

# Missing the consequences misperceptions of the 1967 six-day israeli-arab war

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MISSING THE CONSEQUENCES: MISPERCEPTIONS OF THE 1967 SIX-  
DAY ISRAELI-ARAB WAR.

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Psychology  
in the College of Sciences  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, Florida

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Houghton

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## **Abstract**

In recent times, the issues surrounding the “67 borders” have become part of the public debate. In recent speeches, President Obama has suggested that Israel should return to pre-1967 borders with “land-swaps” in exchange for some form of peace with the Palestinians living within current Israeli territory. The validity of Obama’s suggestion has been questioned by both members of the political left and right and in the opinion of this author, with considerable merit. However, the ultimate judgment on the validity of Obama’s suggestion should be based on a study encompassing the decisions, both correct and flawed, of the leaders during the 1967 war. For this, a study of collective misperceptions, decision making, and the eventual consequences such decisions brought is necessary. That is the purpose of this thesis.

For a proper analysis of the misperceptions and decision making surrounding the 1967 war, it is proper to review the source material. In that light, there is no shortage of material written about the 1967 war; American, Israeli, and Arab authors have all contributed to the historical records. However, much of the material is focused on a historical perspective and not on the decision-making process. There are not many exceptions. Therefore, it becomes important to compare the newer analyzed material against the primary source material and discuss the discrepancies. At the end, it will be determined whether the collective governmental decisions based upon misperceptions accelerated, decelerated, or had a neutral effect on the outbreak of the war. Comparing the source material and viewing it through the filter of newly released information will constitute the methodology whenever possible.

The results of this study have revealed a mixed bag of results depending on the nation in question. This was to be expected because individual nations are subject to different

misperceptions. Nations falling under the spell of different misperceptions experience different consequences and outcomes than those who do not. Additionally, even if two separate nations are exposed to the same stimulus, their response may be completely different. In terms of the 1967 war, it can be stated that Israeli misperceptions staved off the start of the 1967 War, whereas Soviet and Arab misperceptions served to accelerate it. By contrast American misperceptions seemed to have little if any affect whatsoever.

The purpose of this thesis is to expose and document misperceptions and the resulting consequences that arose from them. It is not designed to make judgments about the current political situation. However, it is the sincere hope of this author that when a situation runs parallel to the events of the 1967, some of the same mistakes can be avoided. Exactly what runs parallel, and what is significant in today's world, is left to the reader's own judgment.

## **Dedication**

To my two grandmothers, who always showered me with love and support.

And for my parents, who allowed me to live in their house rent-free until this project was complete.

## **Acknowledgements**

I express my appreciation and gratitude to my thesis chair Dr. Houghton, who sifted through all of my scatter brained ideas. Without your already present knowledge of LBJ and abundance of patience this project would not be possible.

Thanks is also extended to the never ending supply of bi-lingual Jewish authors, whose analysis of the 1967 war, published in English and Hebrew, assisted in the development of this project.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

1. UNEF --- United Nations Emergency Forces
2. UN --- United Nations
3. LBJ --- Lyndon Baines Johnson
4. 67 --- 1967
5. U.S --- United States
6. IDF --- Israeli Defense Forces
7. OP --- Observation Posts
8. DBZ --- Demilitarized Zone
9. Ba'ath/ Ba'th – The Arab socialist party ruling over Syria

## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Introduction

Recently, the President of the United States Barack Obama has walked into some domestic political turmoil for suggesting that the road to Israeli-Palestinian peace lies in Israel returning to the Pre-1967 war borders<sup>1</sup>. While President Obama has insisted that such remarks are “nothing particularly original” and that the 1967 borders have “...long been the basis for discussions among the parties, including previous U.S. administrations<sup>2</sup>”, his comments have none the less drawn sharp criticism from both the political left and right of the United States.

On the right, syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer has stated Obama’s policy is either “...born of genuine antipathy toward Israel or of the arrogance of a blundering amateur”<sup>3</sup>. On the left current Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, and the House of Representatives Minority Whip Steny Hoyer have both given speeches critiquing the president’s policy, albeit in a far more tactful tone<sup>4</sup>.

Regardless of who is correct it should be obvious that all positions should be based on perceptions and premises about the 1967 war. After all, how can someone determine a “just” or “practical” solution to a stubborn political problem unless they have a firm understanding of its

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<sup>1</sup> “Obama calls for Israel's return to pre-1967 borders” Tom Cohen  
< [http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-19/politics/obama.israel.palestinians\\_1\\_israel-palestinian-conflict-borders-settlements?\\_s=PM:POLITICS](http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-19/politics/obama.israel.palestinians_1_israel-palestinian-conflict-borders-settlements?_s=PM:POLITICS)>

<sup>2</sup> Office of the Press Secretary: Remarks by the President at the AIPAC Policy Conference 2011  
< <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/22/remarks-president-aipac-policy-conference-2011>>

<sup>3</sup> “What Obama did to Israel” Charles Krauthammer [http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-obama-did-to-israel/2011/05/26/AGJfYJCH\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/what-obama-did-to-israel/2011/05/26/AGJfYJCH_story.html)

<sup>4</sup> “Israel should not be deterred by psychological warfare from White House” Yoram Ettinger  
<<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4082463,00.html>>

roots? The purpose of this thesis will be to expose the various perceptions and misperceptions surrounding the beginning of the Six-Day War as they affected individual decision-makers roughly 40 years ago.

Although certain precautions may be taken, all situations peaceful or violent will have a degree of misperception. Therefore, the purpose of this thesis is not to blame individuals for misperceiving information, but simply to isolate and document each case, point out the consequences, and contribute to the overall historical record.

### Sources of Misperception

In his writings Robert Jervis<sup>5</sup> has listed several main causes of misperception. This thesis will apply his general principles to specific cases. Additionally, when appropriate, cases will be supplemented with mental safeguards that can be utilized as defensive tools. If fully understood, these tools can revolutionize international relations by potentially preventing a handful of further wars and conversely by reducing the odds of being taken by surprise by a potential enemy.

The following are some hypotheses of misperception:

- 1. Decision makers tend to fit incoming information into their existing theories and images.**

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<sup>5</sup> "Hypotheses on Misperception" Robert Jervis, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Apr., 1968), pp. 454-479 Published by: Cambridge University Press

- 2. Scholars and decision makers are more likely to make an error because they are too attached to their own view, as opposed to being too willing to alter their theories.**
- 3. An actor can more easily absorb information contradicting their existing theory if the information comes in pieces rather than all at once.**
- 4. Misperception is most difficult to correct in the case of a missing mental concept and least difficult to correct when a category is present, however the perceiver deems a category unfulfilled.**
- 5. When a message is sent and the receiver and sender possess different backgrounds and information misunderstanding is likely.**
- 6. When people spend a great deal of time generating a plan, they assume the message they wish to convey is clear.**
- 7. States mistakenly take the position of the Foreign Office (or State department) as representative as a government as a whole.**
- 8. Actors tend to overlook the fact the evidence consistent with their theories may also be consistent with other views.<sup>6</sup>**

These misperceptions will not all be present throughout the writing, but a good amount will be referred to sporadically, especially Jervis's first hypothesis that states the crux people tend to fit incoming information into their already existing theories and images. In that regard, Jervis's overall point is similar to the definition of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Those who expect a positive reaction are inclined to see positive results, those who expect negative results, are

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

inclined towards negative evidence; this effect is amplified exponentially if the incoming data is ambiguous. Since both sides of the Arab-Israeli conflict are separated by a language barrier and distrust it should be obvious that a swamp of potential misperception exists.

That being said, such a swamp is too vast to explore in its entirety, so the focus of this project will be significantly narrowed. This writing will focus on the central countries involved in the war, and their main decision makers. Countries that were outside the main spectrum of events will be excluded and are not part of this project.

### The Forces

The first force in this war is the collective Arab nations with Egypt as their leader. Under its leadership, Egypt enticed Syria and Jordan into a mutual defense pact aimed at defeating Israel. Together these three nations formed the heart of the Arab block. A peripheral Arab force existed and was composed mainly of Iraq and Algeria. Both nations sent token contingency forces and participated in the propaganda effort. The Arabs will be examined both as a group and as individual member states.

The second force in the Six-Day War was state of Israel. As opposed to the traditionally autocratic Arabs, Israel is a parliamentary democracy. Therefore, it is intrinsic that Israel has far more decision makers and a deeper more complex bureaucratic process. Unlike her Arab counter-parts Israel did not have any coalition partners, she fought and stood alone. Israel had no mutual defense pact, and relied solely on its citizens for manpower. For these reasons Israel will have very close attention paid to its decisions and will be given ample time dedication.

The final and most powerful force was that of the surrounding superpowers. The United

States and the Soviet Union both possessed military capabilities far beyond Israel and the Arabs combined. However, unlike Israel and the Arabs both were determined to avoid a direct military conflict. At this time in history the cold war was raging, and it would be a historical injustice to view the Six-Day War outside of this prism. The United States and the Soviet Union armed Israel and the Arabs respectively, (albeit to different extents and for different reasons) and the end result had a catastrophic effect on Soviet influence in the region. Both countries had critical interests at stake, and when fused with the intrinsic seriousness of nuclear war, a wide swath of misperceptions was certain to ensue. For that reason the conflict between the superpowers will also obtain special attention.

Additionally, it should be noted that in the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war much of the Arab world suffered a deep sense of shame and humiliation. Books, poetry, self-esteem, demeanor, all took a gloomy twist<sup>7</sup>. These feelings permeated almost every aspect of Arab society to a point where some claimed the Arabs committed “cultural suicide”<sup>8</sup>. The change in demeanor remains a crucial factor in understanding Arab decision making and reactions, however, although these feelings are important, they originate *after* the conclusion of the war and therefore could not have been a factor in the war’s initiation. Therefore, like the minor players, Arab feelings and self-image post-1967 are also outside the scope of this thesis.

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<sup>7</sup> Aburish, Saïd K. 2004. *Nasser: the last Arab*. New York: St. Martin's Press/Thomas Dunne Books Pg. 250-251

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 250

## The Story

Now that the players have been established, it is important to create an accurate timeline of the events preceding the Six-Day War. This overview is designed to guide the reader through the complex web of events that occurred in the events surrounding the 1967 war. Although this overview will be as accurate as possible, the reader should be cautioned against making preliminary judgments. The following is only a brief overview; thorough explanations and justifications will be provided in the bulk of this thesis. Additionally, there are more events than will be listed below, but the following will nevertheless be a rough outline of the events in question.

Between the years of 1966 and 1967, Israeli relations with her neighbors were marred by violent flare ups; the state of Israeli-Syrian relationship was especially abysmal<sup>9</sup>. The nature of the violence along the Israeli-Syrian border was rapidly escalating. Initial machine gun attacks were fired on Israeli farmers from the Syrian side of the border; however on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April, 1966 artillery was also used, which resulted in Israel and Syria eventually engaging in a brief air battle over the Sea of Galilee where six (Russian built) Syrian planes were downed, causing Syrian emotions to run raw.

Later, during the month of November, Syria and Egypt entered into a mutual defense pact and were under the protective cover of the Soviet Union. Feeling safer, the Syrians decided to encourage further terrorist raids into Israeli territory<sup>10</sup>. The Soviet Union supported this idea because they were trying to prop up radical Arab regimes in order to increase their influence in the region.

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<sup>9</sup> "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War" Galia Golan Pg. 3

<sup>10</sup> Eban, Abba Solomon. 1972. *My country: the story of modern Israel*. New York: Random House. Pg. 195



In the early months of the following year from January- April, attacks into Israeli territory increased in both number and intensity. The tension on both sides was rapidly escalating and the end result was the Israeli chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin threatening to invade Damascus if the terrorist raids did not cease. Shortly after, Israel and Syria went 'tit-for-tat' in the demilitarized zone between the countries. Syria's embarrassment followed, and the Kingdom of Jordan and Egypt began verbally sparring over who was at fault.

On May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> the Soviet Union became heavily involved in the propaganda effort and published a false report stating Israel had massed 10 brigades on Syria's border and was planning an immediate invasion. In response to this false report, Egypt mobilized its army and placed soldiers into the Sinai Peninsula. Two days later, the Egyptian army moved more units into the Sinai Canal and demanded that the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) be withdrawn from the Egyptian-Israeli border. Two days later, on the 18<sup>th</sup> Secretary General of the United Nations U Thant complied with the request and withdrew the UN forces. Over the next 3-4 days, the Egyptian army occupied the evacuated UNEF posts and closed the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping.

Following the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba, surrounding Arab nations began sending troops to surround Israel. In addition to Israel's immediate neighbors, the countries of Algeria and Iraq sent expeditionary forces as well. The total number of soldiers neared 250,000 and the Arabs became ever-confident of their impending victory. Further strengthening this confidence was the inclusion of the Kingdom of Jordan into the Egyptian-Syrian defense pact on May 30<sup>th</sup> 1967.

All these factors contributed to the beginning of the Six-Day War which finally erupted on June 5 1967. The fighting lasted six days and the end result was a triumphant Israel and a

completely routed joint Arab army. When the smoke cleared Israel had gained control of the Sinai Peninsula, Golan Heights, West Bank, East Jerusalem.

### Hypotheses

So the question then becomes, how did misperceptions affect the eventual decision to initiate war? The following claims will be considered and tested:

- **(1) Misperceptions accelerated the start/intensity of 1967 war**
- **(2) Misperceptions staved off the war**
- **(3) Misperceptions did not cause the war/ played a minimal role**
- **(4) That a mixture of components had a mixed bag of results.**

Although individuals make decisions, it is the country as a whole that fights a war. As such a different conclusion should be drawn in regards to each nation. For example, it would be hypothetically possible for Algerian misperceptions to accelerate the thirst for war, while American misperceptions may have staved off American involvement. Therefore, when a conclusion is drawn about how misperceptions affected the decision to go to war, there must be a separate conclusion for each country. Additionally, because each nation responds to stressors uniquely, countries with similar dilemmas may respond in dissimilar ways. For example, if one nation is directly threatened, they may choose to attack, whereas another nation upon being threatened may choose to exercise restraint. Such a disparity exists between Israeli and Syrian decision making.

Of the four previously mentioned conclusions all are viable *depending on the country* in question. In the case of Israel, misperceptions staved off their desire for war and in the case of Algeria and Syria misperceptions accelerated it. The superpowers did not engage in a war, but their misperceptions did affect the decisions of others. As such misperceptions made by and because of the superpowers will have a different conclusion metric – namely how they affected the decision of others, and how misperceptions affected their decisions.

It should also be noted that one piece of information can produce different perceptions in different individual. Take this information as an example. We have two individuals, one who genuinely believes in peace efforts being made by North Korea, the other who is extremely distrustful of North Korean motives. The North Korean government then issues a public statement saying, “We plan to completely disarm our nuclear arsenal”. The first person will have a strong inclination to believe them, whereas the second would speculate the statement is likely a form of propaganda or trap. Although both members received the same piece of information their respective thoughts are mutually exclusive. In this case the key factor in determining a person’s opinion was not the statement by North Korea, but the pre-existing disposition of the individual. For a further explanation of this concept see Festinger’s Cognitive Dissonance Theory.<sup>11</sup>

To a lesser extent, the same is true with a state’s decision makers. Like the average man leaders are people and fall prey to their own biases, but unlike the common person decision makers have an abundance of like-minded people surrounding them. These may be members of the same political party, self-appointed ministers, or college friends. Of course it is natural for deviation to exist even within the closest knit friendship, but because a tendency group-think

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<sup>11</sup> Festinger, Leon. 1962. *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press

exists, individual (Homo-Psychologicus) decision making is substantially different from government decision making (Homo-Bureaucraticus). For a further explanation of intergroup thought and decision making see Houghton's The Decision Point<sup>12</sup>.

Summation:

All of the players exhibited their fair share of misperceptions and with good reason – nobody is perfect. This thesis will ultimately be about the psychological misperceptions and misconceptions leading to the 1967 war. It will explore ideas people saw that weren't there, as well as ideas that were missed. These ideas are still being debated today and in part are a continuation of the misperceptions of old. This thesis will expose various flaws in the minds of previous decision makers and will hopefully prevent current decision-makers from following down the same flawed path.

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<sup>12</sup> David Patrick Houghton, *The Decision Point* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2011).

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

Throughout the years much research has been done on the events of the 1967 war. Most of these works are purely descriptive as each side is attempting to explain and rationalize what happened from their own perspective. This is no small feat; researching the 1967 war is unusually difficult. The large number of participants and the nearly infinite perspectives on the subject make finding the truth difficult. Further complicating matters is the nearly bottomless pit of sources available on the subject, some foreign and some local. The local sources generally present a “pro-Western” stance and are readily available in English. By contrast the foreign sources, while available are generally written in Arabic.

Interestingly enough, despite the plethora of sources almost none is dedicated to exposing the misperceptions that contributed to the begging of the 1967 war. Even more interesting is that the few books that dedicate a psychological approach to this war present a rational actor model approach. It is this author’s opinion that the rational actor approach is not an accurate representation of the facts of 1967, but instead represents the psychological paradigm of the 1970’s. The 1970’s represented a wave of rational-actor model theorist and as such the immediate literature follows. However, a great deal of misperception literature has been written since then and when combined with the newly released documents obtained from newly opened archives and newly featured articles, the misperception approach seems a better fit.

Regardless of the psychological tint of the war, it is still essential to consider the perspective of all sources listed. In regards to the 1967 war the following perspectives will be

encapsulated:

- **Neutral perspective**
- **Israeli perspective**
- **Arab perspective**
- **Psychological perspective**
- **Super Power perspective**

It should be noted that there are other potential sources, such as alternative western sources, or non-involved, yet severely biased parties. However, these sources are outside the scope of this project because a primary source is more valuable when analyzing misperceptions than a general outside party.

### Neutral Sources<sup>13</sup>

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is surrounded by myth. Few sources can truly be called balanced. In order to ensure a balanced view, many organizations decided to use dual authorship as a means of balancing out pre-conceived notions. These sources in theory explain the overall historical view, without being dictated by one particular nation or region. Additionally, these sources are generally written decades after the actual conflict. This time gap allows for a wider array of sources to be utilized and for less biased authorship.

One of the most balanced documentaries on the subject is a PBS documentary called

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<sup>13</sup> It should be stated that no source can ever be entirely neutral, so for the purposes of this thesis neutral will refer to sources that don't take an explicit bias towards one nation or another.

“The 50 Years War Israel and the Arabs”<sup>14</sup>. This movie was divided into sections, including one about the 1967 war. “The 50 Years War” provided an great context to the war itself supplemented with visual images. The views of Egypt, the United States, Israel and Jordan were more than adequately represented. In addition, interviews of Presidents, Prime Ministers, dictators and other high level officials were all frequented in the film. Psychological aspects of the conflict were not covered, however, the visual imagery provided personal depth, something a dry text source would have lacked.

The Fifty Years’ War, Israel and the Arabs,<sup>15</sup> is also a book. This book provides more detail in certain areas of the movies and is lauded for its balanced approach. This balanced approach is available mainly because the book has two authors, Ahron Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri, both of whom come from different backgrounds, but both have written impressive publications that seemed devoid of the usual myths surrounding the conflict. The two authors are each used as ideological barometers, one on each side. Together their writing flows well, and does not stray off in either direction. This book offers one of the most balanced perspectives on the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole.

Another neutral source was an article titled, “The Polls: Attitudes Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict”<sup>16</sup>. Basically, this article has a series of polls ranging from 1967 to the 1980s, with six polls relating to the 1967 War. These polls demonstrated the opinions of four countries and where “their sympathies lied”. The four countries surveyed were European and American, and as a result, were severely lop-sided. In all polls Israel maintained a sympathetic edge over

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<sup>14</sup> “The 50 Years War : Israel and the Arabs” Published: [Virginia] : PBS Home Video [distributor], c1999

<sup>15</sup> Bregman, Ahron, and Jihan El-Tahri, 1999. *The fifty years' war: Israel and the Arabs*. New York: TV Books.

<sup>16</sup> “The Polls: Attitudes Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict.” Connie de Boer *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 1 published by: Oxford University Press.

there Arab counter parts by a gaping margin. It should be noted however, that a lop-sided poll does not necessarily demonstrate bias. Because there is no evidence of impropriety such polls are still neutral in their orientation because they do not in themselves favor one side or the other.

Following the polls another strong neutral source is Richard B. Parker's "The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored."<sup>17</sup> This article is issue centric as opposed to nation centric. It focuses on the major events of the war and some interpersonal rivalries. The author utilizes mainly Egyptian and UN sources, but the overall piece does not favor one side or the other. In the event where the evidence is complicated Parker goes out of his way to note it and lists the opposing theory. Parker concludes that many irrational factors contributed to the start of the 1967 war, and although he does place blame on specific individuals, it is strongly supported by evidence and he remains objective in his criticisms.

### Israeli Perspective Sources

After a thorough understanding of the general information collecting personal accounts becomes essential, after all, this thesis is about misperceptions. Since only a person can misperceive something, it is important to research primary source information in addition to analytical sources.

The first book representing a combined psychological and Israel perspective is, Janice Stein's and Raymond Tanter's Rational Decision-Making: Israel's security choices, 1967<sup>18</sup>. In it Stein argues that Israel acted rationally within the framework of information they had at any

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<sup>17</sup> Parker, Richard B. "The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored" Middle East Journal, Vol. 46, No.2 (Spring, 1992): Middle East Institute

<sup>18</sup> Stein, Janice Gross, and Raymond Tanter. 1980. *Rational decision-making: Israel's security choices, 1967*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.



given moment. She sets up a series of questions. For example were the Arab nations sufficiently united to declare war? Will Egypt close the Straits of Tiran? Stein poses 5 questions and argues that Israel was incorrect in all 5 observations, but based on the information they had made the correct decision; only with supplemental information could Israel eventually make correct decisions. This book was authored in the 1970s, so it holds the mantle of classical rational actor model theory. However, the book lacks access to recently released documents and information.

Additionally the text was disorganized and the dual authorship was apparent as both authors have entirely different lexicons. While the book provided a useful overall framework and provided extraordinary detail, the newly released documents suggest some flaws in Stein's work. In the interest of full disclosure, a book detailing rational decision making will come into direct conflict with a thesis about misperceptions, but such conflicting ideas are nothing new. Stein herself subsequently abandoned the rational actor approach

After Janice Stein's book, two books written by the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban stood out. Eban was a liberal Israeli politician born in South Africa who wrote My Country: the story of modern Israel<sup>19</sup>, and Abba Eban: An Autobiography<sup>20</sup>. Both books provide a strong sense of history and demonstrate the inner workings Israeli society. In My Country, Eban provides a detailed picture of the psychology of the state of Israel and her people. He also provides a crucial explanation for some key Syrian misperceptions. My Country talks at length about how for the first time in Israeli history Auschwitz entered main stream dialogue. Since understanding a person's background is the key to predicting future misperceptions Eban's My Country perfectly sets the setting for Israel.

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<sup>19</sup> Eban, Abba Solomon. 1972. *My country; the story of modern Israel*. New York: Random House.

<sup>20</sup> Eban, Abba Solomon. 1977. *Abba Eban: an autobiography*. New York: Random House.

Eban's autobiography however is structurally different. This book focuses on Eban's person life and gives more of a professional state department perspective on issues. This book had a lot less utility than *My Country*, but one inserted picture spoke wonders. In his autobiography Eban displays a political cartoon of the respective sides' perceptions of UN resolution 242 (The United Nations Security Council resolution that marked the end of the Six-Day War). In this cartoon you clearly see a piece of paper being stared at by an upright Jew, and an Arab standing on his head. Below, a caption read "both sides view UN resolution from different angles." Eban's book although limited in its utility provides an excellent end point for this thesis.

Continuing down the Israel line, Alan Dershowitz's *The Case For Israel*<sup>21</sup> provided supplemental analysis. Dershowitz is a Harvard law professor and criminal defense attorney, and as the title of the book implies a pro-Israel. Dershowitz frames his book the way a defense attorney would frame a case; he starts by listing an accusation, then he cites the accusers, and after he states "the reality" and offers his proof. Only a small portion of his book is dedicated to the Six-Day war<sup>22</sup>, however, it is extremely well organized and was loaded with useful tidbits of information.

Within Dershowitz's book he provides some excellent quotations from Damascus radio, Nasser, and Arab newspapers. Using someone's own words is a great way to help tack down their positions. Most interestingly Dershowitz provided a statistic showing 1/5 of Egyptian Jews were arrested during the course of the war. This statistic on its face demonstrates an anti-Semitic component to the war. Dershowitz's book was extremely useful, but it should be noted that, most

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<sup>21</sup> Dershowitz, Alan. 2003 *The Case for Israel* John Wiley and Sons Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 91-94

of his work in the relevant portions is cited to Michael Oren's book, Six days of war : June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East<sup>23</sup>.

As previously stated Eban's books were largely focused on the State Department and present a strong international perspective. However, the international perspective is only one aspect of the story. It would be impossible to garner a full picture without a military perspective. In his memoirs<sup>24</sup>, the Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan dictates a frame by frame of Israel's military structure and encounters. As the creator of Israel's military infrastructure, a decorated war hero, and the Israeli Defence Minister, Dayan possess the perfect credentials for a thorough explanation of Israel's military affairs, and an in-depth knowledge of foreign forces and their capabilities.

#### Arab Perspective Sources

Knowing the Israeli perspective is only half the battle. The Arabs have their own distinct tale. In fact, the Israeli and Arab perspectives are so different they refuse to even call the war by the same title. Israelis and much of the world refer to the 1967 war as the "Six-Day War". Arabs by contrast view this title as humiliating and offensive, to them the mere mentioning of the phrase "Six-Days" brings back unwanted painful memories. Therefore, the collective Arab nations prefer to opt for the label "June War".

United by a similar language and loathing of "Western colonial" powers the Arabs were remarkably similar in their world view. Yes, of course there was variation between the individual Arab nations themselves; however, the scope was not as wide as one might expect. Most of these

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<sup>23</sup> Oren, Michael B. 2002. *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>24</sup> Dayan, Moshe. 1976. *Moshe Dayan: story of my life*. New York: Morrow

nations were bound by a sense of Arab pride that permeated into both people and governments alike. This innate urge guided many of the regions Arab leaders down the same destructive path with few leaders escaping their ultimate fate.

To get an initial glimpse into the Arab perspective, it is imperative to start with one their greatest societies – Egypt. Firmly on the border with Israel and militarily the strongest of the Arab nations Egypt is an ideal place to understand the core of the Arab world. One of the most famous book's on modern Egyptian history is Anwar Sadat's autobiography<sup>25</sup>. Sadat was the head of the Egyptian National assembly, and later became the President of Egypt. He provides an Egyptian perspective to the 1956 Sinai campaign; which serves as a useful starting point for understanding Egyptian (and Algerian) perspectives regarding the 1967 war. In addition, Sadat provides insight into the temporary Syrian-Egyptian union, along with its faults and its failures.

Another strong positive is that Anwar Sadat was a personal friend of the President of Egypt, Gamal Nasser. Sadat's closeness to Nasser, positions him to take notes on Nasser's personality and statements. Sadat points out deep character and psychological flaws in Nasser, describing him as an egotistical and delusional man obsessed with prestige and an artificial image of himself. What is truly interesting is that whether or not Sadat actually likes Nasser is highly questionable. Throughout his autobiography Sadat regularly states that he doesn't hate anyone however, in context, he repeats this phrase after he notes one of Nasser's actions/behaviors that he doesn't approve of.

Sadat himself was also a key player in the 1967 war, and his book provides a glimpse of his own flaws. For starters Anwar Sadat is a conspiracy theorist. He accuses several countries of

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<sup>25</sup> Sadat, Anwar. 1978. In search of Identity: An Autobiography. New York: Harper & Row.

manically plotting against Egypt. In particular he claims Moshe Dayan, deliberately tried to lull Egypt into a false sense of security. This claim is highly suspect, first Dayan was a strong military man and Israel's defense minister. He openly spoke of preemptively attacking Egypt. By most accounts Dayan is one of the most hawkish Israeli politicians; a fact he is not shy about. To disprove Sadat's assertion all one must do is view a picture of Moshe Dayan. It is hard to imagine a face irreparably damaged by battle scars and sporting a pirate like eye patch lulling anyone into a false sense of security.

Next, Arab-Israeli military/Political relations<sup>26</sup> by John Amos was reviewed. Amos's book is not well known, but is flooded with useful information. He divides one of his chapters by country and delves individually into Syrian and Egyptian history, and the perceptions of certain sects of society. Amos uses both western and Arab sources; however he stays focused on presenting a strictly Arab perspective.

As such, this book provided great insight to the demographic realities of the Syrian State. Amos's books solidly demonstrates the differences between the 1963 Ba'ath party and the 1966 Ba'ath party. He supplies excerpts from the newly formed UAR's (United Arab Republic) constitution<sup>27</sup>. The UAR was a short lived temporary union between Syria and Egypt that resulted in basically nothing. Understanding this political maneuver can provide for a small background on Arab similarities and well as irreconcilable differences.

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<sup>26</sup> Amos, John W. 1979. *Arab-Israeli military/political relations: Arab perceptions and the politics of escalation*. New York: Pergamon Press.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. Pg. 35

Additionally, Amos provides insight not only on Nasser, but thoroughly describes the constraints of charisma<sup>28</sup>. In other words he doesn't only speak of Nasser, but of Nasser's personality type. Towards the end, Amos includes some demographic statistics about Syria as well as detailing the percentages of Syrian minority groups.

Speaking of Syria's internal make up, recently, there has recently been some domestic turmoil in Syria. Protestors have been emerging and demanding the ousting of Syria's current president Bashar al-Assad. The Assad regime has responded by firing back at protestors killing roughly 3000 of them<sup>29</sup>. This upheaval has caused some scholars to publish articles on Syrian politics and history. These articles have great utility because since the mid 1960's there has been a straight line of succession with the ruling Baath party. So, any article written about Ba'ath ideology sheds light on regimes past and present.

One such article is "Making Sense of the Syrian Crisis"<sup>30</sup> by Reza Bhalla. This article is posted by STRATFOR global intelligence. STRATFOR is an organization comprised of intelligence professionals who have an audience with decision-makers and news outlets. Their work is highly professional and presents information in high academic quality and in article format. "Making Sense of the Syrian Crisis" is no exception.

The "crisis" that Bhalla is referring to is the one of today, not of 50 years ago. As such, she dedicates roughly half of her article to the current Assad regime, and the other half to history.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid 44-49

<sup>29</sup> "Syria's rebels unite to oust Assad and push for democracy" The Guardian  
<<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/oct/02/syria-rebels-assad-national-council>>

<sup>30</sup> "Making sense of the Syrian Conflict" Reza Bhalla Stratfor Global Intelligence May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2011  
<[a href="http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110504-making-sense-syrian-crisis"](http://www.stratfor.com/weekly/20110504-making-sense-syrian-crisis)>Making Sense of the Syrian Crisis</a> is republished with permission of STRATFOR.>

Within her article, Bhalla thoughtfully describes the history of the Alawite sect of Syria, Syria's demographics, and the history of France's involvement in the region. The information is also bolstered by a map of Syria color coded by demographic sect. This article shows no particular slant in terms of bias, other than an opposition to the current Syrian regime's brutal practices.

Aside from Egypt and Syria, Algeria was also a player. Algeria's role in the war was captured beautifully by Richard Roughton in "Algeria and the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War"<sup>31</sup>. Against what might be expected from purely geographical location, Algerians had a heavy psychological stake in the 67 war. In fact, Algerians were Pro-Arab in an almost savagely barbaric fashion.

Roughton explains this phenomenon by giving a brief summation of French colonial history in Algeria, and describing the effect it had on demographic sects of the population. He strongly documents Algeria's vicious battle against French forces and their resulting view of the world. Roughton argues that in the mind of the Algerian a few items are prevalent. First, the world is divided into two camps, the imperialist capitalists (Associated with France and Israel), and the oppressed indigenous people's (Palestinians, Yemeni's, Vietnamese). The imperialists are evil, and the oppressed are good; violence is completely acceptable and necessary to escape your colonial oppressors<sup>32</sup>. Second, Roughton documents an already existent hostility between Algerian Arabs and Jews.

So, when the June War finally erupted, Algeria had a slew of violent images engrained in

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<sup>31</sup> "Algeria and the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War" Richard A. Roughton Middle East Journal Vol. 23, No. 4 Published by: Middle East Institute

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.434

its memory. These images were a recipe for a full array of misperceptions to permeate the Algerian mind.

After descriptions about land, countries, and society, it was important to obtain a more person centric approach. A self-proclaimed Palestinian historian wrote Nasser, The Last Arab<sup>33</sup>. As the name implies, the author Said Aburish, is instilled with a sense of Arab pride, and is a staunch Nasser supporter. As such, he defends Nasser, almost to the point of silliness.

Rightly or wrongly the author's text represents the view of many Arabs and deserves attention. Aburish's book has a perspective that only insiders can possess. Aburish sees the world through two sets of eyes, a scholar and a Palestinian. This position allows him to channel his personal feelings into his writings and eventually into the reader. This style makes for a good piece of literature, but not exactly the most balanced authorship.

#### Super Power Perspective Sources

At the time of the 1967 war the world was experiencing a bi-polar stratification of power. The Western side was led by the United States, and was composed of mainly Western Europe, Japan, Israel and North America. The Eastern bloc was led by the Soviet Union and was composed mainly of Eastern Europe and a growing part of central Asia.

Initially, the United States under President Truman adopted a strategy known as containment. The idea was to box in the Soviet Union by surrounding it and stopping the spread of communism. In the short term, this policy seemed at least moderately effective as the Western Bloc seemed to have economic and geo-political advantages. As time progressed the Soviet

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<sup>33</sup> Aburish, Saïd K. 2004. *Nasser: the last Arab*. New York: St. Martin's Press/Thomas Dunne Books



Union was beginning to feel the squeeze and decided to implement a strategy of jumping around the containment countries and develop a more checkerboard pattern of alliances. This plan involved hopping over western containment zones, and was cleverly dubbed “leapfrogging”.

As the Soviet Union implemented its “leapfrogging” policy it found natural alliances in the radical regimes of Syria and Egypt. As it stood, the United States had partnerships with Israel and the relatively moderate Jordan and Saudi Arabia. For a country seeking to expand its influence Syria and Egypt became the logical, if not the only choice for the Soviets. In short, a result of the “leapfrogging” policy was the unholy alliance between the Soviet Union and the radical Arab regimes of Syria and Egypt.

For a more extensive view of cold war politics and the “leapfrog” policy, see Kissinger’s Diplomacy<sup>34</sup>. Kissinger is a brilliant academic who served as Secretary of State under the Nixon presidency. His book Diplomacy covers foreign policy from the time of the Holy Roman Empire up until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Kissinger is American and a staunch realist, as such his work favors the United States a great deal. Nevertheless, Diplomacy is considered one of the strongest international relations books of our generation.

After obtaining cold war background information, securing information from the decision makers involved became key. For this, the memoirs of the U.S Secretary of State Dean Rusk and President Lyndon Baines Johnson were critical. Johnson’s memoir titled, The Vantage Point; Perspectives of the Presidency 1963-1969<sup>35</sup> makes an excellent starting point. The Vantage Point, is an overall summation of the Johnson presidency starting from the beginning. Only one

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<sup>34</sup> Kissinger, Henry. 1994. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon & Schuster. Pg. 423-803

<sup>35</sup> Johnson, Lyndon B. 1971. *The vantage point; perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

chapter is dedicated to the 1967 war, but it is unusually descriptive and revealing of the president's positions.

Because the President of the United States is our Head of State, The Vantage Point is perfect for revealing exactly what U.S policy was. Johnson was indeed a supporter of Israel, however, he is no hawk. Johnson drove himself to the point of exhaustion looking for diplomatic solutions to what was inevitably a military problem. With the help of his staff Johnson attempted to use diplomacy, bluffs, the UN, and every option on the table before committing to any U.S action. The Vantage Point, is well written and provides a strong background for U.S policy.

Due to Johnson's emphasis on diplomacy and foreign affairs, the U.S state department developed into the central tool of his 1967 campaign. The position of the state department and Rusk can be found in, As I saw it<sup>36</sup>. This memoir was dictated to Rusk's son, as Rusk was too old to write it himself. It is clear from the very beginning that Rusk sees both the Israelis and the Palestinians as bickering children. He refers to the Israeli's as paranoid and the Arabs as aggressive and viscous. He argues that when the two are combined the results are catastrophic. Interestingly, Rusk sees the problem very differently than his more militaristic counter parts. To Rusk, the main obstacle towards resuming a semi-functioning Middle East was not the thousands of troops stationed all around Israel, but instead was the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba. Rusk spends the great deal of his memoir discussing options to re-open the straights, but seldom mentions the dilemma created by the loss of Israeli deterrence.

After the ground work and individuals had been established, it was essential to look more towards analytical research. In that regard, many articles were written and there is no shortage of

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<sup>36</sup> Dean Rusk and Daniel S. Papp. 1991. *As I saw it*. New York: Penguin.

opinion. William Quandt's "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 war"<sup>37</sup> was the first piece utilized. Here, Quandt examines various theories developed by other individuals and presents his own. Theories revolving around the United States restraining Israel are deemed "red light" whereas, theories with a central belief that Israel and the United States conspired to remove Nasser are named "green light". Quandt develops his own narrative somewhere between the two poles and calls it the "yellow light" thesis. This interpretation agrees that Johnson disliked Nasser, but insists that the American position was to prevent Israel from pre-empting. He begins by pointing out the strengths and weaknesses for both arguments, and proceeds to detail Johnson and his cabinet. Quandt provides an excellent source for understanding the members of LBJ's inner circle and an outline for their positions.

Information about the Soviet Union is somewhat harder to obtain. The Soviet Union only recently opened its archives and there hasn't been an extensive effort to convert the Russian documents into English. Nevertheless some bi-lingual authors have taken it upon themselves to publish new articles with the newly released information.

One such article is Galia Golan's "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War"<sup>38</sup>. While Israeli herself, this author demonstrates a strong Pro-Soviet bias in her writings. Galia is heavily political active in Israel and is actually a member of a tiny political party to the far left of the Israeli spectrum. It is unclear whether her Pro-Soviet bias is due to her research as a Soviet historian, or her extreme left leaning views, but it is likely that both have influence. Personal biases aside, this article was pretty impressive. As a Hebrew speaker, Golan was able to translate newly released Soviet documents into an English article. Golan's work revealed the Soviet perspective on their relationship with Syria and Egypt. Personally, Galia shows the Soviet Union as a primarily defensive unit concerned with defending itself against a West winning the Cold War. She also demonstrates that according to Soviet

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<sup>37</sup> Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was the Light? William B. Quandt *Middle East Journal* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring, 1992), pp. 198-228 Published by: [Middle East Institute](#)

<sup>38</sup> "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-day War". Galia, Golan *Journal of Cold War Studies* Vol. 8 no. 1 Winter 2006: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Intelligence it was Egypt and Syria that damaged their own nations, and that the Soviet Union, while partially at fault, did nothing negative intentionally.

### Psychological and Theoretical Components

With all of this information digested it becomes important to move into the theoretical aspects of decision making. How do leaders see their foreign policy? How are misperceptions caused? How can they be prevented? For these questions it becomes important to consult theoretical literature.

Robert Jervis is widely accepted as a leader on misperception in the International Relations field. His book Perception and Misperception in International Politics<sup>39</sup> details common misperceptions and is considered highly advanced. Jervis simplified his book into a more condensed article titled, “Hypotheses on Misperception<sup>40</sup>”. This article basically simplifies his writings, without adding new ideas. Within, Jervis lists individual hypothesis and supports his claims with evidence of real world international conflict.

Of his many conflicts, the 1967 war is outside Jervis’s work. Instead he focuses only on applicable general concepts. Jervis’s main argument is that people fit incoming information into their already existing theories and images of other actors and as a result people see what they expect to see, as oppose to what is actually there. To justify this Jervis draws on cognitive consistency theory. His theories have wide spread application and can be easily applied to specific cases.

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<sup>39</sup> Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

<sup>40</sup> “Hypotheses on Misperception” Robert Jervis, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Apr., 1968), pp. 454-479 Cambridge University Press

In addition to Jervis's psychological study, research was conducted specifically on governmental decision making. For this, Houghton's The Decision Point<sup>41</sup> was utilized. Within, Houghton conceptualized government decision making into three broad categories; namely, Homo-Sociologicus, Homo-Bureaucraticus, and Homo-Psychologicus. Homo-Sociologicus demonstrates decisions that are taken in groups rather than unilaterally. Homo-Bureaucraticus demonstrates that countries are not unitary actors, but instead are composed of discordant organizations, and Homo-Psychologicus argues that individuals matter, and can alter history. This information was useful in its application to 1967 because of the complex multi-layer negotiations and decision making.

These two authors collectively focus on the human-mind and how a person thinks. Next, it was important utilize a source that illustrates, now how a person thinks, but what ideological category they fall into. For this Charles Krauthammer wrote a fantastic article titled "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign policy for a Unipolar World."<sup>42</sup> Within, Krauthammer describes four traditional American schools of foreign policy thought. He then explains their strengths and weaknesses and finally concludes with his own world view. This piece is useful in understanding the world view of various American leaders at the time of the 1967 war.

### Conclusion:

The sources listed above constitute the main writings that will be contributing to this project. There will be additional sources that are cited throughout the thesis, but they never the less are outside the main source of information. Additionally, there are a few sources that are not available to the English reader as they were recently released from the Russian Archives or have

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<sup>41</sup> David Patrick Houghton, The Decision Point (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2011).

<sup>42</sup> Charles Krauthammer, "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign policy for a Unipolar World." The American Enterprise Institute. Washington, DC 2004.

never been translated from standard Arabic into English. For these, this author is reliant upon the analyses of Parker and Golan who have both read and interpreted these documents and published their findings in recent articles.

That being said, to date, there is an abundance of material written on the 1967 war. Most of these sources have been translated into English over the years and are available to the English reader. Although the primary sources are essentially carved in stone, the amount of analysis on the subject is only likely to increase with time. What's lacking is a comprehensive study on the mindset and perceptions of the individual decision makers that led to the start of the 1967 war. This thesis seeks to fill that hole with a brief overview of the misperceptions made by the major decision makers in the 1967 Six-day War.

## **Ch. 3: The Super Powers**

### Introduction:

This chapter will be focusing on the collective misperceptions made by the decision makers of the Soviet Union and the United States of America as they relate to the Six-Day War. Both sides had their fair share of misperceptions that impacted the conflict in one way or another. For its part, the Soviet Union created a false intelligence report that caused the blood of the Arab people to reach a boiling point. This report inevitably led to the Arab defeat in 1967 and was detrimental to Soviet interests in the long run. The United States by contrast committed itself to a policy of internationalism and heavy reliance on the United Nations. The American decision-makers' misperceptions about the efficacy of the UN and multilateral ideas in general amounted to a wasteful exercise. This chapter will illustrate specifically what some of these misperceptions were and how they affected the host country as well as the players in the Middle East.

### Background:

After the finale of World War II, the world plunged into what is commonly referred to as the Cold War. This was a zero-sum game competition between West and East, with each side being led by the United States and the Soviet Union respectively. In the mid 1940's the Soviet Union was rapidly expanding into Eastern Europe with a blatant disregard toward common human decency (or at least a different notion of decency) and human life. In response to this egregious violation of human rights, the United States under President Harry Truman adopted the

“containment” policy<sup>43</sup>.

The title “containment” is basically self-explanatory. The United States would here on out attempt to stop the spread of communism by containing it. From this point on the world began to take on a bi-polar shape with opposing spheres of influence. The United States would lead Western Europe, Japan, and a few others. The Soviet Union would have its base in Eastern Europe, with strong holds in Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania. The United States with the help of their sphere would begin intervening militarily across the globe to stop the advance of the red giant.

By the mid 1950’s the American containment policy, while costly, was beginning to bear fruit. The United States through its allies and friendly nations managed to construct a virtual quarantine zone around the Soviet Union. Feeling the heat, the Soviet Union needed to devise a counter strategy. Luckily for them the stars were beginning to align. Having recently suffered a stroke the Soviet Union’s original Premier Joseph Stalin now dead and replaced by Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev began to implement what has already been described as the “leapfrogging” strategy. His plan was to hop-sotch the Western quarantine and revert the balance of power to the Soviet Union’s favor<sup>44</sup>.

Khrushchev’s first target was the Arab Republic of Egypt, and in 1955 he authorized a large weapon sale to the nation. Egypt was an intelligent and logical choice. In June 1956 Gamel Abdel Nasser had recently taken control of all Egypt’s political affairs, both foreign and domestic. The Soviet Union could not have chosen a more anti-Western candidate if they had tried.

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<sup>43</sup> Kissinger *Diplomacy* pg. 446

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 522-523



Nasser was a staunch Arab nationalist and despised the Western world. A mere four days after he took power, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal and virtually closed it off to Western shipping. This action earned Nasser the discontent of the Western sphere<sup>45</sup>, especially the rage of Britain and France. This situation quickly escalated and resulted in the Suez War with Egypt on one-side and the Israel-France-Britain triple alliance on the other. The immediate result was a militaristic defeat for Egypt; however, the diplomatic repercussions for the United States were negative. Egypt was now being hurled towards the Russian sphere. In fact, on a regular basis the soon to be Speaker of the Egyptian National Assembly Anwar Sadat, began writing scathing anti U.S articles in Egyptian editorials posted in al-Gumhuriah<sup>46</sup>. The Arab street was thrown into a Pro-Nasser frenzy, and the Soviet's "leapfrogging" strategy was beginning to produce dividends.

Almost exactly one decade later, the Soviet Union again had an opportunity to expand its influence. In February of 1966, Syria was going through great domestic turmoil. A splinter faction of the radical socialist Ba'ath party had just emerged and overthrown the previous Ba'ath government that had ruled since 1963<sup>47</sup>. Seeing a natural ideological ally in a natal socialist state and an opportunity to create a satellite the Soviet Union pounced on its opportunity. The Soviet Union decided to back Syria with unusually generous economic, political and military support. This aid was so generous that most analysts believe that the Soviet Union was trying to coalesce a radical block of Arab states *led* by Syria to oppose U.S interests in the Middle East<sup>48</sup>. This claim isn't all that farfetched, as the constitution of the Arab Ba'ath party actually states a goal of

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<sup>45</sup> With the exception of U.S President Dwight Eisenhower who opposed the triple invasion. Eisenhower was a military man and tended to favor Middle Eastern stability.

<sup>46</sup> Sadat *In search of Identity* pg. 143

<sup>47</sup> Amos, *The Politics of Escalation*. Pg. 32-33

<sup>48</sup> Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War." Pg. 5

unifying all Arab States under a “single state<sup>49</sup>”. It is likely, if not certain, that the reasons the Ba’ath party wanted an Arab union are significantly different from those of the Soviet Union. The Ba’ath party was fighting for a sense of Arab pride and honor; an Arab union would be a way of achieving these *ends*. By contrast, the Soviet Union sought to expand its power, the unification of radical states was only a *means* of achieving this goal. The Soviet Union had no emotional stake in “Arab pride”. If anything, it found Pan-Arabism annoying and antithetical to communism, but alas the Soviet Union placed their interests above their feelings, and viewed geographic expansion and power projection as more important than emotional concerns<sup>50</sup>.

At the same time that the Soviet Union was pursuing its new strategy, the United States was implementing its own agenda. In the 1960’s the United States had an ongoing friendship with Israel, and attempted to reach out to many Arab regimes. This idea was moderately successful and was implemented as part of a broader U.S strategy to ensure the territorial integrity of all states in the region. This policy allowed the United States to support Israel’s borders, while at the same time being equitable to all, which in theory should not have offended Arab states.

In pursuit of this territorial defense policy, the United States sold defensive missiles to Israel in 1963. The United States predicted that the Arabs would fiercely object – and they did. However, the U.S state department correctly pointed out that the United States had also sold weapons on mass to Jordan and Saudi Arabia roughly one year before. This meant that although the Arabs objected, the argument that Israel was receiving special treatment did not hold water<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> Amos, *The Politics of Escalation* Pg. 35

<sup>50</sup> Golan, “The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-Day War.” Pg. 4-5

<sup>51</sup> Rusk, *As I saw it* Pg. 379

The United States diplomatic offensive in the Middle East, didn't end with just three countries, even Egypt was invited to partake in the goodwill. In 1962, President Kennedy and the United States Congress voted to implement the "Food for Peace" program. The United States was now literally paying for and shipping food directly into the mouths of 40% of Egypt's population<sup>52</sup>. This move was intended to buy some good will among Egypt's people and perhaps tease Egypt out of the Soviet orbit. Unfortunately for the Egyptian people, their leader employed a nasty brand of fire-breathing rhetoric. In one of his trade mark rants Nasser actually told a crowd in Cairo that the United States should take their aid, and "[t]hrow it into the Red Sea!"<sup>53</sup><sup>54</sup> The United States - not being in the mood for Nasser's games - did just that. Shortly after Nasser's speech the "Food for Peace" was reduced to almost nothing.

With this, the scene was now set. The United States had curried favor with moderate Arab states and Israel, and the Soviet Union had fostered an alliance of radical Arabists. The United States was seeking to contain the ever growing eastern sphere of influence, while the Soviet Union was trying to "leapfrog" the quarantine zone. Both sides were arming their respective nations, and a powder keg was being stuffed. It was only a matter of time until a spark set the region ablaze. Soon the events of the 1967 war would be set in motion, and once begun; a slew of misperceptions would ensue. These misperceptions would be based in part on previously held notions about the region and previous internal experience. Both the Soviet Union and the United States had their fair share.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Pg. 380

<sup>53</sup> Ibid. Pg. 380

<sup>54</sup> It should be noted that Arabic sources dispute this. According to Sadat and Aburish, Nasser said "Drink the Sea". This is apparently an Arabic saying for "get lost". Regardless, of the precise wording, the phrase was meant to be insulting.

## How the Soviet Union Got It Wrong

On April 7th 1967 Israel and Syria had an aerial dogfight over the disputed demilitarized zone (or DMZ) between the countries. The end result was the downing of six Syrian MIG warplanes and a humiliated Syria. The Soviet Union realized that Syria was now taking a beating from two directions, from the Israelis and their own domestic unrest. To further complicate matters, the Soviet Union issued an intelligence report that it likely knew was false, stating that Israel had massed 10<sup>55</sup> army brigades on Syria's border and was planning on attacking on May 17th. Soviet officials then shared this information with Anwar Sadat who passed it on to Nasser, who had in any case already heard it from the Soviet Union. In his memoirs Sadat recalled:

“I was seen off at Moscow airport by Mr. Semenov, the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister who was accompanied by the Speaker of the Soviet Parliament... They told me specifically that ten Israeli brigades had been concentrated on the Syrian border.”<sup>56</sup>

As previously implied, this report was in fact false. The Egyptian chief of Staff Mahmoud Fawzi actually went to tour the border and reported back that, “I was seeking confirmation about the Israeli troops, but when I arrived on the border I didn't find anything unusual... I looked at the latest aerial photos, but, again, I didn't find anything unusual.”<sup>57</sup> Fawzi's account was reinforced by the Chief of Staff of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, (UNTSO) General Odd Bull who reported that his organization “had no reports of any build-

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<sup>55</sup> The number reportedly varies from 10-13 depending on the source used

<sup>56</sup> Sadat, *In Search of Identity* Pg. 171-72

<sup>57</sup> Bregman & Tahri, *The Fifty Years' War*. Pg. 75

up....<sup>58</sup>,”

In addition, the Prime Minister of Israel offered the Soviet Ambassador and his staff , without prior warning, to tour the Israeli-Syrian border so he could disprove the claim himself. However, the Soviet representative strangely denied the offer, stating roughly that, his job was to communicate Soviet Truth’s not test their accuracy<sup>59</sup>. This is highly suspect. Suppose for a moment that the Soviet Union believed (but was not sure) that its report was true. One would imagine that they would be ecstatic about the chance for a direct observation of the Syrian-Israeli border. If there was any question about the report’s validity, the Soviet Union would have accepted this opportunity and gathered first hand valuable intelligence. However, since the offer was rejected, one must ask why? The only plausible explanation is that Soviet Union knew what it would find, or more accurately what they would not. As Israel’s Foreign Minister so eloquently phrased it:

“The mobilization of ‘eleven to thirteen Israeli brigades’, to say nothing of their concentration on a narrow front, would have had a conspicuous effect on Israel’s life. No newspaperman or foreign mission in Israel could have been unaware of it. The disruption of normality in so many families would have been registered in all the chanceries and newspapers of the world.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Parker, “The June 1967 War Some Mysteries Explored” Pg. 180

<sup>59</sup> Eban, *My Country* Pg. 198

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 198

To further expand on what Eban was saying, the full strength of Israel's armed forces in the 1967 war was 25 brigades, roughly ten of which were infantry, nine armored, two mechanized, and four paratroopers. Only two of these brigades were on active duty. If Israel were to suddenly call such a large portion of their armed forces - nearly 40,000 men and 3,000 army vehicles- Israeli journalists would have covered the story. Additionally, considering the small space of Israel's Galilee region and the impact of withdrawing 40,000 soldiers out of civilian jobs, it is utterly inconceivable that Israel would have even attempted to keep this a secret from anyone<sup>61</sup>.

Furthermore, no counter evidence that the Israeli concentrations were actually in place has ever been presented. Even many modern day Russian scholars admit the report was false<sup>62</sup>. So the question then becomes why did Soviet officials fabricate the report? It is likely that the Soviet Union was trying to bolster the strength of the weakening Syrian regime and increase its own regional influence. By issuing a false report the Soviets were hoping to enrage Arab tensions and cause the Syrian religious fundamentalists who had been protesting the Ba'ath government to "rally around the flag"<sup>63</sup>. Furthermore, with this fabrication, the Soviet Union would be in a strong position to prod Nasser - who was seen as the defender of the Arab people- into increasing cooperation with Syria.

That being said, it is unlikely that the Soviet Union intended to start a war<sup>64</sup>. A war would have been a no-win scenario for the Soviet Union. On the one hand, the Arabs could be defeated; in that case, the Soviet Union would face a loss of prestige, there would be pressure for

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Bordeaux Parker, *The politics of miscalculation in the Middle East* Pg. 13-14

<sup>62</sup> Parker, "The June 1967 War Some Mysteries Explored" Pg. 182

<sup>63</sup> Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-day War." Pg. 7

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 7-8

a costly military intervention, and Moscow would be viewed as an unreliable partner. On the other hand, the Israeli's could have lost; in which case Moscow feared the United States would intervene directly on their behalf<sup>65</sup>, an outcome that would have been undesirable in face of a possible nuclear standoff. By Soviet calculations their forces were getting stronger and winning the propaganda effort. Nasser was winning over the Arab Street and the Pro-American kingdoms of Saudi Arabia and Jordan were weakening. A logical strategy for them would have just been to wait for a more favorable alignment of forces and not rush the issue.

Additionally, the timing in which the false report was transmitted to Anwar Sadat suggests that provoking a war was not a Soviet goal. When Sadat arrived in Moscow he originally met with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. According to the detailed Soviet record, the Israeli troop concentrations were not mentioned. Sadat was actually told by the Deputy Foreign Minister Vladimir Semynov, who only had a chance to tell Sadat because his plane was over an hour late<sup>66</sup>. If the Soviet Union was attempting to precipitate a war, it is unlikely that Sadat was simply lucky and was told by chance. It is far more likely that Soviet Union would have transferred the message through Gromyko.

Although it is the opinion of this author that the Soviet Union was not intending to start a war, it should be noted that this is not a completely settled issue. Some scholars have argued that Soviet hardliners such as Defense Minister Andrei Grechko intentionally attempted to the 1967

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<sup>65</sup> It is not certain that the United States would have intervened on Israel's behalf. The level of control that the United States had over Israel and the expected ramifications of that were largely overestimated by Moscow.

<sup>66</sup> Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-day War." Pg. 6.

create the 1967 war<sup>67</sup>. While both sides show some merit, the evidence seems to lean towards the notion that the Soviet Union did not attempt to start this war.

The problem with the Soviet policy (aside from its immoral nature) was the affiliated Soviet misperceptions. By holding the opinion of “*we do not wish to start a war*”, the Soviet Union blinded itself to the ramifications of its highly aggressive stance. Because the Soviet Union spent a lot of time formulating its decisions, it assumed that its interest-centric foreign policy was clear. Unfortunately for the rest of the world, that was not the case. Some Arab leaders took the Soviet Union seriously and repeated the contents publicly. For example, Gamel Nasser was quoted as saying:

“On 13 May we received ‘*accurate information*’ that Israel was concentrating on the Syrian border huge armed forces of about eleven to thirteen brigades....The decision made by Israel at the time was to carry out an attack on Syria...”<sup>68</sup>

The content of the Report issued by Soviet leaders sent the Arab street into an uproar and intended or not precipitated caused a rapid escalation eventually leading to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. This usefulness of this report was a massive Soviet misperception as it served to restrict their options and not increase them. The Soviet decision makers had now trapped themselves within the web of their report.

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<sup>67</sup> Such views will not be discussed here, but if interested the reader should reference, “The Cold War’s Longest Cover-up: How and Why the USSR instigated the 1967 War”. Isabella Ginor. Middle East Review of International Affairs, Vol. 7, No. 3 (September 2003)

<sup>68</sup> Eban, *My country* Pg. 198



## **Soviet Escalation – From False Intelligence to War**

Regardless of Soviet intentions, it is crystal clear that the 1967 crisis did escalate as a result of the false report. For on the same day that Mahmoud Fawzi reported to Nasser (May 14<sup>th</sup>), Nasser ordered his ground troops into the Sinai Peninsula. Shortly after he expelled UNEF forces from Egyptian territory. Within another few days, 80,000 Egyptian troops and 800 tanks arrived in the Sinai<sup>69</sup>. With this, Israel was in a rather precarious position. To the north she had terrorist raids from an unstable Syrian government; from the west she had the removal of UN forces and the presence of Egyptian soldiers. Both of these nations were backed in one way or another by the Soviet Union. Because of this, Egyptian intelligence was beginning to predict that Israel was going to be forced into attacking; Moscow disagreed<sup>70</sup>. Moscow saw no contradiction in backing the Arab states publicly and privately, on the one hand, and the avoidance of war on the other – a gross misperception that was soon to be blown away.

After the increase of Syrian terrorism and Egyptian armed forces, one more aggravating factor was thrown into the mix. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> Egypt decided to blockade the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, effectively stopping all of Israel's export's the eastern half of the world. This was problematic because when Israel had withdrawn from Sharm El-Sheikh (the town located at the southernmost tip of the Sinai) after the completion of the 1956 Sinai war, they clearly stated that any reimposition of the blockade would be a *casus belli*<sup>71</sup> (or cause for war). This point was fully understood by Nasser who said, "Now with our concentrations in Sinai, the chances of war

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<sup>69</sup> Dayan, *Story of my Life*. Pg. 288

<sup>70</sup> Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-day War." Pg. 8

<sup>71</sup> Dayan *Story of My Life* Pg. 288

are fifty-fifty. But if we close the Strait, war will be a one hundred percent certainty”<sup>72</sup> With Israel’s cause for war breached and Nasser’s statement of “100% certainty”, it is clear that Egyptian and Israeli decision makers were far ahead of their Soviet counterparts.

Eventually, the heaping pile of evidence was undisputable the Soviet Union had no choice but to re-assess its previous assumptions. The Soviet Union still did not want a full out war, but they must have accepted that their actions were facilitating conflict. Recognizing the danger that war could cause to their interests, the Soviet Union requested that the Egyptian Minister of War Shams Badran visit Moscow. Mr. Badran’s visit to Moscow was intended to restrain Egypt and de-escalate the crisis. Multiple accounts of Badran’s visit to Moscow state that the Soviet Prime Minister Aleksei Kosygin told Badran and the Syrian President Hashim al-Atassi that Israel would not attack because of Arab strength and Russian backing. Instead, Kosygin argued that the Arabs should restrain themselves so as to keep public opinion favorable<sup>73</sup>.

However, Kosygin was not the only Soviet official that Badran visited. Badran also had an encounter with the battle hardened Soviet Defense Minister Andrei Grechko. According to an Egyptian photocopy of the record, Grechko is quoted as saying:

“I want to make it clear to you that if America enters the war we will enter it on your side. Do you understand me...? I want to confirm to you that if something happens and you need us, just send us a signal. We will come to your aid immediately in Port Said or elsewhere.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Sadat, *In search of identity* Pg. 172

<sup>73</sup> Golan, “The Soviet Union and the Outbreak of the June 1967 Six-day War.” Pg. 8

<sup>74</sup> Parker, “The June 1967 War Some Mysteries Explored” Pg. 182-183

Both statements contain one glaring misperception a piece. For Kosygin, he stated that the Arabs should keep public opinion on their side. Inherently that view is indicating that world public opinion was already on the side of the Arabs. However, it frankly was not. World public opinion was divided along the traditional West/East dichotomy. The Western world was largely sympathetic to the Israelis and the Eastern world to the Arabs. According to a United States Gallup poll conducted in June 1967, 56% of Americans said their sympathies lied with Israel while only 4% sided with the Arabs<sup>75</sup>. In Great Britain, a group called “Social Survey’s” conducted a poll with nearly identical results; 55% declared sympathy for Israel and 2% for the Arabs<sup>76</sup>. In the Netherlands, the “Netherlands Instituut voor de Publieki Opinie” (NIPO) conducted a survey asking “Are you on the side of Israel or on the side of the Arab states?” An astounding 67% said Israel and 0% said Arabs<sup>77</sup>. Lastly, in Denmark a poll was taken asking, “Who in your opinion is right in the struggle between Israel and the Arab countries?” 56% said Israel and 2% said the Arabs<sup>78</sup>. Assuming Kosygin actually believed what he was saying to Badran, it is clear that Kosygin misperceived the international situation. World opinion (to the extent you can measure such a thing) was not on the side of the Arab nations; a more dichotomous East-West split was present. While the Soviet Union and her satellites sided with the Arab world, much of the West, at least in spirit, sided with Israel.

Grechko also had a rather dubious perception. He stated that “...[I]f America enters, we will enter on your side...”. The degree of certainty of which this statement was uttered is rather unusual. Grechko is not just saying that the Soviet Union will support Egypt in spirit; he is

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<sup>75</sup> Boer, “The Polls: Attitudes Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict” pg. 123

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. Pg.124

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 124

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 125

attempting to commit his entire nation to the possibility of nuclear war. Considering the United States and Soviet Union avoided direct confrontation for the entirety of the Cold war it is unlikely that there would have been a direct confrontation in the Middle East, a region considered on the periphery of Soviet interests. Regardless, even if the Soviet Union did choose to violently engage with the United States, such a promise would be far outside the authority of a Defense Minister.

However unintentionally, Grechko's comments managed confuse the Egyptians. When Badran returned to Egypt, it is not exactly clear which version of events he gave to Nasser, however it is clear which version Marshall Amer choose to understand. For when the Egyptians were being hastily routed, Amer asked the Soviet Ambassador to Egypt, "Where are the promises which Marshall Grechko gave to... Badran?"<sup>79</sup> The feelings of betrayal were so deep that Amer actually believed he had been tricked by a joint U.S-Soviet conspiracy.

### **End Result for the Soviet Union**

The amount of confusion and sheer dishonesty produced by Soviet leaders is rather astounding. Between the false intelligence report and constantly conflicting messages, the Soviet leaders managed to confuse Israel (see chapter 4) and the Arabs (see chapter 5) alike. By spreading false rumors of Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian border, the Soviet Union vastly increased Arab-Israeli tensions and directly caused Egypt to flood the Sinai with soldiers. By providing supportive words to Egyptian diplomats, the Soviet Union gave Egypt a false sense of security and superiority. This sense of security caused Egypt to feel secure in its aggressive moves of expelling UNEF forces and blockading Israel.

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<sup>79</sup> Parker "The June 1967 War Some Mysteries Explored" Pg. 183

All objective measurements considered, it is clear that the misperceptions caused and felt by the Soviet decision makers *accelerated* the start of 1967 war. Were it not for the blunders in Soviet policy and delay in the correction of their misunderstanding, it is possible the 1967 war would not have occurred. Before the withdrawal of UNEF and the blockading of Israel it is likely that the situation could have de-escalated on its own. However, once the Arabs blockaded Israel a casus-belli was established -there was no turning back. The Soviet Union had started a war.

#### Where America Went Wrong:

To reiterate from the beginning of this chapter, the United States was not sitting idly by as the Soviet Union spread its tentacles across the Middle East. The United States was implementing its own regional goals as well. Since the 1950's the United States had an open policy of opposing any border changes brought about by force in the Middle East. No less than four presidents had stumped for this approach including Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the President of the United States during the 1967 war, Lyndon Baines Johnson<sup>80</sup>. In pursuit of this policy, the United States was beginning to involve itself in Middle Eastern affairs frequently. In 1958 the U.S intervened to preserve the borders of Lebanon and Jordan. The United States was developing a partnership with Saudi Arabia. And finally, in the 60's when it is Israel's borders that were in jeopardy the United States aided them as well.

One must take a moment to pause here and recognize a stylistic difference between the Superpowers. The Soviet Union's foreign policy was cold-blooded and highly interest-based. The goals of the Soviet Union were to expand its militaries projection capabilities and increase its regional influence. The United States by contrast had a policy agenda based on fairness and

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<sup>80</sup> Winston, *The Vantage Point* pg. 287

its values. True, the United States was also concerned with its regional interests, but for the most part it took a back seat to morality, which explains why the United States was seeking to protect the territorial integrity of all states as opposed to merely protecting those whom it deemed friendly. That being said, there is not a set method for achieving any foreign policy.

Theoretically, a political goal can be accomplished with methods ranging from extreme violence to peaceful persuasion, through a ballot or a bullet. However, In the case of the United States the foreign policy we pursued was one of Liberal Internationalism.

Liberal Internationalism is a view of foreign policy which holds that international goals have legitimacy only when they are ventures for good and are devoid of pure national interest<sup>81</sup>. Historically speaking, Liberal Internationalism has its roots in President Wilson's utopian world view based on international laws and norms. Since then, it has been the Democratic Party which has traditionally advocated for this approach. Democrats have usually expressed their support for this view by arguing for increased multilateralism via treaties, UN resolutions, and other multi-player approaches to international crises.

As a person, President Johnson was not well versed in foreign policy; he was much more interested in domestic issues. Johnson's foreign policy was bogged down in the quagmire of Vietnam and he was interested in avoiding another costly U.S commitment, especially in an area where he lacked expertise<sup>82</sup>. For this reason, Johnson relied on his cabinet to implement to the specifics of his foreign policy goals. He particularly had a heavy reliance on Secretary of State Dean Rusk. Rusk helped him implement his foreign policy goals and provided him with the

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<sup>81</sup> "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World." Charles Krauthammer. The AEI press, Publisher for the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC. 2004 Pg. 9

<sup>82</sup> See Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

background information he usually lacked<sup>83</sup>.

That aside, Johnson's foreign policy did tend to mimic Liberal Internationalism. Like all foreign policies, Liberal Internationalism has its strengths and weaknesses. In recent years it has been responsible for several life-saving interventions in the Middle East and elsewhere. However, although Liberal Internationalism paid strong dividends for the United States in the 90's, during the events preceding the 1967 war, Liberal Internationalism amounted to nothing more than a colossal waste of effort. By being too attached to their internationalist view President Johnson and Secretary of State Dean Rusk squandered valuable time that could have been utilized to implement alternative strategies.<sup>84</sup>

### **Expulsion of UNEF**

UNEF was created as an internationally supervised peace-keeping force after the Suez war. United Nations Emergency Forces were stationed along Israel's border with Gaza and in five separate locations along the Israel-Egypt border ranging from Rafah to Sharm al-Sheikh. The total strength of the UN forces was roughly 3,400 Indians, Canadians, Swedes and Yugoslavs.<sup>85</sup> In total, UNEF was not a powerful force; it could have been easily overpowered by the Egyptian or Israeli military. It should therefore be understood that the purpose of UNEF was not to engage in combat, but rather to be a mental barrier between aggressive impulses and aggressive action. If for example Egypt were to attempt to ram through UNEF forces it would do so with ease, but the international uproar it would cause would box Egypt into a diplomatic

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> For a further explanation of Liberal Internationalism as well as other schools of foreign policy thought see "Democratic Realism: An American Foreign Policy for a Unipolar World." Charles Krauthammer. The AEI press, Publisher for the American Enterprise Institute, Washington, DC. 2004

<sup>85</sup> Parker, "The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored" pg. 184

corner and could result in the direct military intervention by foreign powers.

UNEF served its purpose admirably for roughly a decade, but on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May the Egyptians decided it was time for UNEF to leave. On the 16<sup>th</sup> General Indar Rikhye, the Indian officer commanding some of the UNEF units received a letter from the Mahmoud Fawzi. This letter read:

“To your information, I gave my instructions to all UAR [United Arab Republic] armed forces to be ready for action against Israel the moment it might carry out an aggressive action against any Arab country. Due to these instructions our troops are already concentrating in the Sinai along our eastern border. For the sake of complete security of all UN troops which install OP’s [observation posts] along our borders. I request that you give orders to withdraw all these troops immediately...<sup>86</sup>”

General Rikhye did not comply. He politely reminded Egyptian officials that he did not take orders from them and that they should re-direct their request to the UN Secretary General U Thant. If U Thant ordered his withdrawal he would leave, but until then there would not be a conflict unless the Egyptians attempted to assault his troops. Upon learning of these developments, LBJ became increasingly nervous. He began to worry that somehow the United States was going to become sucked into another Vietnam like quagmire. Being true to his misperceptions about the efficacy of multilateralism and the UN, he decided the best way to

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid. Pg. 185



prevent conflict was to work through the United Nations and attempt to persuade U Thant to keep the UN force stationed where it was- this failed miserably.

Still on May 16<sup>th</sup>, President Johnson swung into full diplomatic action. Determined to keep UNEF stationed in Egypt, Johnson messaged the British and the French governments in attempt to obtain their opinion of the impending crisis and to enlist their assistance. Shortly after, Johnson began corresponding with the Israeli Prime Minister as well<sup>87</sup>. In his letter to Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, Johnson urged restraint saying “I am sure you will understand”, “that I cannot accept any responsibilities on behalf of the United States for situations which arise as the result of actions on which we are not consulted.”

This historical record over the next few days is somewhat vague, but a general framework of facts exists. To begin, Johnson’s government’s plan was for U Thant to take Egypt’s request to the United Nations Security Council (or general assembly) where he hoped it would be bogged down for weeks<sup>88</sup>. After endless circular debates, Johnson then figured tensions would have subsided naturally or at least bought some time to come up with a new plan. In the end, if all else failed and the measure was taken to the Security Council, the United States would just exercise its veto power forcing the UN troops to stay in place.

Unfortunately for Johnson, his misperceptions about the UN system were about to be put on full display. Instead of sending the matter to the United Nations, U Thant decided to open a dialogue through Egypt’s permanent representative at the United Nations Muhammad Awad al-Kony. After a brief back and forth, Kony made an interesting claim. He said that UNEF was stationed in Egypt through an agreement with the Egyptian government not the general

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<sup>87</sup> Winston, *The Vantage Point* pg. 290

<sup>88</sup> Rusk, *As I saw it* Pg. 384

assembly. Therefore, Egypt had the right to expel UNEF without consulting the international body<sup>89</sup>. Rather shockingly, (from Johnson's perspective at least) U Thant agreed – the matter would not be sent to the UN for deliberation<sup>90</sup>.

Almost immediately, Egypt sent its official request. On May 18<sup>th</sup> the Egyptian Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad wrote:

“The Government of the United Arab Republic has the honor to inform Your Excellency that it has decided to terminate the presence of the United Nations Emergency Forces from the territory of the United Arab Republic and the Gaza Strip. Therefore I request that the necessary steps be taken for the withdrawal of the Force as soon as possible...”<sup>91</sup>

Within a day, U Thant complied and ordered the immediate withdrawal of UNEF. This swift action earned him much criticism from the United States government and others around the world. Many assumed that U Thant would attempt some form of diplomatic finesse to delay the process. In fact, U Thant did have such a plan. He envisioned a withdrawal taking four months; this would inherently slow down the process and buy some breathing room<sup>92</sup>. However, like anything related to the United Nations, nothing ends up as planned. After becoming familiarized with the uproar on the Egyptian street, the Canadians immediately withdrew their UNEF contingency forces causing the rest stationed at outposts to withdraw as well<sup>93</sup>. Within minutes U Thant's plan had collapsed and the situation was left worse than the United States found it.

In short, Johnson's internationalist approach had failed. Israeli-Arab tensions had

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<sup>89</sup> Parker, “The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored” pg.188

<sup>90</sup> Winston, *The Vantage Point* pg. 290

<sup>91</sup> Parker, “The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored” pg.188

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. 190

<sup>93</sup> Ibid. 189

increased, the UN buffer zone was gone, and the United States had less time to form a functional plan. In regards to UNEF, none of Johnson's goals were met. The matter was not referred to the Security Council or the General Assembly and Johnson could not use his veto<sup>94</sup>. The United States looked weak and disoriented on the international level. Liberal Internationalism had left Johnson out to dry, but like most men of greatness, he didn't modify his beliefs – at least not yet.

### **The Meaning of Irony: The Closure of the Strait of Tiran**

As previously mentioned, UNEF was created as an emergency peace keeping force between the countries of Israel and Egypt following the Suez War. However, what has not been mentioned is that other than being a psychological deterrent for war, UNEF also served another purpose. UNEF's strategic location put international troops at the Sinai's southernmost town Sharm El- Sheikh. With them there, Israel was allowed free passage through the Gulf of Aqaba, into the Strait of Tiran, and into the Eastern hemisphere of the globe. But now, the peace keepers were gone and Egyptians took their place. It became an accepted fact that Egypt was *very likely* to close the blockade to Israeli shipping. After the war was over, Nasser himself even stated, "What could I do?" "These were Israeli ships. I couldn't let them pass. I had to close the Strait of Tiran."<sup>95</sup>

Unfortunately for Nasser, his assessment earned him some annoyance with the United States. In 1956, U.S president Dwight Eisenhower made an explicit statement pledging American support to keep the strait of Tiran open in exchange for ending the war<sup>96</sup>. In addition,

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<sup>94</sup> For clarity it should be noted that the United States only has the ability to issue a veto in the Security Council and not the General Assembly.

<sup>95</sup> Rusk, *As I Saw It* Pg. 384

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 385

Eisenhower even recognized that Israel would have the right, under article 51 of the UN charter, to use force to open the Strait if necessary<sup>97</sup>. Born in Stonewall Texas, Johnson was a true southern gentleman and he placed high stock in being a man of his word. To him, this extended to honoring the words of past Presidents. Nasser's plans were now not only a threat to Israel's vital interests; they were also a challenge to Johnson's personal sense of character.

Trying to preserve peace, U Thant decided to fly to Cairo. His objectives boiled down into two objectives, one general and one specific. Generally, U Thant wanted to de-escalate the crisis and prevent it from getting worse. Specifically, U Thant wanted to prevent Egypt from closing the Strait of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Everyone from LBJ to Nasser knew blockading Israel would definitively result in a war. To expand on a Nasser quote given earlier, "Now with our concentrations in Sinai, the chances of war are fifty-fifty. But if we close the Strait, war will be a *one hundred percent certainty*".<sup>98</sup>

Johnson decided to fully support U Thant's peace initiative and to buttress it with his own. Johnson's plan (like before) was for the main thrust of his diplomacy to be directed through the United Nations, with auxiliary support through multilateral channels. The two channels Johnson chose were Egypt and the Soviet Union. On May 22<sup>nd</sup> Johnson sent Kosygin a message, it read:

"The increasing harassment of Israel by elements Based in Syria, with attendant reactions within Israel and within the Arab world, has brought the area close to major violence. Your and our ties to nations of the area could bring us into difficulties which I am confident neither of us seeks. It

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<sup>97</sup> Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color was the Light" Pg. 202

<sup>98</sup> Sadat, *In Search of Identity* pg. 172 (Emphasis added)

would appear a time for each of us to use our influence to the full in the cause of moderation, including our influence over action by the United Nations.”<sup>99</sup>

Shortly after, Johnson also sent a letter to Nasser trying to remind him of America’s interest in friendship and Egypt’s interest in avoiding war. Saying that he understood “the pride and aspirations of ... [the Egyptian] people”, Johnson told Nasser that “if we come through these days without hostilities”, he could send Vice President Humphrey to try and rectify an old conflict<sup>100</sup>. Johnson had good intentions, but it mattered not. For on the same day that Johnson wrote his letters, at approximately midnight May 22<sup>nd</sup>, and while U Thant’s plane was *en route* to Cairo, Nasser broadcasted a public announcement on Radio Cairo declaring the Strait of Tiran would be closed to Israeli shipping.<sup>101</sup> In fact, according to some accounts, the decision to close the Strait had actually been made a few days before, and it was only broadcast on that day<sup>102</sup>. Johnson’s attempts were in vain.

One must also pause for a moment and ask why Nasser did not officially announce the closing of the straight until May 22<sup>nd</sup>. After all, UNEF was ordered expelled on the 18<sup>th</sup>; what about the 19<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup>? According to Mohamed Heikal, an Egyptian journalist, intellectual, and author of *Al-Infijar*, although Nasser’s mind was made up, he was anxious about the broader world’s reaction to UNEF’s withdrawal, especially the opinion of the Soviet Union<sup>103</sup>. He was

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<sup>99</sup> Winston, *The Vantage Point* Pg. 290

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 290

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.* 291

<sup>102</sup> Parker, “The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored” pg. 192

<sup>103</sup> Quandt, “Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color was the Light” Pg. 203

waiting, not to de-escalate, but to gauge just how much he could accomplish without busting the bubble.

In a rather ironic fashion, Johnson thought the best method for keeping the Strait open was through U Thant and the United Nations. However, it is likely that was impossible. Johnson had in his mind a certain mental category and concept. He believed that all state's involved were for the most part fundamentally good and that if he could arrange the right set of words the situation could be helped. Now, Johnson may not have held this view down into his essence, but it does encapsulate his core views and is the source of much misperception. One must remember that the Egyptian president took action which in his own words had a "100%" chance of war. Had President Johnson been aware of this, perhaps he could have made a new mental category. A category of those who seek war or at the very least will do nothing to avoid it.

Unfortunately for Johnson, although he now had his eye on the right problem he had done nothing to change his methods. He was glued to his pre-conceived notions about diplomacy and internationalism being effective. Johnson wanted to keep the Strait of Tiran open and his preferred method was to work through the United Nations and UN Secretary General U Thant. If instead he had offered a forceful threat it is possible Nasser would have gotten the message. Regrettably, Johnson had not modified his belief system— and it cost him again. By being too attached to his view and lacking a mental category for Nasser, Johnson failed to see it was appropriate to change course and did nothing effective to prevent the situation from escalating.

### **A Very Small Crack- The Red Sea Regatta**

Whatever U.S concerns were before the closure of the Strait of Tiran, they were certainly worse now. The Strait of Tiran was closed, UNEF was gone, and Johnson's plans kept

imploding. Johnson and Rusk now feared that the region was going to set ablaze with armed conflict.

Rather oddly, at this juncture Johnson blamed the rising escalation on the Arabs, but attempted to restrain the Israeli's. Through diplomatic channels President Johnson urged Israel not to make any move for at least 48 hours. He rejected an Israeli request to send a U.S destroyer to the port of Eliat and invited the Israeli Foreign minister Abba Eban to Washington DC for a chat<sup>104</sup>. It is true that at this time Johnson also provided 70 million dollars of military assistance to Israel, but even this was to give the Israeli's enough comfort to prevent them for pre-empting.

By restraining Israel, Johnson was hoping to gain enough time to again move into a diplomatic offensive. He began by issuing a measured statement that read as follows:

“The United States considers the gulf to be an international waterway and feels that a blockade of Israeli shipping is illegal and potentially disastrous to the cause of peace. The right of free, innocent passage of the international waterway is a vital interest of the international community.”

Johnson also added that the United States was committed to defending the territorial integrity of all states in the region<sup>105</sup>. This statement hit all the right points, but it was not news. Everyone already knew that a military blockade could be detrimental to peace efforts. Everyone already knew the United States was against the blockade. Johnson did not offer any method of actually achieving this objective. Instead he offered a solid condemnation of Nasser's aggression. However, this speech alone was not enough to prevent the Israeli's from striking Egypt. Israeli's

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<sup>104</sup> Quandt, “Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color was the Light” Pg. 204

<sup>105</sup> Winston, The Vantage Point Pg. 291

felt their vital interests were in jeopardy and they realized the longer they waited the more troops would pour into the Sinai. The Israeli's needed something more concrete and specific. For this Johnson decided to support a British idea.

The idea's basic components were as follows. First, create a public declaration expressing freedom of navigation in the Strait of Tiran and have it signed by as many as fifteen countries<sup>106</sup>. Second, create a naval task force with as many countries as possible. The Red Sea Regatta, as it was called, would attempt to sail through the Strait of Tiran and basically assume Nasser would not attack it. Johnson decided to support this idea and also hope that the United Nations would endorse it if enough members signed on.

At first glance, one would be tempted to look at this proposal and think that Johnson had learned nothing, that after repeated attempts at diplomacy through the United Nations, Johnson would try something else. This assertion is partially true; however, Johnson still at least began to recognize that maybe it wouldn't work. In response to a question about U.S plans if this plan did not work LBJ stated "I want to play every card in the UN, but I've never relied on it to save me when I'm going down for the third time..."<sup>107</sup> One should note that Johnson *is* utilizing the UN for the third time, but at least he recognizes that it *may* not work.

As it turned out Johnson's skepticism was well placed, for the Red Sea Regatta led nowhere. When all was said and done no flotilla was assembled or sailed. The United Nations did not sign on to the maritime declaration and the Strait of Tiran remained closed. The Red Sea Regatta led nowhere and Johnson had essentially wasted more time.

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<sup>106</sup> Rusk, *As I Saw It* pg. 385

<sup>107</sup> Winston, *The Vantage Point* pg. 192



## End Result for the United States

When all was said and done, Johnson was clearly a man who had a strong belief in the efficacy of the United Nations. When imposed on the crisis of the 1967 war, this misperception caused Johnson to waste valuable time that could have been used to implement more effective strategies. This failure to prevent an undesirable outcome ended up costing the United States.

Although every ideology has his strengths and weaknesses, Johnson's adherence to liberal internationalism ended up being his downfall. By time and time again insisting that the only way for the United States to gain legitimacy was through international venues Johnson ended up restricting his options. Had Johnson offered a more aggressive unilateral stance, it is possible he could have dissuaded the Arabs from so hastily blockading Israel. When the war finally did erupt, the Arab States created a false claim stating that the United States was directly involved in the war. This caused six<sup>108</sup> separate Arab nations to sever all diplomatic relations with the United States<sup>109</sup>. The net negative of this was not severe; however it was slightly detrimental to the containment policy.

That being said, most of the causes for war were enacted by the Arabs and the Soviet Union, not the United States. Although Johnson's policies failed to stop the war, it would be unfair to say he was the root of the problem. After all, it was Egypt that closed the Strait of Tiran and the Soviet Union that issued the false report. In all, Johnson's preventative measures seemed to have minimal impact on anyone. Therefore, it can be said *that the collective misperceptions of the United States perhaps delayed the war slightly, but in all had little effect on the start of the 67 war.*

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<sup>108</sup> Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Sudan, Algeria, and Yemen.

<sup>109</sup> Rinehart *The Vantage Point* Pg. 299

## **Chapter 4: Israel**

### Introduction

This chapter will provide a discussion of the collective misperceptions made by Israeli leaders during the 1967 war. Just like the Soviet Union and the United States, Israeli leaders had to gauge incoming ambiguous data, except for them there was an added, inherent survivability risk involved and so the consequences of misperception were higher. This chapter will highlight the mistakes by the Israeli government in general, but with special emphasis placed on Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban. Like President Johnson, Foreign Minister Eban was heavily committed to the efficacy of diplomacy. Faced with many of the same dilemmas, Eban resorted to similar diplomatic tactics, and just like Johnson, Eban's diplomacy did not pay off as expected.

### Background:

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, the leaders representing the Jewish people met at Museum Hall to declare the independence of the State of Israel. The soon to be Israeli Prime Minister David Ben Gurion reads:

“Accordingly we, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the Zionist movement of the world, met together in the solemn assembly today, the day of the termination of the British Mandate for Palestine; by virtue of the national and historic

right of the Jewish people and of the resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations; hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine – to be called Israel...

With Trust in Almighty God, we set our hands to this Declaration at this session of the Provisional State Council in the City of Tel Aviv, on this Sabbath Eve, the Fifth Day of Iyar, Five Thousand Seven Hundred and Eight, the Fourteenth Day of May, One Thousand Nine Hundred and Forty-Eight.<sup>110</sup>”

The mere location of the proclamation of Jewish independence emits an unavoidable sense of foreshadowing. Upon first glance, it was the opinion of this author that the room was a bomb shelter. Slightly underground, with only small windows barely visible at the top, this room reflects the mindset of the Israeli provisional government. Namely, a declaration means war with the surrounding Arabs.

Indeed, this was the fate of the infantile nation. For the seven Arab nations in the Arab league had decided the month before to invade Israel upon the expiration of the British mandate. Their goals were clear, to establish one state of Palestine, to subjugate the Jewish population, and surround and destroy the Jewish State at its birth<sup>111</sup>. This was at least what was on paper. Had the Arabs won the war, it is uncertain if the Jewish population would have been subjected, expelled or killed, but alas it was the Israeli's who emerged victorious.

The end result was an Israel that survived and the disputed territory was sliced up. Egypt gained control of the Gaza Strip, Jordan the West Bank, and Israel everything else. This resulting divide eventually became known as the 1967 borders. These borders as implied are not based off

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<sup>110</sup> Eban, *My Country*, Pg. 9

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 12

of strategic calculation or any interest of fairness, instead they are arbitrary. The 1967 borders (AKA the 1949 armistice line) is just the line where all of the fighting ceased. And it was this border that was the starting point from the hostilities that emerged in 1967.

### The Israeli Gesture Left Unnoticed

For Israel, the 15<sup>th</sup> of May continues to be a day of infamy in their history. Aside from declaring their independence, it is also the first prime example of their collective misperceptions preceding the 1967 war. Traditionally, Israel celebrated their independence by displaying a military parade through the streets of Jerusalem – but not this year. With tensions flaring, Soviet pressure mounting, and a recent air battle, Israeli leaders were vigorously attempting to diffuse the escalating situation.

Israel and Jordan had signed the Israel-Jordan Armistice agreement which restricted the amount of weapons that could be placed in the Jerusalem area. This agreement was referring to lethal weapons with military utility and not ceremonial unarmed decoration. Regardless, after much deliberation the Israeli government decided not to include any planes, tanks, or heavy armor in the parade. According to the Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, this action was conciliatory and demonstrating a sensitivity for Arab concerns<sup>112</sup>. Unfortunately, according to Nasser, Israeli military equipment did not participate in the parade because... it was stationed on the Syrian Border!<sup>113</sup>

Both Eban and Nasser had conflicting theories. To put it simply, Eban believed Israel was *showing restraint*; while Nasser believed that Israel was *an aggressive country*. Both of their

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid. 200

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. 200

theories were validated by the same piece of ambiguous evidence, specifically the lack of Israeli armaments in the parade.

To Eban, the lack of weapons demonstrated a gesture for peace, but to Nasser the lack of weapons demonstrated that Israel was guilty of war-mongering. Upon learning of Nasser's interpretation of the events Eban was shocked. How could he have a misperception so grave? It is unclear if Eban ever realized *why* he misperceived the expected Egyptian reaction so widely, but the answer can be found psychologically. The Israeli cabinet (of which Eban was a member) had dedicated such a large amount of time formulating their policies that they assumed their intentions were clear. The Israeli cabinet, Eban included, overlooked the extent to which Arab leaders had already formulated their theory. Neither Israel nor the Arab states realized that evidence consistent with their views could also fit into the opposing theory. In essence the Arabs saw what they wanted to see, and the Israeli's wasted their gesture of goodwill.

#### Levi Eshkol's Misperception

Even with all of the mistrust and Israel's problems with Syria, Israeli decision makers did not expect Nasser to come to Syria's aid. Even though Israel and Syria had signed a mutual defense pact, Egypt was heavily committed in a Yemeni civil war and had approximately 60,000 troops abroad. The Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and head of the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) military intelligence Aharon Yariv both estimated that Egypt would be unable to engage in a full scale war until the 1970's.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, after the air skirmish with Syria, Egyptian leaders quickly issued statements distancing Egypt from Syria's defense. Egyptian officials quickly

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<sup>114</sup>Stein & Tanter, *Rational decision-making: Israel's security choices, 1967*. Pg. 137

claimed the defense pact only applied to a substantial problem and not “spasmodic incidents”.<sup>115</sup>

After evaluating these facts, Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol developed a theory of his own. Supported by Yariv and Eban, Eshkol believed that *Egypt could not engage in military conflict and therefore they would not*. Simply put, Israeli intelligence thought Nasser did not wish to get “dragged” into a military conflict<sup>116</sup>. This theory was so pervasive in the Israeli mindset that when ambiguous information was presented, Israeli decision makers molded it to shape their already existent perceptions.

### **Evidence Against A Flawed Theory**

As of the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, the evidence suggesting an Israeli-Arab war was imminent was not overwhelming. Yes, there had been occasional violent flare-ups, but in the Middle East region, these events in and of themselves were not considered serious indicators of danger. With that said, Eshkol cannot be condemned for not immediately jumping to the correct conclusion. He can however be held accountable for not adjusting his initial misperceptions based on the events that followed.

The same day that Israel had offered a gesture of restraint, Egypt began to go on the offensive. Still on May 15<sup>th</sup>, Egypt began pouring infantry and tanks into the Sinai Peninsula and on the 16<sup>th</sup> of May an additional 30,000 troops, 200 tanks, and a large number of planes went to reinforce the units already in position<sup>117</sup>. Upon witnessing this, Prime Minister Eshkol and Foreign minister Eban *should* have realized that their theory had a serious flaw. If Nasser was indeed intent on starting a war, the positioning of Egyptian troops on Israel’s border is a strong

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<sup>115</sup> Eban, Abba Solomon. 1972. *My country: the story of modern Israel*. New York: Random House. Pg. 196

<sup>116</sup> Stein, Janice Gross, and Raymond Tanter. *Rational decision-making: Israel's security choices, 1967*. Pg. 138

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*. Pg. 138

red flag. However, because of the already existent Israeli misperception (that Egypt could not start a war) that is not what Israeli decision makers perceived. The commander of Israel's southern forces General Gavish recalled:

“On the afternoon of the 15<sup>th</sup> I received a call in Beersheva from the Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin, who told me it seems a movement of Egyptian units into Sinai had begun... I estimated that ...*the matter is not serious*”<sup>118</sup>.

Eban thought along similar lines, recalling that “the scale of these movements created *no immediate military threat*...”<sup>119</sup> Eban and Gavish were both holding to the theory that Egypt could not and therefore did not want to engage in conflict despite the evidence to the contrary. In order to rationalize their theory, the two men drew on a similar situation that happened a few years earlier.

In the early 1960's, Israel and Syria were having border clashes and Egypt put a similar amount of troops in the Sinai. After a few weeks, the troops evacuated westward and Nasser claimed to have successfully deterred Israel. Washington and London both messaged Israeli decision-makers indicating that they believed history was repeating itself<sup>120</sup>. After reviewing their information, Eban recalled that this analysis did not seem “unreasonable at the time”<sup>121</sup>. However, his analysis was in fact incorrect and was based more on events in the 1960's than on

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 138

<sup>119</sup> Eban, *My country* Pg. 200

<sup>120</sup> Quandt, “Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was the Light?” Pg. 201

<sup>121</sup> Eban, *My Country*. 201

the current day. This type of analogical reasoning process is not unique and can be explained in Analogies at War.<sup>122</sup>

To continue, Eban, Gavish, and the U.S State department all assumed that tensions would dissipate and that there would be no Egyptian-Israeli war. The Israelis were misperceiving the Egyptian willingness and ability to engage in battle. The underestimate of intent was comforting because it made Israeli's feel safer, but the comforting feeling was illusory.

The next day, May 16<sup>th</sup>, at 10pm General Indar Jid Rikhe, commander of the United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) received a letter from Egyptian chief of staff Mahmoud Fawzi stating UNEF forces had been stationed in the land between Israel and Gaza since the Anglo-French-Israeli invasion of Egypt. General Fawzi's message was as follows:

To your information, I gave my instructions to all UAR [United Arab Republic] armed forces to be ready for action against Israel... Due to these instructions our troops are already concentrating in Sinai along our Eastern border. For the sake of complete security of all UN troops...I request that you give orders to withdraw ...immediately<sup>123</sup>.

From an Israeli perspective, two things are made clear by this letter. First, the Egyptians were mentally prepared for a war, and second, Nasser believed Egypt's military was superior to Israel's. If Nasser believed Egypt's military was in a weaker position, he would have kept UNEF troops on the border to prevent war and the loss of his troops. If Israel attempted an attack through UNEF forces a large majority of the international community would turn against them. Israel would become isolated and would be unable to wage a successful war. Nasser by contrast

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<sup>122</sup> Khong, Yuen Foong. 1992. *Analogies at war: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam decisions of 1965*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

<sup>123</sup> Parker, "The June 1967 War: Some Mysteries Explored" Pg. 185



could be deliberately provocative and Israel would be unable to respond militarily.

That being said, some authors (mainly from Arab sources) have claimed a different chain of events<sup>124</sup>. According to the alternate theory, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia began a massive propaganda campaign, bolstered by the CIA, accusing Nasser of cowardice and hiding behind UN skirts. The attacks escalated and escalated until it drove Nasser, who viewed himself as the chief representative of the Arab street, practically insane. Under this theory, Nasser expelled the UNEF forces, but he was really looking for a way to “save face” and escape the vicious onslaught of Arab propaganda – he was not attempting to start a war.

The claim of Arab propaganda is true and supported by the neutral sources.<sup>125</sup> However, the claim of deep CIA involvement is largely unsubstantiated. Regardless, suppose for a moment that Nasser did truly wish to avoid battle and was innocent of malicious intent as some have claimed. The obvious path would have been to allow UNEF to remain in their posts. Why would Nasser come up with some convoluted plan that involved the United Nations, General U Thant, and a whole series of actors outside his control? Surely unfriendly propaganda, no matter how damning, would be superior to the risk of losing a war. Therefore, the removal of UNEF under Egyptian orders can only mean one thing; Nasser did not want UNEF as a shield. To Nasser, whatever perceived risk was involved with expelling UNEF forces outweighed the annoyance of Arab taunts – meaning, Nasser put his ego before the prevention of war. Eban’s theory that the situation was not serious was indeed seriously flawed.

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<sup>124</sup> Aburish, *Nasser the Last Arab* Pg. 253

<sup>125</sup> Bregman & El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years’ War* Pg. 76

### Eban's Second Misperception

Eventually, after numerous demonstrations of aggression and the passing of a few days, Eban's initial misperception was fading. Remember, at this time Egypt was mounting troops on Israel's border, UNEF had been expelled, and Nasser was spouting his traditional bellicose rhetoric. Due to this rapid succession of events, Eban was more or less logically forced to reject his initial theory. Eban now believed Nasser was focused on completely humiliating Israel<sup>126</sup>. However, being the statesman that he was, Eban crafted a new theory; Eban believed, that *the Egypt problem could be solved through international diplomacy*<sup>127</sup>. Just like President Johnson, Eban's unwillingness to alter his misperception led to future ineptitude. What Eban missed was the impact that expelling UNEF from their observation posts set off across the Arab world and the toll such feelings had on Nasser. After UNEF was expelled from their OP's, Arab's were demonstrating in the streets of Cairo demanding the Gulf of Aqaba be blockaded. Nasser was always perceptive and responsive to the desires of the Arab masses. Deeming himself the champion of the Arab street, around this time he even wrote to LBJ saying "I obey the summons of the people."<sup>128</sup>

In Nasser's mind, the feelings of the Arab street made it necessary to close the Strait of Tiran.<sup>129</sup> In the Israeli mind, the blockading of the Strait of Tiran was cause for war.<sup>130</sup> These two facts alone demonstrate that there was no wiggle room for diplomatic action. Either the Strait would remain open, or it would close.

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<sup>126</sup> Eban, *My country* Pg. 204

<sup>127</sup> Stein, & Tanter, *Rational decision-making*. Pg. 154

<sup>128</sup> Aburish, *Nasser the Last Arab*.

<sup>129</sup> "The June War: Some Mysteries Explored" Richard Parker Pg. 191

<sup>130</sup> Bregman & El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years' War* Pg. 77

## Evidence Against Eban's Second Theory

Eventually, Nasser ordered Egyptian troops to occupy Sharmel-Sheikh (located at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula). This is where Abba Eban's misperception was costly. Upon the Egyptian occupation of United Nations OPs, Eban asked himself, what the best method was of stopping Nasser from closing the strait of Tiran? Eban was heavily influenced by his misperception and resorted to international diplomacy.

Like Johnson, Eban signed onto the plan involving Secretary General U Thant going to Cairo and speaking to the Egyptian leadership on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May. As previously stated such efforts did not bear fruit, to reiterate, sometime between the 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of May, Nasser convened a 'Supreme Executive Committee'<sup>131</sup>. In this meeting the committee decided to close the Strait of Tiran. Shortly after, Nasser also said:

"We are in confrontation with Israel... Our armed forces have occupied Sharm el-Sheikh. We shall on no account allow the Israeli flag to pass through the Gulf of Aqaba. The Jews threatened to make war; I reply 'Ahlan Wasahlan'; Welcome, we are ready for war, The water is ours."<sup>132</sup>

Now that Israel was blockaded, Israeli leaders had a choice to make. Should they respond militarily or diplomatically? Eban and Eshkol opted for the latter. Eshkol's plan was to send Eban on a diplomatic adventure through Paris, London, and Washington D.C. Eshkol and Eban believed they could obtain useful international support – but they were wrong. While in America's capital Johnson presented two main themes to Eban. One, Israel should refer her

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<sup>131</sup> In attendance were Anwar Sadat, Nasser, the Egyptian Prime Minister Sidqi Sulyaman, and the head of Egypt's military Abdel Amer, Mohieddin (a military tactician and Nasser confidant), Hussein el-Shafei (Nasser's Vice President), and Ali Sabri (Former Prime Minister of Egypt)

<sup>132</sup> Eban, *My Country*. Pg. 205

troubles to the United Nations Security Council and two, Israel should support a British idea of creating an international naval fleet dedicated to protecting maritime rights in the strait. Despite the failure of previous diplomatic efforts (see chapter 3), Eban was still committed to his theory that diplomacy could re-open the strait.

After Israel chose to delay, on May 24<sup>th</sup>, the Security Council was called into session by Canada and Denmark. Here Eban was expecting support for Israel's cause and some progress to be made, or at the very least deep international concern. Here was Eban's chance to prove that diplomacy was the correct choice. When the delegate of the council arose to speak, Eban was in an utter state of shock at words chosen by the Soviet representative:

“The Soviet delegation deems it necessary to stress that it does not see sufficient grounds for such a hasty convening of the Security Council and for the artificially dramatic climate fostered by the representatives of some Western powers which are probably counting on an exaggerated effort in the staging of this meeting<sup>133</sup>.”

Bulgaria followed:

“The delegation of Bulgaria believes that at the present moment there is really no need for an urgent meeting of the Security Council<sup>134</sup>,”

Then the Indian representative stated:

“The situation on the ground, while potentially dangerous, is still not clear; therefore, an urgent and immediate discussion is unwarranted.<sup>135</sup>”

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<sup>133</sup> Eban, *My country* Pg. 206-207

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 206- 207

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 206-207

Eban was astonished. He asked himself how - after a military concentration of forces on our border, a blockade of our ports, UNEF being expelled, disrespect of the UN Secretary General, Israeli military mobilization, and open declarations calling for Israel's "destruction" - the foreign representatives could be serious?<sup>136</sup> Eban now had to swallow the reality that his decision to press for an international coalition had backfired. Instead of gaining international support for Israel, Eban's plan (and by extension his misperception) was helping the Arabs and the anti-Israel coalition unify.

Indeed, it came to pass that as time went on the extra time helped the Arab nations solidify. On May 25<sup>th</sup> Iraqi troops arrived in Syria. Egypt used the extra few days to recall its troops from Yemen, and on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May King Hussein of Jordan signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt. The Arab nations of Kuwait, Algeria, and Iraq then went to reinforce Israel's surrounding enemies.<sup>137</sup> By choosing to delay (for diplomatic reasons) Eban put Israel in a much tougher position than it was one week prior. Had Israel chosen to pre-empt, she would have had fewer opponents, a lesser unified Arab world, and fewer Egyptian troops. Clinging to diplomatic options severely damaged Israel's deterrent capability and boosted Arab morale and unification. Eban's misperceptions about diplomacy had just cost Israel dearly.

During this same period of time, Eban traveled to Paris. Eban was expecting good news because at the time, France was a strong Israeli ally and Israel's chief supplier of weapons. In fact, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was awarded a medal years before. Instead, French President General Charles De-Gaulle, while sympathetic, distanced France from Israel and

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid. 206

<sup>137</sup> Eban, *My country*. Pg. 211

warned Israel not to “shoot first”<sup>138</sup>. Rather than a declaration of support, De-Gaulle told Eban that 1967 was ‘not 1957’. In other words, France would not support Israel as willingly as it did a decade earlier in the Suez Crisis. In fact, France had grown nearer to the Arabs due to its bitter battle with Algeria, and as a result, French policy was shifting away from Israel.

One must pause for a moment and reflect on what Eban and Eshkol believed. In their mind, diplomacy would *increase* their diplomatic support. However, the opposite was indeed true and Israel was now in fact becoming isolated. The Security Council was of no help. The peace keepers were evacuated, and the Arabs were unifying. Time was turning the world against Israel. Eban’s misperception about the efficacy of diplomacy had hurt Israeli interests again.

### **What it Takes to Convince a Stubborn Man.**

After his international tour, Eban returned to Israel just as committed to his misperception as before. Eban still had faith in the diplomatic process and believed the Strait could be opened by talking. This stubborn misperception followed Eban through all of the decisions he still had yet to make, and stayed with him till the post-war era when he gained time for distant reflection.

Upon Eban’s return from his international tour, the Israeli cabinet now had a decision to make. Should they pre-empt and attack Egypt, or should they delay and seek further support through diplomatic routes? After lengthy deliberation the 18 members of the Israeli cabinet were..... evenly split! The cabinet had nine ministers led by Yigal Allon (Labor minister) voting to pre-empt and nine ministers led by Abba Eban to delay!<sup>139</sup> Eban *absolutely refused* to let go of his theory that diplomacy could persuade Nasser to open the strait. Despite the

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<sup>138</sup> Stein, & Tanter, *Rational decision-making*. Pg. 178-179

<sup>139</sup> Stein & Tanter. *Rational decision-making* . Pg. 195

unbelievable damage that delay was having to Israel's vital national interests and possible survival, Eban held true to his theory.

One again should pause here and ask why? Why was Eban so attached to his misperception? The answer is likely related to Eban's personal background and job description. Eban was a diplomat at heart, and his primary tasks had revolved around diplomacy on a daily basis for years. He had seen successful results in alternative scenarios. That being said, it would be incorrect to say Eban *did not want* to consider alternatives, instead it would be proper to say he *could not*. Abba Eban's identity and purpose in life had become so engrained in diplomacy that even faced with insurmountable evidence he could not change his misperceptions. This theory of course does not bind every member of the Israeli cabinet. Not having the same diplomatic background as Eban, Levi Eshkol had actually been swayed and voted to pre-empt.

But alas, the day was not yet over. According to Eban, President Johnson claimed<sup>140</sup> that he would "take all and every possible measure to ensure that the Straits of Tiran remain open"<sup>141</sup>. The Israeli cabinet was so impressed that when they re-voted the result was 16-1 for delay with 1 abstention<sup>142</sup>. A critical observation should be made here. In the Israeli mindset, *the safer they feel the more likely they are to refrain from military action*. The inverse is also true, *the more threatened Israeli decision makers feel, the more likely they are to pre-empt*.

Indeed, it was this formula that eventually led Israel to war, but for the moment, the Israeli cabinet felt safer, so they chose to delay military action. In this regard, Prime Minister Eshkol actually sent a letter to Johnson thanking him for his support. There was only one

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<sup>140</sup> Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: "What Color was the Light" Pg. 214/ Emphasis added

<sup>141</sup> Eban, *My country*. Pg. 212.

<sup>142</sup> Stein, & Tanter, *Rational decision-making*. Pg. 198

problem – Johnson vehemently disputes the context Eban attributes to him. Instead Johnson insists that his message was limited by alluding to constitutional restraints.<sup>143</sup> In fact when Johnson received Eshkol's letter he was furious! Eban was so convinced that diplomacy was going to work that he literally twisted what Johnson actually said to fit it into his pre-existing theory about diplomacy.

Regardless of the exact details, it is clear that Johnson's actual position represented a lesser US commitment than the Israeli cabinet had thought. Had Israel perceived American support as lesser and limited, the Israeli cabinet would have likely voted to pre-empt. Remember, the previous vote was 9-9 and the tide was moving toward pre-emption it would have only required one individual to change their mind.

Instead, Eban's misperception continued to harm Israeli interests. Due to the delay, Nasser became emboldened by the lack of Israeli response to Egyptian challenges. He stated his intent to "restore the situation to what it was before 1948."<sup>144</sup> Meaning, a Middle East without Israel on the map. In response, massive amounts of people gathered in Cairo chanting "we will slaughter them; we will destroy them. Slaughter, slaughter, slaughter..." Egyptian general Mourtaghi declared that "In five days we shall liquidate the little state of Israel..." In Damascus a general announced "if hostilities breakout, Egypt and Syria will be able to destroy Israel in four days at the most"<sup>145</sup> The extra time Eban sought for diplomacy was unifying Arabs, and dividing Israel from its western allies.

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<sup>143</sup> Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: "What Color was the Light" Pg. 217

<sup>144</sup> Eban, *My country*. Pg. 211

<sup>145</sup> Eban, *My country*. Pg. 213-214



Egypt now had 1000 tanks and 100,000 troops on the Israeli border. Syria had 50,000 men on her border, a few hundred tanks, and 100 Russian planes as well. Jordan a few days earlier had added themselves to the Syrian-Egyptian defense pact and accordingly Jordan placed roughly 50,000 of its men, with Iraqi troops, on the Israeli-Jordanian border. Arab morale was at its highest level in history. Eventually, Allon reached a tipping point. He subsequently recalled his state of mind writing:

It seems that as from Mid-May 1967 every possible Rubicon was crossed by the government of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Iraq... [A] military confrontation had to take place. Impressive Egyptian forces were massed in the Sinai Peninsula. The straits of Tiran were closed to Israelis shipping. Jordan entered an aggressive military alliance with Egypt, throwing her borders open to Egyptian command... The Egyptian president admitted...these preparations were directed towards a war of extermination against Israel... The enemy's openly declared intention of launching an attack from the Sinai Peninsula and the concentration of offensive forces therein was tantamount to the first phase of an attack... [I]t became evident that that Arab air and land offensives might be launched simultaneously on three fronts.<sup>146</sup>

The bad news did not end there. The state of Israeli-French relations was about to become even worse. On June 3<sup>rd</sup>, Israel learned that France decided to declare an arms embargo on the entire Middle East<sup>147</sup>. As Israel's chief weapons supplier this drastically undercut Israeli military strength, deterrence, and morale. By contrast, many of the Arab states relied on the Soviet Union for their armaments. Therefore, although the French embargo technically covered the entire Middle East, both Arabs and Israelis, the consequences were one-sided and favoring the Arabs. This was the last straw. Finally, the Israeli public and decision-makers resigned themselves to their destiny. After witnessing the loss of their French ally, the expulsion of UNEF, the placing of enemy troops, and the bellicose rhetoric, the Israel public knew war was inevitable. Eban finally gave in and broke his misperception. As he recalls in his memoirs:

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<sup>146</sup> Stein & Tanter, *Rational Decision-Making*, Pg. 239

<sup>147</sup> Eban, *My Ocountry*. Pg. 215

“The Primary victim of the events which unfolded in the summer of 1967 was the United Nations. It is hard to know who does the United Nations more harm – those who believe that it is everything or those who believe that it is nothing. In the test of conflicts, such as those in Vietnam, Biafra, Czechoslovakia and Pakistan, the skeptics have been vindicated more than the hopeful supporters. But even those who had been most reserved about the real weight of the United Nations could never have foreseen the humiliating abdication that actually occurred. The spectacle of a docile United Nations hauling down its flag in Sinai to make way for Egypt's impending war; the callousness with which Nasser reduced U Thant's visit to futility; above all, the fiasco of the Security Council meetings in New York marked the lowest point which the United Nations had reached in the first two decades of its existence.”

#### Conclusion:

Eban's misperception - and by extension that of the state of Israel - ran deep, so deep in fact that even with repeated evidence to the contrary the misperceptions proved nearly impossible to break. Only with the rapid fire of aggressive actions and the repeated failure of diplomacy did Abba Eban break his theory. He should have realized that he did not make unbiased decisions and re-assessed the likelihood of war. Had he done so, it is likely that he would have found a greater need for pre-emption. Israeli decision makers should have issued predications about Egyptian troops movements and diplomatic objectives in more specific terms. Had Eban done so to a greater extent, his flawed predictions would have become more apparent. For example, rather than simply continue to believe rather vaguely that 'France will support us', had Eban been more specific and claimed, 'France will continue to provide us with armaments' there would have been no rationalizing away his misperception of French policy.

Although the misperceptions of Israeli decision-makers brought them a greater sense of hope, the cumulative effect was detrimental. Although Israel went on to win the war easily, by

choosing to delay Israel emboldened the Arabs and gave them much needed time. In the week between May 14<sup>th</sup> and June 6<sup>th</sup> Arab unification increased, whereas Western solidarity decreased. Egypt gained necessary time to remove its troops from Yemen and the United Nations abdicated its responsibilities for international peace. The added layer of security that UNEF provided was removed and France declared an arms embargo on Israel which restricted Israel's military capability. Had Israel pre-empted earlier she would have faced *less* enemies and Egypt would not have been able to withdraw its Yemeni troops in time for confrontation. In addition, the enemies she did face would have been *less organized* and possessed less morale. Iraq would not have had time to send reinforcements into Jordan. Jordan may have abstained from combat, and the war would have started before France declared the arms embargo.

One must also remember that the more danger Israeli decision-makers felt, the more likely they were to launch a pre-emptive war. It is clear, however, that their misperceptions made them feel safer and shielded them from the real threat of the danger. Therefore, it can be said that *Israeli misperceptions staved off the Six Day War* and the delay increased the quantity and quality of threats directed against Israel. By choosing delay the nature of Israel's threat evolved from strategic to existential.

## **Chapter 5 - The Arabs**

### Introduction

Aside from the Superpowers and the Israelis, the Arabs had their own set of misperceptions to deal with. Faced with their own set of ambiguous data, the collective Arab leaders relied on their own pre-conceived notions just as much as the Soviet Union and Israel did. For this chapter the decision making styles of Syria and Egypt will be explored. Each of these nations was bound by a strong sense of Pan-Arabism and believed strongly in the illegitimacy of Israeli existence. The Egyptians for their part had one permeating misperception that caused them many problems. This was the belief in the superiority of the Egyptian military. Throughout Egypt's interactions with the Soviet Union, Israel and all other nations, this misperception caused Egypt to take actions contrary to its interests. This misperception also led to the eventual routing of the Egyptian military.

For this section it should also be noted that there is a lack of primary Syrian sources. This is partially due to the autocratic nature of their current government and also due to the language barrier. For these reasons the misperceptions of Syria will not be viewed through an individual lens as done in the previous section. Instead, the realities of the 1967 war will be compared against the stated perceptions and beliefs of the Syrian Ba'ath party, which was in control of the government during the war. Due to this, Syrian misperceptions will be somewhat broader than the standard that has thus far been used in this thesis. Additionally, this chapter will be considerably thinner. This is unfortunately unavoidable, but until more primary source material emerges from Syria this is the best that can be produced at this time by an English speaking author.

In addition to Egypt and Syria there were a few other Arab players. One such example is Algeria, who sent contingency troops to participate in the fighting. Algeria, although interesting, was not a major player in this conflict and will be outside the scope of this chapter. However, for a thorough look at Algeria's role the reader is advised to look at Roughton's article.<sup>148</sup>

### Background

Since the mid-fifties, Syrian domestic politics has revolved around various governments attempting to legitimize themselves. The most recent successful coup attempt took place in 1966 when a radical splinter group of the Ba'ath party broke away from the main line Ba'aths and took control of the government. This new government was incredibly unstable and unrepresentative of the will of the Syrian people, since a country with a population consisting of

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<sup>148</sup> "Algeria and the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War" Richard A. Roughton Middle East Journal Vol. 23, No. 4 Published by: Middle East Institute

roughly 70% Sunni Muslims was now being dominated by Alawites who compromised roughly 11% of the Syrian population.<sup>149</sup>

These Alawites attempted to cement their rule by over-representing themselves within Syria's government. For example, both the Minister of Defense and Commander of the Syrian Air Force, Lt. General Hafiz Al-Assad and the Assistant Secretary General of the Ba'ath party Salah Jadid, were 'Alawis. Still, realizing that Alawites were a small faction an effort was made to recruit other minorities into Syria government. These minorities were broad, but mainly consisted of Ismalis and Druze. However, even with the broadening of the base, these minority groups at best constituted around 15% of the population.

Regardless of the exact number, the end result was that these minority groups were recruited into government life solely because of their religious orientation, and as such their status became bound up in government policies. This was particularly true of the Alawite sect. The Alawites had leaders who were specifically recruited into the Syrian air force. The attachment was so strong that some have even claimed that 'as went the Air Force, so went the collective honor of the Alawites' – a notion of particular consequence and is a point to be remembered.

In addition to the inherent oppressive nature of the government's structure, Syrian politics looms large in the shadow of the traditional Sunni-Shia split. The depths of this conflict will not be discussed here, but the basic overview is as follows. Muhammad was the first and undisputed leader of Islam. Following his death, there was a dispute as to who should succeed him. On the one hand were the Shi'ite Muslims who claimed that Muhammad's closet relative Ali should

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<sup>149</sup> Amos, *Arab-Israeli military/political relations* Pg. 280

succeed him. On the other hand were the Sunnis who claimed that the individual who was best at handling the political situation should succeed him; they chose Muhammad's father in law Abu Bakr. The Sunnis eventually won this battle as Abu Bakr became the successor. It is true that Ali ended up being fourth in line to succeed Muhammad, however, and after taking power, he and his descendants were themselves killed<sup>150</sup>.

Amidst this background of inter-religious and inter-group hostility the Ba'ath party attempted to bridge all gaps. Its method for doing so was to propose a left-wing radical national-Arabist ideology that would cause religious tensions, as well foreign and domestic turmoil, to emerge. The outline of such a world view is summarized in the constitution of the Arab Ba'ath party:

“The Arabs are one nation. This nation has the natural right to live in a single state and to be free to direct its own destiny. The Party of the Arab Ba'th therefore believes that: (1) The Arab fatherland constitutes an indivisible political and economic unity. No Arab country can live apart from the others. (2) The Arab nation constitutes a cultural unity. Any differences existing among its sons are accidental and unimportant. They will disappear with the awakening of the Arab consciousness... Art. 7. The Arab Fatherland is that part of the globe inhabited by the Arab nation which stretches from the Taurus Mountain, the Pocht-I-Kouh Mountains, the Sahara, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean. Art. 10. An Arab is he whose language is Arabic, who has lived on Arab soil, or who, after having being assimilated to Arab life, has faith in his

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<sup>150</sup> Alyssa Fetini, Understanding the Sunni-Shi'ite Divide. Time World.  
<<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1924116,00.html>>

belonging to the Arab nation...”<sup>151</sup>

“The nationalism for which we call is love before anything else. It is the very feeling that binds the individual to his family, because the fatherland is only a large household, and the nation is a large family. Nationalism, like every kind of love, fills the heart with joy and spreads hope in the soul; he who feels it, would wish to share with all people this joy which raises him above narrow egoism, draws him nearer to goodness and perfection... and as love is always linked to sacrifice, so is nationalism... Nationalism is love before anything else.”<sup>152</sup>

Amidst the background of religious and domestic turmoil, the Syrian government believed its secularist nationalistic ideology could quell inter-Arab rivalries. More specifically, the Ba’ath party believed that Ba’ath nationalism combined with an aggressive anti-Israel stance would reduce Arab tensions and strengthen their rule. This concept applied to issues both externally and internally.

By contrast, the situation in Egypt was dominated not by party or by ideology, but instead by one man, Gamel Nasser. Nasser was a man with a fire-brand style of rhetoric that emanated throughout the Arab world and was an interesting and unpredictable figure. To the Western World he often seemed no more than a loud-mouthed nuisance, but to the Arab street (and particularly in Egypt) he was regarded as a hero. Even in modern times Nasser is still written about and praised by the Arab street<sup>153</sup>.

As a man, Nasser was a revolutionary. He emerged from seemingly nowhere and through

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<sup>151</sup> Amos, *Arab-Israeli military/political relations* Pg. 35

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.* 35

<sup>153</sup> See citation 35



a domestic coup took power from his Egyptian predecessor. A sharp political player, Nasser then spent his time quickly isolating and minimizing his political opponents. First he attacked nationalistic parties, then the communists, then the religiously orientated Muslim Brethren and eventually any other remaining figures that emerged. He was able to accomplish this with the sheer strength of his charisma and his ability to quickly identify and strike at the opponents jugular.<sup>154</sup> But all of this channeled charisma also had a dark side. As a personality, Nasser was very tense and emotional. This combination caused him to frequently make rash and erratic decisions. It also caused him to alienate others and become isolated. As Anwar Sadat recalled:

“...’abd al-Nasir was one of those people who always live on their nerves. His life was like a tight cord 24 hours a day. As a matter of fact, ‘abd al Nasir did not create this tense atmosphere in order to surround the regime with the necessary awe. This was his nature before and after the revolution, after he planned the revolution, after he became a member and then chairman of the revolution Council, and after he became president. The tenseness was a basic feature of his personality from the time he was 20. He could not overcome it, and the burdens and responsibilities of power seemed to increase it... This tense nature made any attempt to approach him an uneasy matter, contrary to what one might think. This electrified atmosphere created a stiff barrier between him and others. Therefore, ‘abd al-Nasir did not have friends in the simple meaning of the term.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Amos, *Arab-Israeli military/political relations* Pg. 40

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 42

This extreme emotional state caused Nasser to butt heads with many of his associates and come to rash decisions. For example, during the Suez War the British and French governments issued an ultimatum to Egypt demanding that it withdraw from the Suez Canal zone. Many Egyptian officials considered this “dirty”, but because of the circumstances on the ground, (a 3-on-1 attack against Egypt and a destroyed Egyptian air force) some members of the “old-guard” thought it would be wise to accept. Nasser was so flustered that he called up the president’s firing squad to the government courthouse. Nasser then declared that anyone suggesting the Egyptian government accept this ultimatum would be shot immediately<sup>156</sup> – not exactly a method for getting subordinates to be honest with you.

Whenever the situation was becoming too tense or public discontent too broad, Nasser had the ability to funnel public anger outward. The usual targets for this displaced aggression were the United States and Israel. This policy was similar to Syria’s, at least from the perspective of foreign policy. The end result was a foreign policy approach that was inherently escalatory and laden with misperceptions.

#### Syria’s Misperception: Ba’ath Ideology Will Unify Syria

After the conclusion of the Israeli war of Independence in 1948, certain areas between Israel and Syria were considered demilitarized zones (DMZ’s) and no-man’s lands. These territorial patches were arranged in a checkerboard type fashion between the Israelis, Syrians and the United Nations. The ownership status of these territories was highly disputed. The Israelis considered the area to be under Israeli sovereignty and began farming the highly arable land. The

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<sup>156</sup> Sadat, *In Search of Identity* Pg. 144-45

Syrians objected. Eventually (and rather quickly), Syrian verbal objections escalated into machinegun fire and terrorist raids on the Israeli farmers and into Israel proper. The Israelis then responded both by plating their tractors and pursuing the terrorists into Syrian<sup>157</sup> territory with their air and ground forces.

This pattern of raid and reprisal repeated itself continuously until one day the Syrian Air Force had an unfortunate clash (from their own perspective) with the Israelis. In this unfortunate venture both sides became heated and their respective air forces exchanged fire. The end result was the downing of Six Syrian MIG's, two of them over the country of Jordan. As previously mentioned, Syria was a nation facing a heavy amount of domestic turmoil. On the one hand the Syrian government (neo-Ba'ath party) faced constant de-legitimization attempts by the vast Sunni majority, and on the other it faced challenges from the previously ousted Ba'ath party. With this development, the Syrian government had a prime opportunity to test their theory. Namely, *could Ba'ath ideology solve the underlying confrontations in Syrian society?*

The Ba'ath view, as expressed in their constitution, was *yes*. The Ba'ath party believed that Arab nationalism could submerge religious infighting and replace it with a sense of Arab unity. Additionally, it believed that apathetic individuals would be drawn towards the state. If all else failed, Arab nationalism could simply funnel excess anger towards the Israeli state and the end result would be positive for Syria.<sup>158</sup> This theory of the Ba'ath party constituted Syria's first misperception.

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<sup>157</sup> And sometimes Jordanian

<sup>158</sup> Amos, *Arab-Israeli military/political relations*. Pg. 35

## Rejection of the Ba'ath

Within Syria, the result turned out to be the opposite to what was expected. Despite the efforts of the Ba'ath party to homogenize their society along ethnic lines, conflict continued to get worse. Rather than accept Ba'ath ideology, the country became even further divided. Both secular and religious groups objected more strongly than before. Sunnis had perhaps the largest objection of the Syrian population. Already objecting to what they saw as a Godless secular regime, the Syrian air battle reinforced their negative perceptions. After the air battle, Sunnis now began to view the Ba'athists as weak and ineffective, and they even began referring to the government as the “‘adas”, or lentil bean regime.<sup>159</sup>

The term “‘adas” is itself revealing of the failure of the attempt to unify using the Ba'athist ideology. For in reality, “‘adas” is an acronym for the terms Alawite, Druze, and Isma'ili- three minority groups in Syria. According to the government's stated beliefs, this secular ideology was supposed to minimize religious beliefs and promote Arabism. Instead, the government was now being defined by their religious beliefs and the common ethnicities were being ignored. Further increasing the Sunni-Ba'ath split was an article posted in al-Jaysh al-Sha'b, the official magazine of the Syrian army. The article called for an abandonment of everything Islamic. According to the text, Islam was hindering all of Syrian society. In order to progress, religion must be jettisoned and a new era of rational thought and secularism must be ushered in. The article called for a new dawn consisting of “new Arab men” to be socialized along Marxist or even Maoist lines.<sup>160</sup>

Although not certain, it is likely the government approved of the content of the article.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. Pg. 38

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.39

For one, the acceptance of secular doctrines and rejection of a religious orientation falls perfectly within the stated framework of the Ba'ath. Two, it was published in the official army magazine. While it is true that not all articles reflect the opinion of the publisher, in the case of an autocratic government's publications it is usually the case. Regardless, the Ba'ath party published the piece, which caused unexpected results. When the article went through circulation, the Muslim community began to revolt. Through April and May of 1967, Islamic intellectuals and religious officials began preaching anti-government messages from street corners and from mosques. Sunnis disagreed with the anti-religious message and began rioting in the street. Syrian merchants disagreed with the economic restructuring and joined the Sunnis. Another domestic split became prevalent because of the publication date of the article - April 25<sup>th</sup> 1967. It appeared two weeks after the embarrassment of the pre-dominantly Alawite air force. With the downing of the planes the Alawite community lost their honor and respective standing in Syrian society. An example of this can be found in the response to the mass protests.

When the protests got underway, the Syrian government wanted to unleash the military on the protestors. However, due to the Alawites' lack of standing there was increased tension between the Alawite and Druze factions of the army. Expecting failure, the government opted to utilize an Isma'ili unit instead, causing the Sunnis to funnel a disproportionate amount of anger towards that group.<sup>161</sup> The Syrian misperception about creating a united Syria was now becoming clear, and even the government was recognizing its citizens in groups.

Externally, Syria fared no better. After understanding the secular notions of the Ba'athists Jordan and Saudi Arabia began issuing propaganda. This propaganda stated that Syria was a

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid. 38-39

Godless regime. Collectively, Jordan and Saudi Arabia argued for further mass revolts in the name of G-d. Nasser too distanced himself from Egypt. After the air battle he himself declared that the Egyptian-Syrian defense pact only applied to large scale warfare and not “spasmodic incidents”. Indeed, it would seem that in the short-term Ba’ath policy had the opposite effect to what was intended. The misperception about the ability to unify Syria was showing from all directions. After a minor air skirmish with Israel, Syria now faced strong opposition from the majority of its country, divisions within the military and external conflicts. Not only was the Ba’ath perception of unity incorrect, it seemed the opposite was true. The concept of secularism divided the Arab world by nation and by religious sect. It should be stated that by the arrival of the war the Arabs were sufficiently unified to act as a quasi-unified force. However, this had more to do with a hatred of Israel and personal reasons as opposed to any specific Ba’ath ideology. In fact, even in the immediate aftermath of the war, when the Arabs had fought together, there were still sharp disagreements. To this current day, the Arabs have never emerged as “one nation”.

#### The Egyptian Misperception - Military Superiority

Like their Syrian counter-parts, the Egyptians had their fair of consequences as a result of their misperceptions. However, despite sharing the bond of Arabness, Syrian and Egyptian misperceptions were different in nature. Whereas Syrian misperceptions were focused on the benefits of an ideology, Egyptian misperceptions were focused on their capabilities, specifically the supposedly invincible capabilities of their military. Although not unanimous, throughout the events preceding the war various Egyptian leaders predicted an Egyptian victory. This confidence allowed Egyptian leaders to take more aggressive stances and eventually led to their

downfall. Had the Egyptians perceived their comparative weakness, it is likely they would have concluded the fiasco without being routed militarily. The Egyptian misperception of military superiority reared its head continuously and left a stamp on the numerous events already listed in previous chapters.

### **Closure of the Strait**

As previously detailed, after the expulsion of UNEF, Nasser convened the Supreme Executive Committee. In attendance were Anwar Sadat, Nasser, the Egyptian Prime Minister Sidqi Sulyaman, the head of Egypt's military Abdel Amer, the Former Prime Minister of Egypt Ali Sabri and a few others. Again, as previously stated, the outcome of this meeting was the closure of the Strait of Tiran. But why? Why did Nasser choose to do this?

During the meeting, there was a brief discussion about what would happen if Egypt had to engage in combat with Israel. Here, Amer stated with confidence that he was certain Egypt would win. That Egypt's military was superior to Israel's and there would be no problems. On this line of military thinking no one objected. The only dissent came from Sulyaman who argued the situation would be damaging to the Egyptian economy. As Anwar Sadat recalls in his memoirs.

“Then, turning to Amer, he [Nasser] asked, “Are the armed forces ready, Abdel Hakim?” Amer pointed to his neck and said: “On my own head be it, boss! Everything's in tiptop shape.” We all

knew that our armaments were adequate-indeed, infinitely better than in the October 1973 War. When Nasser asked us our opinion, we were all agreed that the strait should be closed...<sup>162</sup>

Indeed, from this excerpt one can feel that the Egyptian truly believed they would emerge victorious from any military encounter. Even the person who objected to the blockading of Israel did so based on economic grounds, not military fears. This first misperception of the relative power-relation of these two countries cost Egypt dearly.

It's clear from the question Nasser asked that he was himself unsure of his military strength. Now, some historians<sup>163</sup> argue Nasser wanted to avoid war, while others<sup>164</sup> argued that his sole mission was to embarrass Israel militarily. However, this difference is beyond the point. At the end of the day, Nasser had to make the ultimate decision regarding the Strait. When *all* of his advisers believed in the supremacy of the Egyptian military (as compared to Israel's), Nasser was certainly influenced towards the closure of the Strait, towards war, and therefore towards the routing of Egypt's military.

### **U.S Intervention – Shams Badran**

As time pressed forward, the Egyptians kept their misperception about Israeli military superiority. This misperception spread to other members of the Egyptian government and displayed itself in different scenarios. One such person was the Egyptian War Minister Shams Badran. Badran, as previously recorded in the Soviet section went on a diplomatic mission to Moscow. Upon arrival, the Soviet Union attempted to discourage Badran and Egypt from acting

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<sup>162</sup> Sadat, *In search of Identity*, Pg. 172

<sup>163</sup> Aburish, *Nasser: The Last Arab* Ch. 9

<sup>164</sup> Eban, *My Country* Ch. 10



aggressively (see Chapter 3). They asked him to restrain himself and allow the situation to de-escalate – but he did not. The question that again should be asked is why? Why did Badran not share the Soviets’ sense of urgency? The answer is identical to the previous scenario; Badran believed Egypt had nothing to worry about militarily.

When in Moscow, Badran was asked point blank by Soviet Officials what he would do if the United States intervened militarily. Badran with confidence believed that Egypt would be able to hold its own against the United States. In fact, he believed it was possible for Egypt to defeat the U.S Navy. As Sadat recalls in his memoirs:

...Shams Badran, in his capacity as War minister, was sent to Moscow. In the Kremlin he was asked what Egypt would do if the U.S Sixth Fleet intervened in the fighting. He answered without hesitation: “We have a weapon that can deal it a lethal blow”. He had in mind the rocket-carrier TU- 16 bomber which, loaded with its rocket, can do no faster than 310 mph, that is, half the speed of a civilian Boeing. The joke amused them a great deal in the Kremlin, just as it amused us in Egypt.<sup>165</sup>

This statement is truly astounding. It is one thing to believe that Egypt had military capabilities on par with Israel, but it is quite another to believe Egypt could best the United States. One must remember that 1967 was during the height of the Cold War, and that the United States was a Superpower armed with nuclear weapons. Egypt by comparison was a member of the Third World which had trouble feeding its own people. Badran’s confidence was truly irrational. Fortunately for Egypt, Badran’s grievous misperception about the United States was

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid. Pg. 173

not infectious. As implied by Sadat's memoirs, no one in Egypt believed him. However, even though Egyptian leaders took Badran's claim as some sort of joke, one can infer that as the Minister of War, he had at least a minimal sway over military affairs. After all it was in his job description. Just like the meeting of the Supreme Executive Committee, it can be assumed that Badran's opinions were factored in somewhere along the line.

Regardless, even though Egyptian government officials did not *generally* believe they had a military edge over the United States, it is clear they still believed they were stronger than Israel. This misperception continued to haunt Egyptian decision makers, floating from leader to leader and from plan to plan. The misperception of superior military power soon affected nearly all the government's key figures.

### **Distorting Government Planning**

On June 2<sup>nd</sup>, after Badran returned from Moscow, the situation was fundamentally different than it was a few weeks prior. Now, UNEF was gone. Egypt was blockading Israel. Both sides had mobilized considerably. Defense pacts and contingency troops were arriving in all surrounding Arab countries. Putting aside whose fault the escalation was, from an Arab perspective it was plausible Israel would initiate a pre-emptive strike.

In Egypt this was taken into account. The government decided it needed a contingency plan for an Israeli attack. Nasser decided to outsource this plan to the Egyptian Air Force Commander Sidqi Mahmoud. Nasser more or less told him that he expected Israel to attack in the next few days<sup>166</sup>. He also stated that the Air Force would likely be dealt the first blow. Mahmoud paused in nervousness, but responded "We've taken that into account, sir; we shan't

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid. Pg. 174

sustain any losses beyond the calculated ten percent.”<sup>167</sup> Sidqi’s perceptions were just as incorrect as Badran’s.

On June 5<sup>th</sup> Israel did indeed choose to initiate the war with its Air Force. The general framework (as Nasser predicted) was to attack the Egyptian air capabilities on the ground in a surprise strike. According to an Israeli mirage commander named Ronen:

“I led the attack on Inshas, a large airfield with forty-two MiG-21s, just east of Cairo. We flew at a very low altitude just above the sea, at the height of the waves. Overland-over the sand dunes- we flew at an altitude of less than one hundred feet...Farmers were waving to us, probably thinking we were Egyptian aircraft... We pulled up to six thousand feet. I looked down and saw the Egyptian MiGs... with the pilots sitting inside the cockpits... It was then that I realized that we had managed to surprise them.”<sup>168</sup>

In other words the premise of Nasser’s prediction was true. The Israelis did strike in secret. The Israelis did target the Egyptian air force. And the Israelis did so more or less when Nasser said they would. This was the entirety what the Egyptians were expecting. However, what they overlooked again was the superiority of the Israeli military services. For when Israel struck, far more than 10% of Egypt’s air force that was destroyed – it was 100%. In fact, when Amer issued the order to Mahmoud to initiate an Egyptian counter attack, Mahmoud responded, “I can’t, because we do not have aircraft”<sup>169</sup>

It is of course unknown exactly what plans Egyptian leaders would have taken had they

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid. Pg. 174

<sup>168</sup> Bregman & El-Tahri, *The Fifty Years War* Pg. 103

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. Pg. 104-10

not suffered from such a serious misperception. Had Egypt realized that a pre-emptive Israeli strike could completely wipe out the Egyptian Air Force maybe they would have always kept some jets in the air. Perhaps they would have appealed to the UN for help. Again, the selected path would be uncertain. However, under no circumstances would Egypt have sought a war. For by all accounts, the war ended in the first few hours with the destruction of the Egyptian military. Mahmoud's misperception about the number of aircrafts destroyed, moreover, ultimately cost Egypt the 1967 war.

### **Anwar Sadat – The Misperception is Broken.**

Like the other members of the Egyptian government Anwar Sadat also believed in the superiority of the Egyptian military. However, his belief was far deeper. Even after the war started and the Egyptian propaganda machine went into effect claiming boastful wins, he still had not noticed that Egypt had already lost. In his memoirs Sadat too recalls his overconfidence, he states:

“I knew from broadcasts on the morning of June 5 that Israel had started the attack, and so I thought, ‘Well, they’ll be taught a lesson they won’t forget.’ I was quite confident, so I had a shave, took my time changing to go out, then drove myself to the command headquarter. I had...unshakable confidence in our victory. Our equipment was more than adequate and the plan superb... ‘What’s the news?’ I asked. Some officers said we had shot down forty aircraft so far.

‘Splendid!’ I said.”<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Sadat, *In search of Identity*. Pg. 174

Sadat had a high position in Egyptian government as both the leader of the national assembly, a foreign representative, and a close personal friend of Nasser. His willingness to so easily believe in a swift Egyptian victory even when it was Egypt who had been attacked demonstrates his misperception was essentially the same as the others. Sadat too believed in the superiority of the Egyptian military.

Sadat was different on a personal level. He was a realistic and pragmatic man. He was highly nationalistic. When this misperception finally broke, it was too much for him to handle. Sadat, normally well composed and clear-eyed - snapped. His misperception was engrained so deeply that merely realizing it could be wrong caused him to wish for a heart attack. After hearing the truth of the damage caused by the Israeli strike Sadat again recalls:

“What could I do? I just went home and stayed in for days, until June 9...It was too much. I didn't know what to do with myself. I was in the habit of walking about [2.5] miles a day, but in the days after June 5 I simple didn't know how far or for how long I walked. I walked and walked, losing any sense of time or distance. Perhaps it was 6 miles or more-perhaps less- I simply didn't know. I was dazed and unable to locate myself in time or space. I grew even more dazed and broken-hearted when I watched the crowds...chanting, dancing, and applauding the faked-up victory reports which our mass media put out hourly... Watching those “victory” processions I wish I could have a heart attack, like the one I had had in 1960. I wished I could pass away before these good and kind people woke up...before they realized that the victory they

had been sold was in fact a terrible disaster.”<sup>171</sup>

Sadat demonstrates that the strength of the Egyptian misperception; it was even felt by the masses of the Egyptian people. For Sadat though, the whole situation was simply too much for him to bear. The stress caused by being so blind, combined with the feeling of helplessness and defeat, drove Sadat insane

More bad news continued to trickle in. First, Amer decided to order a hasty and full scale retreat. Then, the Israeli’s had captured Al-Arish and were moving towards more Egyptian towns. Lastly, the strongest Egyptian division, the 4<sup>th</sup> armored division, was completely destroyed. In other words it was clear that Israel had won. Israel’s military was clearly superior as they had not only defeated Egypt, but were inflicting heavy losses on the Jordanians and Syrians as well, not to mention upon the contingency troops sent by Algeria and Iraq.

After thinking and reflecting for a while, Sadat still could not let go of his misperception – at least not entirely. He decided, in an emotional state, that he would personally fight the Israeli army. Sadat gave instructions to the Secretary General of the National Assembly stating that, members with a military background should call 1200 men up for service and that together they would strike at the Israelis. Furthermore, he reminded Nasser that “... our densely populated country is itself a very powerful weapon in our hands.”<sup>172</sup> Despite all the evidence to the contrary, Sadat just could not completely jettison the misperception. It is true that he knew Egypt was defeated. It is true he felt confused and angry. But, he would not admit that Egypt still had no viable recourse. He was seriously attempting to fight the Israeli air force with standard issued

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid. 174-175

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. 177-78

rifles.

After he explained this plan to Nasser, Nasser basically had to calm him down. The Egyptian leader conveyed to Sadat the feeling of defeat, but asked him to “stay with [him]”<sup>173</sup> until he had made a public statement. Sadat agreed. After Nasser’s statement, the crowds of Cairo came alive. Everyone was chanting for Nasser to stay on, indicating that they were happy with his leadership. After witnessing this, Sadat was finally able to let go. Still feeling defeated and unsatisfied, he regained his normal temperament. It was Nasser who was never the same again, as Sadat phrased it:

“The events of June 5 dealt him a fatal blow. They finished him off. Those who knew Nasser realized that he did not die on September 28, 1970, but on June 5, 1967, exactly one hour after the War broke out.”<sup>174</sup>

### End Result of Arab Misperceptions

Ba’ath and Egyptian misperceptions collectively played a large role in Arab actions. For the Ba’ath’s they put their secular ideology above the demographic realities of their state. The misperception of a unifying Ba’ath ideology caused countless domestic problems within Syria. Faced with revolts from Sunnis, merchants, foreign leaders, and all elements of Syrian society, the Ba’ath party decided to funnel its aggression outwards. In Egypt the misperception was different. They believed that their army and by extension the army of the united Arab front was

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid. 178

<sup>174</sup> Ibid. 179-180

simply stronger than Israel's. Had this misperception been absent, it is likely Egypt would have been less aggressive. If they had assumed that Israel was stronger and was going to destroy thousands of their soldiers, perhaps they would have deliberately hid behind "UN skirts", as the King of Jordan suggested. It is certainly unlikely that they would have goaded Israel into attacking them. It can be said, therefore, that Arab misperceptions highly contributed to the escalation of conflict and thus *accelerated the start of the 1967 war*.

## **Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

### Minimizing Misperception.

This thesis demonstrates that there are misperceptions present in nearly all levels of the decision making process. These misperceptions can have a wide range of consequences ranging from benign neutrality to destructive malignancy. Decision makers and everyday people suffer from misperceptions daily and must face the reality that they are unavoidable. However recognizing that there are misperceptions can allow us to reduce both the number and severity of the misperceptions we face. In terms of international politics, this can minimize the risk for combat and help our leaders understand when some wars are just unavoidable.

Decision-makers must remember that actors, including themselves, tend to fit incoming information into their already existing images and beliefs. Holding to this notion demonstrates to the actor that misperception is possible. When the actor is aware of the shortcomings of the



human mind, then he can take preventative defensive measures. These measures include, but are not limited to making your assumption and predictions as explicit as possible, assigning devils advocates, and taking caution in regards to personal identity and missions<sup>175</sup>.

### **Making Explicit Assumptions**

When a decision maker must predict what consequences their policy will have, it is best to make those assumptions as explicit as possible<sup>176</sup>. Creating certain benchmarks allows the policy crafter to test their assumption with the flow of time. It also prevents them from successfully rationalizing away their errors. When a prediction is made either in writing or to the witness of others it disallows the person making the claim to back away or stick to their flawed misperception.

For example, let us look at the series of events that America followed during the 1967 war. Johnson's misperception was that he strongly believed in the efficacy of the United Nations. That is why he attempted to handle the closure of the Strait of Tiran, the expulsion of UNEF and all other matters through the United Nations. Even when there was evidence his plans were not effective he still held his positions.

Assume for a moment that Johnson would have said, "We will send Nasser's request to expel UNEF to the UN and the strait will certainly stay open". Had he made that comment the misperception of the efficacy of the United Nations would not have lasted long. An immediate recognition of failure would have set it and a new plan would have become necessary. When Instead Johnson said U Thant might prevent the straits closure, and the issue might go to general

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<sup>175</sup> Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* Ch. 12.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.* Pg. 410

assembly, and maybe the U.S would use its veto, it left a lot of room for misperception. After all, how could Johnson tell he was incorrect if he never laid out the details of his plan correctly?

The failure of the Johnson administration to make explicit predictions led to the repetition of identical errors. In the events that followed, Johnson continually laid out a weak expectations, and too flexible of an outcome preference. This allowed the cycle to continue. Instead, Johnson should have not only made his predictions, but his underlying beliefs explicit as well.

### **Devils Advocates**

In order to expose what decision-makers underlying assumptions are, decision-makers need to be presented with alternative imagery and theories<sup>177</sup>. Individuals must be willing to look at material from all different angles to ensure that they did not overlook something – hidden or obvious. Having one individual do this, is not always so easy. As previously stipulated people tend to fit all information into their already existing images. Therefore, leaders should assign a devil's advocate whose task will be to challenge the accepted status quo. For best results, one should implement a devil's advocate who actually believes what they are saying.

It is important to note a key difference from what may be implied. In order to minimize misperception someone should not try to ignore their bias. Instead, decision-makers should recognize them and attempt to pit cognitive biases against one another. For without an alternative theory, the normal result is for one theory to be shared amongst the group. This theory will generally be unchallenged and over time develop into a deep misperception. These misperceptions can be extremely difficult to break once created.

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid. Pg. 415

This was the situation in Egypt. One must remember that Nasser's actions discouraged devil's advocacy under the penalty of death. He specifically said that anyone who opposed his position on the Suez-ultimatum would be shot immediately by the Presidential Guard. It is a safe assumption that Nasser did not keep many people in his inner circle who disagreed with his policies. Additionally, if there was anyone who did, they likely feared for their safety if they revealed their true feelings. In Egypt's government, critical thought was not encouraged.

Therefore, it cannot really be a surprise that there was only one line of thinking in Egypt's government. Virtually all of the relevant staff believed Egypt was superior militarily. The Air Force commander, the War Minister, the head of the National Assembly, the head of the Armed Forces, all shared the misperception of the superiority of Egyptian military strength.

Had Nasser assigned someone as a devil's advocate, it is possible he would not have expelled UNEF. Had Nasser never expelled UNEF, he would not have been able to close the strait. Had he not closed the strait, the pre-war crisis would have never escalated. Had the crisis never escalated the Arabs would never have committed what Aburish describes as "cultural suicide". In the end not assigning a devil's advocate hurt Egypt's interests more than anyone else.

### **Identity and Mission**

Another important safeguard is to avoid allowing those with an interest in maintaining a policy judge its effectiveness<sup>178</sup>. This extends further into saying that individuals and organizations should not allow their tasks, prospects for the future, and identities to become tied to specific theories and images of other actors. When this becomes the case decision-makers tend

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid. Pg. 418

to see only what images fit into their already existing beliefs systems and can miss ideas easily identifiable by others.

Ignoring this safeguard was the source of Israel's woes. Eban had been a life-long diplomat and at the time of the 1967 was the Foreign Minister of Israel. He personally oversaw many of the diplomatic adventures Israel undertook since its founding. Diplomacy became part of his person-hood.

When the events of 1967 unfolded, Eban was tasked with both finding solutions and being a diplomat. It is again not a surprise that all of his proposed solutions were diplomatic in nature. In regards to the installment of UNEF peace keepers, the blockade of Israel, and the forces piling up in Sinai, Eban truly believed the United Nations could reverse what it could not prevent in the first place.

Later, when it came to judging Eban's ideas and proposals, Eshkol commonly relied on Eban's opinion. At the early stages of the war, Eshkol was acting as his own Defense Minister;<sup>179</sup> he had no person tasked with giving him militaristic advice to counter balance Eban. Eventually, after Eban traveled to Europe and the United States, he returned and Eshkol held a cabinet meeting. In this meeting they had to decide whether to delay or pre-empt.

Essentially, this vote bubbled down to the following questions, "had Eban's diplomacy paid off, and would more diplomacy be effective"? Those who thought it had voted to delay, whereas those who thought it had not voted to pre-empt. In this debate Eban was not only given a vote, he led the faction in favor of delay. During the follow up vote, when the balance tilted heavily in favor of delay, it was in fact because of Eban's misperception about diplomacy. Eban

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<sup>179</sup> He later added Moshe Dayan

thought that the United States had promised to do “everything” in its power to re-open the strait, but in fact, Johnson had never made his claim. In other words, Eban heard what he wanted to hear from President Johnson. Eban was in effect doing what a student of bureaucratic politics would expect him to do, "standing where he sat". For a further explanation of bureaucratic decision making, see Essence of Decision<sup>180</sup>.

In the end Eban and Israel were fortunate. Although Eban’s misperception cost Israel time and allowed the Arabs sufficient time to organize, it did not cause a massive difference in terms of life or death. In the future however, Israeli decision-makers may not be so lucky.

### Summation

When taken as a whole misperceptions cannot be entirely eliminated. However, they can certainly be reduced in severity, number, and length by taking worthwhile safeguards. These safeguards are not that difficult to implement and only require a little patience. It is important to remember that all individuals tend to fit incoming information into their already existent theories and notions. But, by appointing a devil’s advocate, avoiding personal identity to become crossed with your task, and making your assumptions as explicit as possible you can minimize future misperceptions.

In the Six-Day war, all sides tended to ignore these safeguards and as a result were laden with misperceptions. The end result was in one way or another bad for most sides. In the case of

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<sup>180</sup> Allison, Graham T., and Philip Zelikow. 1999. *Essence of decision: explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Longman.

Egypt, its army was destroyed and it lost a vast amount of territory. The same is true of Syria and Jordan. Rather than expand its power projection function and be seen as a credible source in the region, the Soviet Union was seen as weak group that did not accomplish its goals. By contrast, Israeli misperceptions actually seemed to serve Israel's favor. The end result for them was a vast increase in territory, and the imposition of the understand that they had a superior military. The United States gained from their misperceptions. Rightly or wrongly the United States is associated with Israel. A strong Israel made U.S satellites look like viable options as compared to their Soviet counter-parts.

In today's world, there is still a tremendous amount of turmoil in the Middle East and around the world. Hopefully, this study of misperceptions can shed some light on what went wrong in the past so that decision-makers of the present can understand their faults. In the long run, avoiding misperceptions in their entirety is impossible, but great strides can be made in their reduction. In the end, we should try to see the world as clearly as possible as not all countries may be as lucky as Israel and the United States and escape relatively unscathed from their misperceptions.

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