisis which led to the October 1973 Middle East war, developed strategic solutions markedly different from those developed in both 1956 and 1967 in at least two significant respects. Both in 1956 and 1967 Israel was the initiator of at least the physical hostilities. In October 1973 the Israeli Government deliberately chose not to employ the tactic of preemptive attack which earlier governments had used in both 1956 and 1967 and which had, in fact, become institutionalized as a part of the political-military doctrine of the state. In addition, in October 1973 the Israeli Government declined to order mobilization of the large reserve contingents of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) until just hours before the beginning of the coordinated Egyptian and Syrian attack on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, 6 October 1973.

These two critical decisions merit examination and study. In light of the political and military outcomes of the October war, these decisions can be seen either as the value-maximizing choices of rational political-military decisionmakers of a government under wartime duress, or they can be seen, as critics of the 1973 Meir government have called them, as decisionmaking errors.

If rational, the October 1973 decisions to forbear preemptive attack and to delay mobilization should appear as deliberately taken in expectation of certain positive political outcomes and taken within the context of some perception of cost. Conversely, if seen as decision errors, some misappreciation of the imperfect information which characterizes decisionmaking under uncertainty should be apparent.

As in all states, in Israel certain political-military doctrines have evolved

which more or less accurately reflect the values and predict the responses of the state to certain input stimuli in the political-military arena. As in all states, Israeli political-military doctrine is the product of the full political and military experience of the state and, therefore, it is evolutionary. In a phrase, it changes.

Examination of doctrine as an explanation of political action is a time-honored tradition among political and military scholars. Unfortunately, scholars are often slow to appreciate doctrinal evolutions, even in the presence of clearly altered national circumstance. As predictive tools, therefore, political-military doctrines have utility in direct proportion to their currency.

It now appears clear that major changes in Israeli political-military doctrine resulted from the June 1967 Middle East war, and these were reflected in government actions in October 1973. To appreciate the evolution resulting from the so-called Six Day War, it is necessary to understand some of the basic precepts of Israeli political-military doctrine which were current in June 1967.

Israeli Political-Military Doctrine: June 1967. The elements of Israeli political-military doctrine have been competently defined as functions of one of three doctrinal "levels": the Political Level, the Strategic Military Level, or the Tactical Military Level.[1] Certain key elements at each doctrinal level are of central concern.

• At the Political Level:

—There is a basic Israeli assumption that the central goal of all Arab States is the destruction of Israel.

—For Israel, security is more important than peace. Any possible settlement which might endanger Israel's national security is unacceptable.

—Israel must rely solely upon her own military power to insure the survival and security of the state. Israel will

not become dependent for her survival upon any political or military alliance.

—Israel will seek the support of at least one of the superpower nations in order to neutralize any potential threat from other big power nations and as a source of weapons which cannot be manufactured in Israel. Israel will make every effort to become self-sufficient in arms production and, where critical weapons systems are concerned, will disregard cost considerations.

—Israel will maintain the capability to produce nuclear weapons quickly, if necessary. Israel will refrain, however, from overtly "going nuclear" in order to use this apparent restraint as a bargaining counter in conventional weapons procurement negotiations with the big powers.[2]

—Israel views the Jewish communities of the world as her only permanent and reliable source of outside support. Israel fully intends to maintain her national character as a Jewish state.

• At the Strategic Military Level:

—Israel will strike preemptively in response to threats to the security of the state. When war breaks out, the conflict will be transferred to the territory of the opponent at the earliest possible moment.

—For economic and international political reasons, it is essential that decision and victory be achieved in the shortest possible time.

—In the presence of an Arab threat which is seen as a permanent condition, a constant high state of readiness must be maintained by the IDF, especially by military intelligence and the air force.

—Given the limited economic and manpower resources of the state, the major strength of the IDF must be based on a reserve system capable of mobilization in the shortest possible time.

• At the Tactical Military Level:

—The IDF emphasizes high quality units composed of highly

trained and motivated personnel and sophisticated weapons systems, as opposed to numerical superiority.

—A guiding principle of all tactical military operations is the desire to minimize human casualties in any way possible.

Throughout the above, a general Israeli *Weltanschauung* appears evident. In terms of the Rational National Actor paradigm,[3] before June 1967 Israel must have viewed herself as a threatened state, without reliable allies and able to rely only upon her own resources to insure national survival and prosperity. Israel's perceptions of geographic and political reality dictated a policy of offensive response to threats to state security and, accordingly, a policy determination that "pre-emptive action, notwithstanding its heavy political price, is an absolute necessity."[4]

Doctrinal Outcomes of the June 1967 War. Notwithstanding the intense international criticism which befell Israel as a result of the June 1967 war, the country entered into a period of unprecedented economic growth and prosperity. With enemies defeated and divided and with an increased perception of security resulting from the acquisition of the so-called occupied territories, foreign investment and tourism grew dramatically. Arabs from the occupied territories became a source of cheap labor for the Israeli economy and capital generation, through overseas bond sales, especially within the American Jewish community, provided increased levels of capital development funding.

One major doctrinal development occasioned by the June 1967 war is of paramount importance. As a result of the dramatic expansion of territory under the control of Israel, the requirement to undertake preemptive attack in response to perceived threats to the security of the state was no longer seen as an absolute necessity, but merely as another option.

The significance of this difference cannot be overstated. No longer was it necessary to respond reflexively to perceived threats, as was the case in both 1956 and 1967. The June 1967 war offered, among its results, an alternative. It became conceivably possible to absorb an Arab "first strike" without endangering the population centers of the nation and only then to respond.[5] This point has been made time and again by Israeli spokesmen and is regularly cited as an argument for retention by Israel of at least parts of the occupied territories.[6]

Growth of "The Concept." It is important to understand Israel's near absolute reliance upon her intelligence community. Israeli strategic doctrine relies upon the intelligence community to provide the early warning necessary for the mobilization of the large reserve formations which constitute the major arm of the IDF.

At least since the early 1960's, the Israeli intelligence community has been composed of three elements: military intelligence, the "Mossad" or Secret Intelligence Service, and the Foreign Ministry Research Department. Despite the existence of three separate intelligence organizations, however, only military intelligence has been specifically charged to undertake evaluations of collected intelligence data. The focus of the interest of the military intelligence organization has been, quite naturally, on military developments. The clear weakness of this system has been the absence of independent political evaluations of the political intentions of potential enemies based on the political, as opposed to the purely military, situation.[7]

The central question, and eventually the ultimate lesson, of the October 1973 war is: Given that war is a political act, is it necessary to "win" in the

classical military sense in order to win politically? Clearly, as we shall see, it is not.

Gradually, after the June 1967 war, a powerful idea developed within the Israeli military intelligence community which ultimately became a "lens" through which all Arab actions were viewed—and colored:

> Since 1967, military intelligence had been convinced that the lessons of that disaster must have imposed upon the Arabs two preconditions which they would infallibly observe before risking another war. The first was that Syria would not attack except in concert with Egypt. The second was that Egypt would not attack until its Air Force could neutralize Israel's. And since Nasser himself had said, shortly before his death, that Egypt's Air Force needed another five years to achieve that capability—itself an assessment regarded as wildly optimistic by most observers—the conclusion was that Egypt would not go to war, and neither would Syria. It was a powerful syllogism. And so generally was it held by military intelligence that it even had a name: "The Concept."[8]

This powerful idea permeated and singularly influenced the thinking of the Israeli intelligence community between June 1967 and October 1973, as evidenced in the language of the interim report of the Agranat Commission of Inquiry, released on 2 April 1975.[9] The Agranat Commission, named for its chairman, Israeli Supreme Court President Shimon Agranat, was chartered by the Knesset on 18 November 1973 to inquire into matters concerning preparations for, and the conduct of, the October 1973 war. The interim report of the commission resulted in the immediate resignations of Gen. David Elazar, IDF Chief of Staff, and Maj. Gen. Eliahu Zeira, Chief of Military

Intelligence. As of May 1976, the text of the full report of the commission has not been released.

Israel Between Wars. The cease-fire which ended the so-called War of Attrition in 1970 brought with it a period of relative calm which, while not peace, became a situation entirely acceptable to the Israeli Government. Such pithy phrases as "new facts" and "creeping annexation" described Israel's easy adjustment to a status quo *vis-a-vis* her Arab neighbors with which the nation was prepared to live for the indefinite future. Although Israel viewed with some apprehension the mounting deliveries of arms and equipment to the Arab States by the Soviet Union, there was a general confidence in the ability of the IDF to defeat the Arabs in future conflicts and overall satisfaction with the arms balance.

When Anwar Sadat's so-called Year of Decision (1971) ended without incident, the result in Israel was increased confidence in the stability of the status quo and increased credence in the presumed basic truths of "The Concept."

By the summer of 1973, Israel's overall outlook was only mildly comparable to that of 1967. The nation was prosperous and on the offensive against the menace of Arab terrorism. Although widespread international criticism had resulted from the shooting down of a Libyan airliner over Sinai and, subsequently, the inflight capture and forcing down within Israel of a Lebanese airliner thought to carry the leader of the Marxist PFLP, George Habash, such criticism was considered *de reigueur* and little more than a vexation. Israel felt generally secure and insulated within the occupied territories. The probability of war seemed remote.

During the summer of 1973 Israel prepared for general elections to be held at the end of October. As election issues developed, the challenge mounted by the rightist Likkud Party, which

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included among its members the dashing hero of the 1967 Sinai campaign, Gen. Ariel Sharon, forced the ruling labor coalition, headed by Prime Minister Golda Meir, to adopt a more severe position on the issue of the occupied territories.[10] It has been credibly suggested that this announced policy shift by the Government of Israel contributed to the Arab decision to resort to war in 1973.[11] Whether or not this is so, it seems clear that to the extent that internal Israeli politics were considered by Arab decisionmakers, this factor must have weighed in favor of the decision for war.

The "Wolf, Wolf" Phenomenon. Beginning in January of 1973, both Egypt and Syria began a series of more or less intensive mobilizations and maneuvers, often accompanied by pronouncements of intentions to liberate the occupied territories. These exercises were conducted in January, May, July, September, and finally in October of 1973. They were closely watched in Israel.

In response to the second of these major mobilizations, in May of 1973, the Israeli Government ordered a partial mobilization of reserve forces at a cost of IL 40 million. When this period of tension passed without major incident, widespread internal criticism was voiced against the government for "over-reaction."[12]

As a result, Israel came to see these Arab mobilizations as deliberate attempts to cause Israeli mobilizations and thereby to damage both the economy and morale of the country. Accordingly, the government became increasingly hesitant to call for mobilization in response to what came to be regarded as the "wolf, wolf" phenomenon.[13]

The technical problem for military intelligence, then, became the requirement to separate "signals," (i.e., actual attack indicators) from the so-called noise, (i.e., irrelevant or misleading information, or

irrelevant data. There has been after-the-fact criticism of this attempt on the basis that it is simply impossible to do, since there is actually no difference between "signals" and "noise" other than in retrospect. This view was not held, among others, by Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, originator of the concept of "strategic warning" of imminent war, and Director of Military Intelligence Maj. Gen. Eliahu Zeira, also a subscriber to this concept.[14] An explanation of the concept of strategic warning is contained in this criticism of it:

> [The concept of strategic warning] does not, in fact, mean anything. In practice, intelligence assessments are built up from the accumulation of tactical detail—rail deployments, troop movements, and such like—weighed against the political background. What strategic indicators might be is hard to see. It is, on the other hand, easy to see why Dayan—and perhaps Zeira—should have found such an idea attractive. If tactical indications of impending war were all that could be achieved, then Israel ought to mobilize every time the Arabs chose to mass any substantial body of armor on its borders. But in that event the burden on Israel's economy would rapidly prove intolerable. There had to be some subtler guide: hence the invention of "strategic warning."[15]

Whatever the reality, by October 1973 decisionmakers within the Israeli Government were more or less acclimated to, if uncomfortable with, periodic Arab mobilizations along the borders. Simultaneously viewing Arab actions through the lens of "The Concept" and in light of the experience of the futile mobilization of May 1973, Israeli Government decisionmakers became increasingly skeptical of the seriousness of the threats posed by the periodic Arab mobilizations.

As an aside, exactly this same potential problem plagues the Israeli intelligence community today. During a December 1975 interview, Maj. Shlomo Gazit indicated with some pride that, since he assumed his present position as IDF Director of Military Intelligence, the Israeli intelligence community has caused no unnecessary mobilizations of IDF reserve units. General Gazit replaced General Zeira as Director of Military Intelligence following the latter officer's resignation in the wake of the interim Agranat Commission report.

The October 1973 Crisis. Uncertainty continues to surround the events which led to the October 1973 Middle East war. Accounts of these events vary. The problem is particularly acute from the perspective of events as seen by responsible officials within Israel. With reputations at stake, there is little agreement between the principal parties to the events. The problem is compounded by the fact that most of the official government information remains classified. Even the findings of the Agranat Commission have been hotly challenged by some of the officials criticized by the commission. As of May 1976, the issues are far from settled. The account that follows is an attempt to approximate the events and to reflect the positions articulated by principal Israeli Government decisionmakers on the basis of the best information currently available. Conflicting accounts are identified where there appears to be some impact upon the decisions taken by the government.

A significant background event to the crisis occurred in Austria on 28 September 1973. On that day, two gunmen from the Palestinian organization Sai'qa, based in Syria and believed to be more or less under the control of the Syrian Government, detained a train carrying Soviet Jews en route from Moscow to Israel via a Zionist transit center near Vienna, called Schonau Castle. The Sai'qa gunmen demanded that the Austrian Government close the Schonau Castle transit center. Ultimately, Austria's Chancellor Bruno Kreisky, himself a Jew, acquiesced. Predictably, the Austrian action produced total outrage in Israel and riveted the attention of the public and the Cabinet on Austria. Very importantly, subsequent Egyptian and Syrian military moves were seen, in light of the Schonau Castle incident, as defensive actions in anticipation of Israeli reprisals.[16]

On Monday, 1 October 1973, Syrian units began forward deployments along the Golan Heights. The IDF easily detected these movements but noted that the deployments reflected a defensive posture, with artillery well rearward and armor in defilade. Defense Minister Dayan, among others, felt these deployments to be defensive.

On Tuesday, 2 October 1973, Prime Minister Meir was in Austria in a vain attempt to convince Austrian Chancellor Kreisky to reverse his decision concerning the closure of the Schonau Castle transit center. With the attention of the Israeli Government and public thus focused on Austria, Egypt announced a "high state of readiness" along the Suez Canal[17] and Syria announced a general callup of reserves.[18] There was apparently no Israeli Government reaction to these developments until the following day.

When Mrs. Meir returned from Austria on Wednesday, 3 October 1973, she met almost immediately with key advisors and was briefed concerning the events of the previous day. Present at this meeting were Deputy Prime Minister Allon, Defense Minister Dayan, Minister Without Portfolio Galili, Chief of Staff Elazar, the air force commander, Major General Peled, and Brig. Arie Shalev from military intelligence, representing Major General Zeira, who was ill. Shalev called the Egyptian and Syrian actions "unconnected" and

concluded his presentation by stating: "The possibility of an Egyptian-Syrian attack is not, in my personal view, likely because there has been no change in the Arabs' assessment of the balance of forces in Sinai such that they could go to war."[19]

Nonetheless, discussions at this meeting were open and extended over a wide range of possibilities. It was generally agreed that the worst possible likelihood was a limited Arab "suicide attack" with the objective of placating the impatient Arab populace but which would be easily contained by IDF regular units. It was further generally agreed that the Arabs were then incapable of actual strategic warfare since Arab forces lacked the means to reach Israel's population centers while Israel forces did have the capability of attacking Arab population centers. It was felt that, so long as this strategic asymmetry existed, even a limited Arab attack was unlikely. The meeting produced a decision not to mobilize additional units.[20] Remarking on this meeting in her recent memoirs, Mrs. Meir recalls that "the military evaluation was still that we were in no danger of facing a joint Syrian-Egyptian attack."[21]

That same evening the full Cabinet met to hear Mrs. Meir's report concerning the situation in Austria. This Cabinet meeting was, in fact, confined to the Austrian issue and the government was not informed concerning the developments along the borders.

On Thursday, 5 October 1973, it was learned that a massive airlift of Soviet advisors and their dependents from Syria and Egypt was underway. According to her own account, this development concerned the Prime Minister tremendously.[22] Nonetheless, no action was taken beyond a decision by the IDF General Staff that evening to place the regular army on alert the following morning.[23]

By this point, however, the Air Staff had become concerned with informa-

tion generated through normal photo reconnaissance missions and, accordingly, had maximized the photo reconnaissance effort on 4 October. The films produced by these missions, examined throughout the night of 4 October, revealed the forward deployment of Egyptian bridge-laying and water-crossing equipment. By midnight the Air Staff was convinced that war was imminent.[24]

Early on the morning of Friday, 5 October 1973, the results of Thursday's photo reconnaissance missions were passed to Major General Zeira, Director of Military Intelligence, now recovered from his illness. It was further learned that Soviet naval formations at Port Said and Alexandria had put to sea at first light.

Sometime during the morning, Defense Minister Dayan met with the IDF General Staff in a forum which included Generals Elazar and Zeira. During this meeting a decision was reached to place the regular IDF in a high state of alert and appropriate orders to this effect were issued. Mobilization machinery was alerted but no decision for actual mobilization was taken. (The Air Force had covertly mobilized its relatively few reservists during the previous day.) The overall assessment remained that there was a low probability that an Arab attack would occur.

At approximately 1100 that morning, a Cabinet meeting convened in Mrs. Meir's Tel Aviv office. Certain Cabinet members, including Deputy Prime Minister Allon, were not present, having already dispersed for the Yom Kippur holiday. Recollections of this meeting vary considerably. One account holds that General Elazar requested mobilization but was overruled.[25] Another account holds that the lone voice demanding mobilization was Shimon Peres, then Minister of Transport and Communications.[26] What is clear is that the consensus of the meeting was that the probability of

Arab attack remained low. Mrs. Meir is credited with the comment that she was "relieved by the generally encouraging reports and that war seems unlikely after all."[27] The meeting did, however, produce a grant of authority for the Prime Minister to order general mobilization without further consultation with the full Cabinet.[28]

Meanwhile, throughout the morning of 5 October 1973, Syrian ground units redeployed into offensive formations. It is not known when this important information reached the IDF General Staff.

Following the Cabinet meeting, General Elazar ordered another full assessment of the situation on both fronts by military intelligence. By early afternoon a full intelligence estimate, in 40 paragraphs, was submitted. The initial 39 paragraphs were pregnant with attack indicators, containing, in the words of the author, "all the signs you could wish for indicating offensive intentions." Paragraph 40, however, read as follows:

> Though the actual taking up of emergency positions on the canal appears to contain indications testifying to an offensive initiative, according to our best evaluation no change has occurred in the Egyptian assessment of the balance of power between their forces and the IDF . . . Therefore, the probability that the Egyptians intend to resume hostilities is low.[29]

"The Concept" would not yield.

Accounts of the events of Saturday, 6 October 1973, also vary. One account attributes the final defeat of "The Concept" to a Mossad agent who was finally able to obtain the Arab plan.[30] Whatever the reality, it is sufficient to understand that by very early on the morning of 6 October both Dayan and Elazar were convinced that a coordinated Egyptian-Syrian attack against Israel was set for 1800 on that day. The

Prime Minister was notified at approximately 0400.

At this point Elazar asked Dayan to authorize immediate full mobilization and a preemptive air attack against both Egypt and Syria. Dayan opposed the air attack on political grounds and, in any case, denied authority to authorize either proposal pending the approval of the Prime Minister. It was agreed, however, that both proposals would be placed before a meeting of "key ministers" set for 0800.

Where accounts of earlier events vary, accounts of this particular meeting are virtually irreconcilable. The meeting convened as scheduled in Mrs. Meir's Tel Aviv office and quickly turned to the two key decisions facing the government, the decision concerning preemptive air attack and the mobilization decision. Elazar and Dayan adopted adversary positions on both issues.

Elazar argued strongly in favor of preemptive attack. Dayan countered with the argument that, given the likely international political repercussions, a preemptive attack was worthwhile only if it would be capable of causing substantive damage. Dayan felt that this result would not accrue. Although Elazar's position was supported by former Chief of Staff Hiam Bar-Lev, Mrs. Meir decided in favor of Dayan.[31] Mrs. Meir strongly feels that subsequent events have vindicated her decision in this matter.[32]

Less easily resolved is the controversy surrounding the mobilization decision. Dayan advised against immediate full mobilization, stressing two points:

1. That full mobilization could be used by the Arabs as a pretext for an invasion scheduled in any case; and,

2. IDF forces in place were adequate to contain the Arab attack pending the reserve mobilization.[33]

In her memoirs Mrs. Meir insists that she decided against the Dayan proposal and authorized the full mobilizations requested by Elazar.[34] Other accounts

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contend that Elazar was authorized only partial mobilization with one source condemning this decision as "one of the great failures of decision-making in Israel."[35]

In any event, a short time after this meeting Mrs. Meir met with U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Keating and informed him that Israel had absolutely reliable information that a coordinated Syrian-Egyptian attack was scheduled for 1800 that day. Mrs. Meir assured the Ambassador that Israel would not attack preemptively. Interestingly, when the actual attack came some hours before 1800, some senior American officials, including the Secretary of State, were temporarily convinced that Israel had launched a preemptive attack despite Mrs. Meir's assurances to the Ambassador.

A meeting of the full Cabinet convened in Tel Aviv at 1200, and most members were genuinely shocked to learn that war was imminent and that mobilization was in progress. The meeting was interrupted at 1400 with the news that full-scale Arab attacks were underway on both the Syrian and Egyptian fronts.

The Decision Process. It has been suggested that "the Israel government, or at least the individuals who comprise that government, act as rational decisionmakers in that they choose policies designed to maximize certain specific end goals."[36] It seems appropriate at this point, therefore, to undertake a brief technical analysis of the two key decisions which faced the Israeli Government during October 1973 with a veiw toward determining the degree to which the decisions that emerged may be termed "rational."

The two decisions of concern are:

1. The mobilization decision, and

2. The decision concerning preemptive attack.

The mobilization decision offered three alternatives: to mobilize fully, to mobilize partially, or to refrain from mobilization in the absence of perfect information. Figure 1 displays this decision situation in tree form and offers nine possible outcomes, three of which (outcomes 02, 05, 08) represent maximum negative utility.

The critical concerns, clearly, are the probabilities associated with the various outcomes 01 through 09. The three outcomes representing maximum negative utility are seen to be "conditional" upon the occurrence of an Arab attack (probabilities P_a, P_c, and P_e). Throughout the crisis, the probability of an Arab attack was seen by Israeli decisionmakers as very small. This is clear from their virtually mystic adherence to "The Concept." Likewise, the probability of losing the war (maximum negative utility outcomes 02, 05, 08), even given the Arab attack, was viewed as remote. It will be recalled that Dayan was confident in the ability of IDF regular units to contain a possible Arab attack pending reserve mobilization. In each instance, the compound probability of the maximum negative utility outcomes, reflected as the product of the probabilities of the conditional outcomes (P_a x 02, P_c x 05, P_e x 08), is the product of two small numbers. Accordingly, they could be, and were, rationally discounted.

Confident in the ability of the reserve army to mobilize quickly, in the ability of the regular army to contain the conflict pending mobilization and, perhaps most important, insulated within the occupied territories, Israeli decisionmakers were rationally able to decide to forego early mobilization.

The second decision to be considered is the one taken on the morning of 6 October 1973 to refrain from preemptive attack. A number of factors militated against a decision in favor of a preemptive policy and, considered together, they form a rational basis for Mrs. Meir's decision.
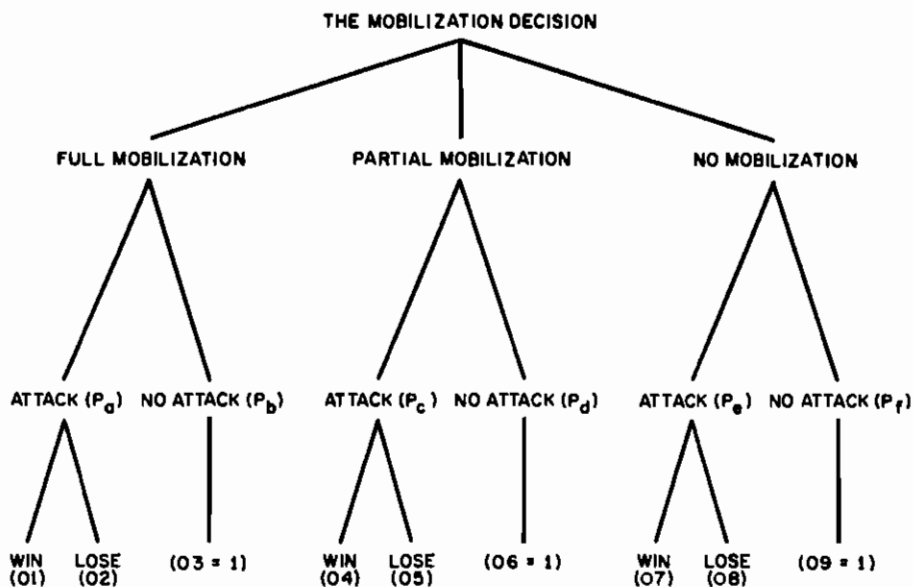
The preemptive attack was seen as

Figure 1

extremely costly in political terms and of questionable utility in the context of the time in which it was considered. On the morning of 6 October 1973, U.S. Ambassador Keating informed Mrs. Meir that the United States might not feel obligated to provide material support to Israel if a preemptive strategy were to be adopted. Additionally, Dayan felt that the results of a preemptive attack would not approach those realized in 1967. This option, therefore, did not appear "cost effective" in these dichotomous terms.

It was felt that the additional measure of security offered by the occupied territories obviated the doctrinal requirement for a preemptive policy which had existed in 1967. In 1973 the government felt capable of absorbing an Arab first strike, without catastrophic consequences. Finally, Israeli decisionmakers felt that the Arabs had no capability to mount a credible strategic attack against Israel since they lacked the means to reach population centers within Israel.

In these terms, therefore, the Israeli Government decisions to forego preemptive attack and to delay mobilization were "rational." As the model under consideration clearly indicates, however, rationality is no barrier against error. In short, there is no guarantee that even clearly rational decisions, made under conditions of uncertainty, will prove "correct" in any ultimate sense.

The basis for the decisionmaking failures of October 1976 lay not in the rationality of "The Concept" or even in the quality of the decisions themselves, but in the assumed definition of success, or "victory," upon which "The Concept" was founded. Developed and articulated by the Israeli military intelligence community, "The Concept" was a tactical statement of a military problem. It held that the Egyptians would not act because they could not "succeed" in the classic military sense. Rightly enough, the Arabs did not ultimately "succeed" militarily; they did, however, succeed politically

The lessons for decisionmakers are clear. It is absolutely essential to recognize that the quality of decisions is a function of the validity, or "sensitivity," of assumptions which underlie, and therefore prejudice, decision alternatives. Recognition of the "sensitivity" of key assumptions, and of the possible consequences of their proving wrong, requires not only a high order of intellectual discipline and competence, but strong nerves as well.

The concluding remark concerning the matter of rationality will be left to Abraham Wagner, author of *Crisis Decision Making,* and to whom this writer is indebted for many of the ideas contained in this section.

> An argument has been raised . . . that withstanding an Arab first strike, Israel . . . suffered high casualty and aircraft loss rates, and by comparison an interceptive strike would have been less costly. Such arguments pose another aspect of the basic question of decision-making under uncertainty. We can only offer the line of reasoning . . . that the probability of an Arab attack was sufficiently low as to more than discount the uncertain option. Thus the course chosen, not to launch a preemptive strike, may still be viewed as a rational . . ..[37]

Political Outcomes of the October 1973 War. To observe that the results of the October 1973 war were disappointing to Israel is something of an understatement despite the fact that the war ended with Israeli arms in the ascendant on both fronts. It has been argued that "from the purely military point of view, the fighting ended with a clear-cut Israeli victory."[38] Mrs. Meir herself has stated that "we won the Yom Kippur War, and I am convinced that . . . the political and military leaders of both Syria and Egypt know that they were defeated again, despite their initial

gains."[39] Such an argument is specious in that it ignores the essential truth that war is a political act and that the 1973 war resulted in an Arab political victory. An essential lesson of this war is that technical military definitions of victory do not necessarily equate directly to political success. In this respect the Israeli "victory" in 1973 is roughly equivalent to the U.S. "victory" in Vietnam during Tet 1968.

In human terms, the October 1973 war represented a national disaster for Israel. Israeli personnel losses, over 2,400 killed, were staggering when compared to the total population. In dollar terms, the war cost the country over $5 billion, more than the annual state budget, and augured a period of declining economic fortune in contrast to the period of economic expansion which followed the 1967 war.

Perhaps most serious for Israel, the war resulted in the growing diplomatic isolation of the nation within the international political community. For whatever reasons, as recent United Nations actions clearly indicate, Israel currently enjoys little support within the world community.

Possible Doctrinal Outcomes. Certainly the 1973 war has done little to alter the basic premise of Israeli political-military doctrine, the assumption that it is the intention of the Arab confrontation states to destroy Israel. Likewise, it is to be expected that Israel will continue to spare no effort to maintain sufficient military power to assure the survival and security of the state, with or without outside assistance.

While, in the past, Israel has made every effort to achieve military self-sufficiency by means of domestic production, the ability of the country to achieve this goal in the post-1973 environment must be questioned. Immense quantities of war-fighting materials were consumed by both sides

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during the war. Israel has sought, and will receive, large quantities of technologically advanced, and therefore very expensive, replacement weaponry from the United States. It seems clear that Israeli efforts in this area have, at minimum, been set back and may have to be rethought. At least during the immediate future, Israel will remain dependent upon the United States for essential war-fighting equipment and will make every effort to protect the existing relationship with the United States.

There is growing concern among many observers regarding the possible introduction of nuclear weapons into the Middle East. Major General Gazit feels that at least some Arab States will hold operable nuclear warheads and delivery systems within 5 years.[40] Some observers are convinced that there are already nuclear weapons in Israeli hands,[41] and almost all agree that Israel has every capability of producing these weapons within a relatively short period of time. The very significant casualties suffered by Israel in the October 1973 war and the growing isolation of the country in the international political sphere may cause the government to rethink its nuclear policy. Cogent argument is possible to the effect that the so-called Massada Complex and Israel's doctrinal view of herself as the ultimate protector of world Jewry militate in favor of the development of nuclear weapons by Israel.

Unless Israel opts for the development of a nuclear deterrent or so-called massive retaliation strategy, reliance upon the reserve system of the IDF must continue. The inability of regular IDF units to contain the coordinated Arab attack in 1973 pending mobilization of reserve formations must be of concern to defense planners. Israel must mobilize to become capable of credible defense, but economic considerations preclude multiple mobilizations in response to repeated Arab demonstrations.

During October 1973 the Israeli intelligence community was unable to divine Arab intentions. Although it is unlikely that either intelligence analysts or decisionmakers will again succumb to the lure of any belief system as rigid and confining as "The Concept," the basic contradiction nonetheless remains. To be effective, the IDF must mobilize. The economy of the nation, however, cannot absorb the strain of repeated mobilizations. Consideration of this apparently unresolved dilemma must continue to represent a pressing problem for Israeli Government decisionmakers.

It is clear that preemptive attack was, until after the 1967 war, Israel's doctrinal response to threats to state security. Control of the occupied territories has permitted alteration of this policy. It was felt that, should an Arab first strike occur without an Israeli preemptive attack, enormous political gain would accrue to Israel by a clear demonstration to the world of Israel's requirement to retain the 1967 territories. The outcome, however, is that despite Israeli restraint, *the expected political gain did not accrue.* Instead, Israel's international political position has deteriorated. It should be expected that the significance of this development will not be lost on Israeli decisionmakers. It is entirely possible that the preemptive policy will be revived in an effort to minimize future war losses and in light of the fact that international approbation did not result from the Israeli restraint in October 1973. The apparent prospect is for an increased Israeli perception of national isolation.

Prospects. Throughout its short history as a modern state, Israel has relied heavily on her military institutions to assure the national survival. Little has been denied the IDF in the name of economy or competing national priorities. As a consequence, the national expectation is for quick and decisive

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military success. There is little patience with other outcomes, as the recent electoral successes of the rightist Likkud coalition clearly signal.

Accordingly, it should be expected that the lessons of the October 1973 war will be gravely considered by Israeli decisionmakers and significant adjustments result. Militarily and politically, the organizations and prejudices which faced the crisis of October 1973 are not likely to appear again during a future conflict.

It has been suggested that military superiority by one side or the other does not lessen the probability of conflict, at least in the Middle East.[42] Perhaps the most significant outcome of the October 1973 war was, not that the tactical outcome differed or that the IDF performed less ably than before, but that the performance of Arab forces drastically improved. This quantum improvement in military performance

could serve to bring the vision of total and final victory again into clear focus in the Arab mind and produce, in the not distant future, yet another Middle East war.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Maj. Robert H. McKenzie-Smith, U.S. Army received a B.A. in political science from Park College, Parkville, Mo. He has served in Vietnam as an advisor and infantry company commander and, most recently, as the G3 Plans Officer of the 82d Airborne Division. From August 1971 until just a month prior to the Yom Kippur War, he served as a member of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization for Palestine and was stationed in Jerusalem. He is a student at the Naval War College, Class of 1976.

NOTES

1. Michael I. Handel, *Israel's Political Military Doctrine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for International Affairs, 1973), p. 66.

2. During a private interview which he granted the author on 5 December 1975, Maj. Gen. Shlomo Gazit, Israel Defense Forces Director of Military Intelligence, indicated that Israel will not develop nuclear weapons unless a hostile Arab State procures them first or unless Israel finds herself unable to procure adequate conventional weaponry from the United States. General Gazit further indicated that some Arab States, including Libya, have made efforts, so far unsuccessful, to purchase operable nuclear weapon systems.

3. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. 32.

4. Fuad Jabber, *Israel and Nuclear Weapons* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1971), p. 105.

5. Zeev Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army* (San Francisco: Straight Arrow Books, 1974), p. 285.

6. Maj. Gen. Shlomo Gazit, IDF Director of Military Intelligence, during an interview, 5 December 1975.

7. The Insight Team of the London *Sunday Times*, *The Yom Kippur War* (Garden City, N.J.: Doubleday, 1974), p. 94.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

9. "Agranat Committee Interim Report," *Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Middle East and North Africa*, 3 April 1974, p. N4.

10. Samuel W. Sax and Avigdor Levy, "Arab Israeli Conflict Four: A Preliminary Assessment," *Naval War College Review*, January-February 1974, p. 10.

11. Mohammed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan* (London: Collins, 1975), p. 205.

12. Abraham R. Wagner, *Crisis Decision Making: Israel's Experience in 1967 and 1973* (London and New York: Praeger, 1974), p. 150. See also Edward Luttwak and Dan Horowitz, *The Israeli Army* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), p. 342.

13. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p. 151.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

17. Wagner, p. 151.

18. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p. 106.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 108.

20. Wagner, p. 152.

21. Golda Meir, *My Life* (New York: Putnam, 1975), p. 421.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 423.

23. Wagner, p. 154.

24. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p. 114.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

26. Wagner, p. 156.

27. *Ibid.*

28. Meir, p. 424.

29. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p. 119.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 121.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

32. Meir, p. 431.

33. *Sunday Times* Insight Team, p. 123.

34. Meir, p. 426.

35. Wagner, p. 158.

36. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

38. Sax and Levy, p. 15.

39. Meir, p. 420.

40. Gazit interview.

41. Naom Chomsky, *Peace In the Middle East? Reflections on Justice and Nationhood* (New York: Pantheon, 1969), p. 150.

42. Dale R. Tahtinen, *The Arab-Israeli Military Balance Since October 1973* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1974), p. 31.

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