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Flexible Air Strategy and The 1973 October War

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ABSTRACT

TITLE: Flexible Air Strategy and The 1973 October War

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The key to winning the next war lies in the flexibility of air power. A critical analysis of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War using Professor William P. Snyder's model for war planning demonstrates how flexible air power clearly influenced the outcome of the war for Israel. In order to be successful on the battlefield in the future, U.S. military leaders and strategists must be flexible in planning and building air power doctrine, strategy and tactics. The U.S. Air Force cannot win a war on its own, but all must understand that it is the flexibility of the air arm that makes victory possible in the air-land battle concept.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel John (Skip) J. Haller, Jr. has been interested in Middle Eastern affairs since he studied the Arabic language and the Moslem culture at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California in 1986. His follow-on tour in 1987 to North Yemen enhanced both his interest and knowledge of the Middle East region. As a graduate of the Armed Forces Staff College, Colonel Haller was assigned to Joint Duty at the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) where he served as a Middle East expert on security assistance matters with Egypt and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. He served on the CENTCOM staff during Operations Desert Shield/Storm and was picked to be CENTCOM's representative on the SECDEF's U.S./Saudi Arabia Joint Security Review Team. Colonel Haller is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1995.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Military strategy students must understand the various roles of air power in order to properly integrate all military forces in the air-land battles of the future. As new technology develops, building new and flexible strategies to counter technological gains becomes more difficult. Analyzing air campaigns reveals how air power has been used both successfully and inappropriately. The 1973 Arab-Israeli war clearly illustrates why strategists must be flexible in the application of forces in future wars.

This paper takes an in-depth look at the Arab and Israeli strategies during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, also known as the Yom Kippur or Ramadan or October War. A background and description of the military strategies will be given in order to compare and contrast the successes and failures of the individual strategies. Using the Snyder Model, analysis will show that Israel's flexibility in applying its air-land battle strategy to meet numerically superior Arab forces and new technological threats ensured success on the battlefield. (18:78-85) Although the 1973 Arab-Israeli War resulted in a limited political victory for the Arabs, the fact remains that the inflexible Arab war fighting strategy resulted in a military defeat for Syria and prevented the Egyptians from attaining all their strategic military goals.

CHAPTER II

BACKGROUND OF THE 1973 ARAB-ISRAELI WAR

The conflict between the Arab and Israeli people is well documented throughout history and dates back over 2000 years as described in the Old Testament of the Bible. (7:18) The three major wars they fought in 1948, 1956, and 1967 document their continuing conflict, but the on-going crisis and events after the 1967 war led directly to 1973 October War. The huge military buildup undertaken by the Arabs between the 1967 and 1973 wars was most significant and resulted in changes to the military plans and doctrine of both sides. (6:142-43)

The On-going Crisis

After the Arabs' crushing and embarrassing defeat by the Israelis in the 1967 war when the Israelis captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Desert and the Golan Heights, the Arabs wanted to get their land and prestige back. Since the Arabs far outnumbered the Israelis and because Israel's economy was so dependent on the outside world, Arab strategy was to conduct a war of attrition. According to Allen, Egypt hoped that continued fighting across the Suez Canal would weaken the Israeli economy and therefore, in June 1969, President Nasser announced that the War of Attrition had officially begun. (2:23)

As the war of attrition continued with little success, the new Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat, believed that Israel was satisfied with the status quo and would make no reasonable efforts toward peace without some sort of initiative by the Arabs. Thus, the Egyptian Minister of War,

General Ahmed Ismail, developed a joint strategic plan with Syria and President Hafad Assad for a major offensive against Israel to break the stalemate. (6:142-43)

On the other hand, the Israelis built a new doctrine based on using the Arab territory captured during the 1967 war as a defensive buffer zone. Israel changed its military strategy of offensive preemptive strikes on the enemy's territory to an active defense that relied heavily on its superior air forces and the new Bar Lev line defensive bunkers built along the east bank of the Suez. As tensions increased before the 1973 war, Israel's doctrine seemed to be working. The Bar Lev line had prevented any new major offensives across the canal by Egypt. Also, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) had demonstrated its superiority on several occasions. Allen tells us, "In September 1973, Israeli F-4 Fighters and Syrian MIGs clashed in an air battle over the Mediterranean Sea resulting in 1 F-4 and 13 Syrian MIGs being lost." (2:15)

Prime Minister Golda Meir and her government also feared the loss of United States aid and world support if they were tagged as the aggressor in any new Arab-Israeli conflicts. (14:146)

Therefore Israel's doctrine of strategic defense fit politically and militarily together.

The Buildup

Although the United States supplied Israel with additional aircraft and munitions, the U.S. program did not begin to compare to the extensive military buildup undertaken by the Arabs with Soviet assistance. The Soviets saw a unique opportunity for themselves after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War by providing significant military aid to Egypt. Allen says that the Soviets wanted to establish a military presence in the area that would enable them to dominate the Eastern Mediterranean and threaten NATO's southeastern flank. (2:18) Both the Egyptians and the

Syrians welcomed the military aid and began extensive training programs using Soviet advisors to secretly prepare for war with Israel. However, the Soviets proceeded with some caution since they realized another war in the Middle East could cause a confrontation between the U.S. and Russia. In July of 1972, President Sadat expelled the Soviet advisors from Egypt in final preparation for war. (13:145) As the period of détente developed between the super powers, Baker speculates that friction developed between the Russians and Egyptians because the Russians were trying to restrain the Egyptians from starting another Arab-Israeli war. He further postulates that the Russians departed Egypt without argument because either one, they wanted to maintain good relations with the Arab world or two, they believed the U.S. would cut off economical and technical assistance it was providing for the Soviet people. (2:106)

Even though the Soviets were expelled from Egypt, Soviet support to the Arabs continued. In fact, Egypt's relations with Moscow became increasingly important as the time for war drew closer. In the forefront, it appeared that Egyptian and Soviet relations were strained. However, Allen says the Soviets pledged their full support to Egyptian efforts in a communiqué in May 1973 to "liquidate the consequences of aggression," leaving the possibility of military action open to the Egyptians. (2:32) The groundwork was now set for the Arabs to break the stalemate with Israel and to regain their pride and the territories lost in previous wars. Then, on October 6,1973, during the most important Jewish religious holy day of the year,[1] Syrian and Egyptian forces surprised Israel by attacking on two fronts with unprecedented land and air forces.

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1 The 10th day of Tishri in accordance with the rites described in Leviticus 16 -- called the Day of Atonement.

CHAPTER III

OPPOSING POLITICO-MILITARY STRATEGIES

Arab Strategy and the Limited Air Role

Arab political will and strategy was driven by their need to regain the territory and the prestige they had lost during the previous wars with Israel. Israel was establishing settlements in the captured Golan Heights and around the Sinai at an increasing rate which further embarrassed the Arabs. In fact, in O'Neill's assessment of the war, he describes how Syrian President Assad addressed his people on October 6, 1973 and told them the war was a "battle of honor and dignity." (16:32)

The time had come to regain those losses and stop the expansion of the Israeli settlements. The world had become increasingly dependent on Arab oil and the Egyptian and Syrian military had a renewed confidence in their newly provided Soviet military equipment and training. Although they knew that a total defeat of Israel would not be possible, they felt that they must at least take back a portion of the occupied territories to include the Khatmia, Gidi and Mitla passes in the Sinai and most of the Golan Heights. (9:140) A limited victory would compel the Israelis to negotiate to establish a peace accord on terms that would be favorable to the Arabs. The Arab military strategy was based on their overwhelming numerical superiority in both personnel and equipment and their technological gains in air defense and anti-tank weapons. By combining these advantages with the use of surprise and deception, the Arabs believed they could overcome Israel's technological superiority, hold the Israeli Air Force at bay and gain a foothold in the occupied territories that would bring Israel quickly to the peace table.

The plan called for a combined Arab attack on two fronts. In the Golan Heights, Syria planned to mount a massive ground attack to keep the Israelis occupied while the Egyptians planned to cross the Suez Canal to gain a foothold in the Sinai under the cover of their air defense umbrella. Experience from past wars taught the Arabs that they could not defeat the Israeli Air Force with their own Air Forces. Therefore, they planned to use their air power sparingly for select missions or risk losing it altogether. (12:53) Also, they did not want to lose their aircraft on the ground again, so they built hardened shelters to protect their aircraft until needed. Thus, the role of air power in the Arab strategic plan was very limited.

Israel's Key Defense Strategy--The Air Force

Israel had developed a long-standing politico-military doctrine of striking first and carrying the war into enemy territory as it had done in previous conflicts. However, after their 1967 victory where they gained the Golan Heights and the Sinai, the Israelis modified their strategy to use the occupied territory as a defensive buffer zone. The Bar Lev line would be the first line of ground defense and alerting mechanism against an Egyptian attack with the IAF on ready alert to back it up. The Bar Lev Line was primarily a holding position until the IAF arrived and full Israeli mobilization could occur.[2] (5:32) The high ground Israel had gained in the Golan Heights provided excellent observation points to detect any Syrian buildups along the border. The rough terrain of the Rukad Wadi and the Jordan River also provided a natural barrier against any major Syrian attack.

Israel's new strategy allowed it to rely on its superior air power to thwart an initial attack, giving it time to mobilize the reserves to mount a massive counter attack. (2:117-118) The role of

the IAF in this strategic plan as identified by Nordeen in his writings was "(1) to protect Israeli airspace, (2) to achieve air superiority over the battle zone, (3) to support ground and sea operations, (4) to fulfill IDF transportation, reconnaissance, communications, and intelligence needs." (14:143) Israel's flexibility in carrying out its air power strategy enabled it to successfully accomplish these roles and gain victory on the battlefield.

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2 A series of fortified observation posts, gun emplacements and mine fields designed to act as a trip wire against an attack.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE ARAB AND ISRAELI AIR STRATEGIES

Air Power Objectives and Doctrine

To understand the objectives of opposing air forces in an air-land battle, the overall military objectives must be made clear first. Dupuy described General Ismail's unified Arab plan as follows:

> to undertake a joint strategic offensive, in cooperation with Syria, with the mission of defeating Israeli forces in the western Sinai
> by a deliberate assault crossing of the Suez Canal
> to seize five bridgeheads ten to 15 kilometers
> deep on the eastern bank, to repel Israeli counterattacks, to inflict maximum losses on the enemy and to be prepared for further missions.
> (6:143)

The war-fighting doctrine of the Egyptian and Syrian air forces was to defend their homelands. Their objectives were to protect their aircraft on the ground and save their sorties for air defense missions behind the battle zone. They planned to stay clear of their extensive surface-to-air missile (SAM) and anti-aircraft (AA) umbrella that would protect their ground forces. However, as a secondary objective, the Arab air forces flew some sorties against specific Israeli targets in the Sinai and Golan Heights to soften Israeli positions for the attacking Arab land forces. (2:62)

Israel's military objectives were based on the new war-fighting doctrine of strategic defense. Under this doctrine, the military relied upon early notification of attack and the ability of the defensive zones and the Air Force to hold out until a massive counter-attack could be undertaken by its mobilized forces. (2:39-40) Therefore, the IAF had to gain immediate air superiority and

then stop any invading forces until its mobilized reserves could reach the battle field. Once this was achieved, the Air Force would join the counter-offensive in support of the land forces.

Technology as a Principal Factor of Strategy

Weapon systems technology played a major role in the development of both the Arab and Israeli strategies. The Arabs knew that their Russian supplied aircraft were no match for the U.S. supplied Israeli aircraft with highly skilled Israeli pilots in 1973. In the 1967 war, Egyptian aircraft were destroyed on the ground in less than three hours and the Arabs lost 452 aircraft to Israel's superior weapons systems. (17:34) To prevent reoccurrence of this disaster, the Arabs built a state-of-the-art, integrated SAM missile and AA system to protect their ground forces from the IAF. They also built hardened shelters to protect their aircraft so they would be available for defense of their homelands. Since their aircraft would not be used in any significant close air support role, the Arabs also acquired the latest Russian technology in anti-tank missiles to counter the Israeli technologically superior western tanks. The combination of these new weapons systems resulted in a major improvement from previous wars. It gave the Arab war fighters new confidence and were the key to Arab strategy. (11:331-34)

Israel has always relied on its technological superiority, especially in the air, for its national defense. Because of the Israelis' confidence in the effectiveness of their fighter aircraft and aircrews to gain air superiority rapidly, they did not spend much money on other air defense systems. They based much of their strategy on air superiority. They believed that the IAF's technologically superior aircraft, missiles and smart bombs could defeat any air threat outside their own territory and allow Israeli forces to operate freely on the ground. (3:118) The IAF strategists believed their aircraft and pilots were so good that they could improvise tactics against

the Arab air defense system without the latest electronic counter measures from the United States. (15:289) Finally, the Israelis' ability to gain air superiority in the past was partly because of their high tech command-and-control systems. With the current intelligence and communications, the commander could redirect his forces to meet any threat. (13:170)

Employment of Available Resources

The Arabs knew they had a tremendous numerical advantage in all areas and devised much of their strategy around this fact. Although there are various estimates of Arab and Israeli strengths, General Eaker states, "The Arabs began the conflict with roughly a four-to-one overall superiority in military strength, including 4,000 to 1,900 tanks; 2,000 to 500 airplanes and 140,000 to 50,000 combat troops." (7:19) Although numerically superior, the Arab's knew their MIG 17/21 and SU-7 fighter/bombers and the assortment of light bombers and helicopters were inferior to the IAF aircraft. Their strategy of using them primarily for air defense and protecting them on the ground bears this fact out.

However, it is interesting to note that the Commander of Egypt's Air Force, General Husni Mubarak stated in an interview that, "In the final analysis it is the pilot who is the determining factor and not by any means the aircraft." (10:8) Arab leaders' increased confidence in their aircraft and pilots allowed them to send their air forces into battle against a technologically superior enemy. The mainstay of the Arab air defense system, however, was in its SAM and AA weapons. SA-2/3/6/7 surface-to-air missiles and ZSU-23-4 antiaircraft guns were integrated into a lethal network that protected Arab ground forces against the IAF from 0-60,000 feet. (13:163)

Israel, on the other hand, had based its overall strategy on its advanced F-4, A-4, Mirage, Nesher and Super Mystere fighter/bombers. Extensive electronic countermeasures (ECM),

missiles and the proven skills of their pilots created complete confidence in the Israeli leadership that the IAF could handle any threat from its neighbors. IAF leaders planned to gain air superiority immediately and then assist their land forces in close air support to stop the enemy attack. Israeli strategy was founded on the fact that the geographical defense mechanisms and modern intelligence systems would give it time to mobilize its reserve forces. Once the mobilized forces engaged, the IAF could then take on deep interdiction attacks following Israeli doctrine of taking the battle to enemy territory. Although this static defense strategy proved to be almost disastrous to the Israelis, it did lay the foundation for proving the importance of having a flexible air power strategy.

With no real industrial base, the Arabs had to rely on the Soviets for all their equipment and logistics support. They could not fight a prolonged war without Soviet support so their strategy was based on a short war. This was also true of Israel, who relied primarily on U.S. support. However, Israel had developed a limited technology improvement base and had modified many of its aircraft to meet its requirements. (13:147)

The Arab leaders planned to use their virtually unlimited manpower to their advantage in massive ground attacks because they knew the small country of Israel could never withstand the human losses. Israeli leaders were very sensitive to human losses and realized that they could not win a war of attrition.

CHAPTER V

SUCCESS VS. FAILURE--THE SNYDER MODEL

By breaking the 1973 Arab-Israeli War into the five variables of the Snyder Model, leaders and strategists alike can learn valuable lessons to be applied in future planning.

Technology

One of the most prominent factors in the October war was the battle of technology. The IAF relied on its superior technology in aircraft as the cornerstone of Israel's defense strategy. The IAF was greatly surprised in the first few days of the war as it tried to stop the heavy armor attack protected by the Arab air defense system and suffered its heaviest losses. The IAF had some success against the SA-2/3s but it had no high tech ECM against the new SA-6 which had an undetectable continuous wave radar. The SA-6 was the latest and best of all the surface-to-air missiles the Russians had at the time and were better than anything the U.S. had encountered in Vietnam. The Israelis took heavy losses, especially on the Syrian front, from the SA-6's with some estimates as high as 25 aircraft in the first 100 hours of the war. (13:151-153)

As Snyder tells us in his model, "The benefits of technology are often fleeting, however, negated by changes in doctrine or offsetting technological advances." (18:82) On the second day of the war the Israelis suffered heavy casualties against the Syrian air defense network as they pursued their defense suppression tactics. Noting their heavy losses and lack of success, the IAF decided to do an end run around the air defense systems located just behind the main battlefield and attack deep strategic targets in Syria. (13:152-153) In addition, the Israelis devised new tactics using chaff and observer helicopters to defeat the SA-6 missiles where

possible. Using several aircraft as decoys, the Israelis would fly into the SA-6 zones causing the Syrians to launch their missiles. As the missiles launched, the Israelis flooded the area with chaff while the observation helicopters visually identified the launch sites. Then the Israelis sent additional fighters to attack the SA-6 launch pads before the Syrians could reload the launchers. As the war progressed, Israeli ground forces were used to destroy the Egyptian and Syrian air defense systems while new countermeasures from the U.S. helped the IAF avoid being shot down by the SA-6 missiles. (13:156) The ability of the IAF to rapidly change its aircraft weapons loads to attack strategic targets away from the Arab air defense network helped defeat the enemy's technological advantage.

The advanced technology in the Arab air defense weapons also posed a problem for the Arab forces. Not all the Arab aircraft had the appropriate Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) equipment and many were shot down in the dense air defense system in the heat of battle. (13:164) Since the Arabs didn't match their new technology with their aircraft systems, they could not fly reconnaissance sorties over the battlefield effectively. This key technological error enabled the Israelis to cross the Suez undetected. (2:246) In fact, whenever the Egyptian Air Force flew sorties over the battlefield, the IAF was able to operate because the Egyptian Air Defense system was turned off. (1:324) The IAF could not defeat this technological advantage alone but was flexible enough in its mission tactics to continue the strategic fight until the technological advantage could be neutralized. Not until after Israeli ground forces crossed the Canal and took out the air defense sites was the IAF really protected from the Egyptian missiles. (8:54)

Doctrine

Doctrine is another critical area that must be understood in order to realize the importance of flexibility when applying military force. Doctrine is described as the "fundamental principles by which the military forces. . . guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application." (18:82) The Arab attack on Israel was based on its basic belief that they must recapture the occupied territories to regain Arab dignity and bring peace on terms favorable to the Arabs. In this respect, the Arab military was successful in supporting national doctrine. But the military did not achieve all of its objectives, partially because of its inflexibility after the war began. The war planning, military buildup, and the element of deception and surprise supported the Arab doctrine superbly. However, after the war began, the Arab land forces were restricted to the cover of their air defense systems at the bridge heads and could not push forward to the strategic mountain passes without that cover. (12:53) Also, the Egyptian Air Force kept its aircraft either in its shelters or behind the main battlefield for defense of the homeland and to prevent fratricide through its own air defense system. Therefore, this flaw in the Egyptian's doctrinal concept allowed the Israeli crossing of the Suez to go undetected until it was too late. In this case, it appears the Egyptians were too rigid in following their own doctrine and did not seem to use good judgment in its application.

In contrast, the Israeli doctrine of strategic defense, although flawed, was flexible enough to provide victory on the battlefield after the war began. Israel quickly discovered that sole dependence on the IAF to quickly gain air superiority and then devote its efforts fully to stopping an enemy land force was no longer valid. The technological gains in the Arab air defense systems and their new aircraft shelters proved that the IAF was not omnipotent and that other strategies must be available to meet Israel's defense needs. The Israelis relied on their strategic defense mechanisms in place, putting most of their faith in only one doctrinal concept or plan.

But flexibility in their doctrinal concepts after the war began allowed the Israelis to rapidly adapt to the changing environment.

Political-Military Relations

Political leaders have many resources available to them to make decisions in running their countries. The military is only one of those resources but its application and operation is very complicated. Therefore, it is essential to have military experts that can properly advise the civilian leadership on when and how to adequately use military force to obtain political objectives. It is also essential for military leaders to understand the problems civilian leaders encounter when making decisions to employ the military resource. Good political-military relations are essential to coordinating any country's overall war effort. (18:82)

Israeli leadership had been informed on several occasions by military intelligence personnel that an attack was imminent by the Arabs. Although the civilian leadership heeded the warnings, it chose not to take decisive action due to counterbalancing interests and other non-military inputs. Also, on 6 October, the Israeli Chief of Staff asked for permission to carry out a preemptive strike against Syria. The request was denied by the Prime Minister and the IAF was told to change its weapons loads from offensive to defensive: two prime examples of the need for a good political-military relationship. (2:58-60) In either case, if Israel had listened to its military, it would have been labeled as the aggressor and world opinion would have been against it. On the other hand, the IAF was flexible enough to work with and adapt its political leaders decisions.

The political-military relationship on the Arab side was most critical in preparing for the war. The guidance, political and economic support, and the timing of the initial attack was

provided by the civilian leadership and was the key to initial Arab successes. President Sadat and his political leaders worked masterfully at clandestinely bringing together a coalition of Arab forces over a period of time. This time was used and needed by the Arab forces to properly prepare for war. Every detail of the Arab military leaders' war plans were carefully worked out with their political leaders in order to provide the best international environment for surprise and success. But as the war progressed, the political-military relationship began to break down. President Sadat took a very cautious approach to moving his Egyptian troops too far forward. His Army Commander, General Shazli, wanted to drive the Egyptian bridgehead, with its air umbrella, out to the mountain passes to keep the Israeli reserves from getting to the battle in the Sinai. Had the political leaders been flexible enough to allow their forces to deviate from standard Soviet war fighting doctrine, the Israelis may have never reached the Suez Canal. (2:248-250)

National Style

A country's national style develops over its entire history. Its people and their culture and ethnic backgrounds shape a country in one way. In addition, a country's geography and its previous experiences shape it in another way. This national style directly influences a country's attitude toward war and its strategy used in fighting a war. (18:83)

Israel's distinct history gives it a national style unlike any other country in the world. The persecution of the Jews in Europe and the subsequent establishment of their own country has given the Jewish people great pride in Israel. The entire population of the country mobilizes in time of war to defend their country with a ferocity found in no other nation. Their success in previous battles also gave them confidence in their ability to dominate the battle field, both on

the ground and in the air. Overconfidence sent the IAF headlong into the Arab air defense network resulting in severe aircraft losses and, more importantly, the loss of more than 50 of its hunter squadron pilots. (15:294)

The Arabs also have a long history that brings all Arab nations together. In most wars with the Israelis, however, the Arab soldier was looked upon as weak and one who would run rather than fight. In addition, the Arab nations have feuded in the past for leadership in the Arab world and this has divided them as a team. The October War was an exception. The national pride of the Arabs was high and they gained much of their dignity back for the way they fought the Israelis. This pride caused President Sadat to refuse to a cease-fire until the Arab objectives were reached. (2:138)

Leadership

Leadership is the chain that binds all the other variables of strategy together. As Snyder tells us, "Skillful, imaginative leaders oversee the development of effective strategies." (18:83) It was Israel's political and military leaders skillfully working together that enabled that small country to defend itself in the 1973 War against overwhelming odds. General Peled, Chief of the IAF, and his staff provided the flexibility the Israelis needed to adapt to a two front war. For example, on the second day of the war, as the IAF was preparing to go on the offensive against Syrian air defense positions, the Syrians launched a massive armored attack. The IAF changed its weapons loads and went to the aid of the ground forces. (2:99-102) On the Egyptian front, the Israeli ground forces led by General Sharon, knocked out several SAM sites and opened a corridor for the IAF. The IAF, in turn, started attacking the Egyptian armored divisions blocking the advance of the Israeli ground forces. (2:274-75) Israel's strong, imaginative leaders like General Sharon,

who saw the urgent need to punch through the Egyptian defenses and establish a bridgehead on the west bank made it all possible.

President Sadat and General Ismail built a magnificent war plan prior to the war, but the Arab leadership failed to be flexible enough during the war to seize the initiative and carry out that plan.

Time magazine summarized the Egyptian leadership best:

> They failed to exploit their initial advantage in
> the Sinai by pushing out from their bridgehead
> toward the mountain passes....no matter what the overall strategy calls for there is no substitute
> for officers who can take advantage of unexpected battle field opportunities by improvising new
> tactics. (4:63)

The biggest flaw in the Arab strategy was their leaders' inability to deviate from the their basic war plan to allow their commanders flexibility on the battlefield. Both Syrian and Egyptian leaders were either unable or unwilling to move their key air defense systems forward with their ground forces. They also failed to be flexible in using their air forces for anything but air defense of their homelands. Although they achieved much of their political objectives, they did it at great human and economic expense. From the Egyptian point of view, it may have been worth it. The chance of these kind of human losses being acceptable to the U.S. in the future is extremely slim.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Both the Arab and Israeli war fighting doctrines and strategies were well thought out. The Arab's took the initiative and surprised Israel in the beginning. But they lost the momentum and failed to take advantage of their initial gains. Israel's leaders, however, were flexible enough to adapt their war plans and tactics to the situation and regain the initiative in just a few days.

The Arabs were caught off guard with their own initial success. They were unprepared or unable to move their key air defense system with the same speed as their advancing armored divisions. Had the Egyptians pressed on to the strategic mountain passes in the first few days of the war, the outcome of the war could have been entirely in the Arabs favor. First, Egypt would have gained the high ground which would have been a great advantage at the peace talks or in future conflicts with Israel. Second, putting the pressure on Israel in the Sinai would have relieved some of the pressure on Syria in the Golan Heights. Since Israel had waited so long to mobilize its reserves, the Arabs could have completed a Blitzkrieg to the outskirts of Israel that would have saved thousands of lives in the process. By using their air forces in an offensive role, they could have forced the IAF to defend its homeland while the Arab ground forces advanced through the Sinai and the Golan Heights.

The key to Israel's success was the ability of the IAF to gain air superiority quickly and then concentrate on delaying the enemy ground forces until full Israeli mobilization could occur. The flexibility of the IAF to quickly adapt to new threats, challenges, and surprises by the Arab forces allowed the Israelis to implement their warfighting plans successfully. Once the reserves arrived, Israel was able to follow its doctrine of fighting on one front at a time and succeeded in crushing

the attacking Syrian forces. At the same time, the powerful IAF was able to dictate events on the battlefield and keep the Egyptian ground forces under their air defense umbrella. In addition, the IAF kept the Arab air forces in a largely defensive attitude. Because the Egyptians failed to exploit their initial advantage, the Israelis were able to take the battle to the enemy's territory, also key to their war fighting doctrine.

A strong and flexible air force proved extremely effective in the outcome of the 1973 Middle East War. However, it must be noted that victory came at a huge cost to the Israelis and the war was not won by the Air Force alone. Had the Israelis used the Snyder Model to analyze their strategic defense plans, they may well have identified many shortfalls. Then they could have planned and trained for possible new threats, building more flexibility into their military forces.

Good basic doctrine and strategy are important in preparing for war. However, strategists must ensure they build flexibility into their war plans to provide for innovative thinking by all military leaders. If military leaders are allowed to vary from basic doctrine and strategy in a training environment, then new ideas can develop to counter new enemy threats. Building options into basic strategy in a peacetime environment makes it much easier for the war fighter to be flexible in battle. And finally, having a force such as air power that can rapidly change to meet new threats, allows flexibility in applying a nation's warfighting strategy to be victorious. The Israeli Air Force proved in the 1973 October War that air power can provide that flexibility.

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