

MERIA

NASSER AND HIS ENEMIES: FOREIGN POLICY DECISION MAKING IN EGYPT ON THE EVE OF THE SIX-DAY WAR

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This article argues that Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser¹ neither blundered into the Six-day War, nor did he make deliberate plans to provoke conflict. Instead, in early 1967, he took actions aimed at reaping political gains, which he knew carried a high risk of precipitating military hostilities. It is suggested that Nasser's willingness to take such risks was based on his fundamental underestimation of Israel's capacity for independent and effective military action. This was largely founded on his image of America as an all-powerful adversary, although intelligence failures caused by domestic factors, including Nasser's lack of control over the Egyptian military, also played a role.

In early 1967, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser took actions aimed at reaping political gains, which he knew carried a high risk of precipitating military hostilities. Nasser's willingness to take such risks was based on his fundamental underestimation of Israel's capacity for independent and effective military action. In turn, this conception was largely founded on his image of America as an all-powerful adversary, although intelligence failures caused by domestic factors, including Nasser's lack of control over the Egyptian military, also played a role.

To explain these conclusions, this article begins by discussing the composition of Egypt's decision-making elite in order to identify those individuals whose images of the enemy are likely to have been most important. Elite images of the United States, Israel, and other perceived enemies, as evidenced in public rhetoric and private speech, are then analyzed. The crucial decisions in the crisis preceding the 1967 war are analyzed in this context, in each case examining both events and Egyptian perceptions to assess the significance of the

role played by images of the enemy in the decision-making process. The principal sources used here include memoirs,² interviews,³ public speeches and radio broadcasts,⁴ diplomatic documents,⁵ and a broad array of secondary literature.

THE DECISION-MAKING ELITE

The principal decision-maker in Egypt in 1967 was President Nasser. The cabinet met only once after May 14 for a collective discussion of the 1967 crisis, and appears to have played no major decision-making role.⁶ The Supreme Executive Committee of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU), which consisted of Nasser, Prime Minister Sidqi Suleiman, and several veteran members of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC)--Abdel Hakim Amer, Zakaria Mohieddin, Anwar Sadat, Hussein Shafei and Ali Sabri⁷-- was more important.⁸ Nasser valued the opinions and advice of Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad, but the Foreign Ministry was repeatedly bypassed during the crisis.⁹ The editor of Al-Ahram, Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, Nasser's

close friend and adviser, was also very influential.¹⁰

The defense establishment played an important independent foreign policy role. In particular, Field Marshal Amer was able to question and even reverse Nasser's foreign policy decisions. Nasser was unwilling to move against Amer or contradict him in public. Since 1962, the armed forces had been substantially independent of Nasser's direct interference.¹¹ Amer promoted officers loyal to himself, so that, for example, the Chief of Staff, General Muhammad Fawzi, known to be a supporter of Nasser, was largely bypassed in favor of General Abdel Mohsen Murtagi, the head of Ground Forces Command.¹² Other key figures included Air Force chief Sidqi Mahmoud, the naval commander Admiral Suleiman Izzat, and most importantly Defense Minister General Shams Badran, who was Amer's close friend and "leading hatchet man."¹³ Foreign policy decision-making in the area of defense was divided between Nasser and Amer, necessitating careful consideration of individual decisions to identify who was actually responsible for them.

*Images of the Enemy*¹⁴

From Nasser's point of view in late 1966 and early 1967, there were three main enemies: Imperialism, represented by the United States and Britain, was linked to Zionist Israel, the "imperialist base in the heart of the Arab homeland,"¹⁵ and to the "Arab reactionaries." This conception is repeatedly expressed in Nasser's own speeches, and was also commonplace in the wider political discourse.¹⁶ All three groups were represented as being closely connected:

We can see that imperialism coordinates operations with both sides--reaction on one side and Israel on the other.... And since imperialism is the origin and the source of planning, the two sides receiving its support and arms cannot by any means be two conflicting sides but must be two cooperating sides.¹⁷

Imperialism, especially that practiced by the United States, was seen as by far the most powerful enemy up to and during the early stages of the 1967 crisis, while the other hostile states were said to be "only satellites spinning in the U.S. orbit and following its steps."¹⁸ In Nasser's crisis speeches of 1967, "the West" is portrayed as consisting primarily of the United States and Britain. It is deceitful and knowingly hypocritical, despising and ignoring the Arabs, and disregarding their legitimate aspirations and rights. In addition, it is the staunch political ally of its creation, Israel, supporting its propaganda, taking its side and providing it with military equipment.

The United States

Nasser saw the United States as his real opponent, out to destroy him and the Egyptian revolution: "The battle we are fighting is not an easy one; it is a battle in which we are fighting America, the greatest power in the world."¹⁹ He perceived it as having strongly hostile intentions towards the Arabs, especially in terms of its constant support for Israel. Indeed, he went so far as to announce their identity: "Israel today is the United States."²⁰ Although Nasser had also become suspicious of Kennedy's true intentions,²¹ he was on especially bad terms with his successor, Lyndon Johnson, who Nasser saw as being strongly pro-Israeli.²² During the latter's presidency, relations deteriorated, largely due to the United

States' perceived attempt to gain political profit from Egypt's economic problems and to its arms sales to Israel and the conservative Arab states.²³

Thus Nasser came to believe in a "wider conspiracy" between imperialism, Zionism, and reaction--"only different names for the same thing"--which explained "the coordinated, hostile movements against our nation."²⁴ He identified a worldwide imperialist onslaught against progressive regimes behind the replacement of Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sukarno in Indonesia by right wing, pro-Western figures, and the interventions in the Dominican Republic, the Congo, and Vietnam. He suggested that the United States had created Israel and fostered the Islamic Alliance²⁵ in order to control the Arab world, and that the CIA was planning his own assassination for the same purpose. Although Nasser was intensely disliked in certain U.S. government circles by the mid-1960s, it seems most improbable that there was an actual plot against him. However, the idea became so fixed in his mind that American denials were of no avail.²⁶

The state-controlled media echoed Nasser's insistence that the United States was the primary enemy and conspirator. By February 24, 1967, Heikal, in his series of eleven *al-Ahram* editorials on the conflict between Egypt and America, was writing that the United States had developed a "sinister dangerous complex" consisting of "economic and psychological warfare, the hatching of plots and assassinations, and a basic and fundamental reliance on secret activities."²⁷ Even at the height of the pre-war crisis with Israel, the Voice of the Arabs' radio station retained its priorities:

We challenge you, Israel. No, in fact, we do not address the challenge to you, Israel, because you are unworthy

of our challenge. But we challenge you, America.²⁸

However, despite this belief in its hostile intentions, it does not appear that Nasser expected the United States to launch a conventional military attack on Egypt. The situation in Vietnam was taking up so much of the United States' resources and attention that it seemed unlikely to embroil itself in yet another regional conflict.

With regard to the issue of relative capability, it was obvious to most members of the Egyptian regime that the military strength of the United States was vastly greater than that of all of the Arab states combined. Nasser stated during an international press conference on May 28 that he had not even taken U.S. forces into account, because:

If I started considering how strong America is and how strong I am, even before I started my calculations I should come to the conclusion that America has air, land, and sea superiority over us.²⁹

He went on to say that Egypt would certainly defend itself with great determination if the United States intervened, even suggesting that he would destroy the Suez Canal. Defense Minister Badran, on the other hand, apparently replied to a colleague's query about the possibility of intervention by the U.S. Sixth Fleet that "we have a weapon that can deal it a lethal blow."³⁰ His hearers concluded he had received Soviet arms or assurances of support on his recent visit to Moscow, although it is possible, given the incongruity of the boast, that he did not mean it seriously. There is at least no evidence that other members of the military establishment shared his confidence.

Israel

In Nasser's public speeches and private conversations of 1967, Israel's intentions are consistently portrayed as hostile, threatening, deceitful, and aggressive. In his Unity Day broadcast, for example, he referred to Israel as "the original enemy which is a manifestation of perpetual aggression."³¹ As such, its nature was seen as fundamentally expansionist.³² Israel was also usually portrayed as subordinate to external forces: in particular, the international Zionist movement, Western imperialism, and the United States. Heikal questioned the extent of this subordination in *al-Ahram* on January 14, 1963, writing that "Israel is an instrument but not an instrument without a will of its own."³³ However, such an opinion was uncommon. The operational image of Israel's relative military capability held by the Egyptian ruling elite is more ambiguous. The defense establishment thought that they could defeat Israel in May 1967, and said so in private and in public. At his trial for conspiracy after losing the war, on February 24, 1968, Badran testified:

We were confident that our army was ready and that Israel could not attack because intelligence estimates pointed to the fact that we were superior in armored weapons, artillery and air power. It was calculated that Israel would not walk into an open grave.³⁴

When the decision was being taken to close the Strait, Amer, asked by Nasser if the armed forces were ready for war, apparently pointed to his neck and said, "On my own head be it, boss! Everything's in tiptop shape."³⁵ Furthermore, in early June, he told the foreign minister, "If Israel actually carried out any military action against us I could, with only one-third of

our forces, reach Beersheba."³⁶ Amer's subordinates seem to have shared his opinion. British Field Marshal Montgomery visiting the Egyptian armed forces on May 12 gave a blunt warning that they would lose a war with Israel, to which General Murtagi replied that they had the latest Russian equipment.³⁷ Murtagi expressed a similar opinion to a domestic audience, reporting from Sinai that "Our forces are fully prepared to take the battle outside the UAR borders."³⁸ Internal propaganda convinced most military officers that their capabilities were superior to those of the Israelis.³⁹

This appears to have been a major misperception. Due to economic problems, Egypt had been rapidly falling behind in the arms race since 1965.⁴⁰ Israeli and foreign intelligence agencies thought that no confrontation would be possible for Egypt before at least 1970,⁴¹ and Johnson was advised by U.S. intelligence officials that Israel could quickly defeat Egypt or any combination of Arab states.⁴² However, it appears that the Egyptian intelligence service, focusing on the quantity of arms and troops rather than quality, training, leadership, and morale, seriously underestimated relative Israeli strength. Arab tacticians in general agreed that Israel would be unable to fight a long war, and that there would be "a crushing military advantage once Arab military operations against Israel are conducted according to a single, co-ordinated plan."⁴³ Consequently, public opinion inside Egypt was entirely convinced that Israel was weak, divided, and afraid to fight without outside support. This was the belief that had long been promulgated by Heikal in *al-Ahram*:

Imperialism has built up an image of Israel as a ferocious power which no Arab could challenge. But this is a

myth, because the UAR can eliminate Israel single-handed. The problem is the forces protecting Israel and their military presence.⁴⁴

It was also a theme emphasized in Nasser's crisis speeches, which portrayed Israel as militarily boastful, deluded by false past successes, and ripe for destruction by the Arab nation.

However, it is difficult to tell whether Nasser really believed this to be the case. It is possible, as Heikal suggests that since Nasser had limited access to the armed forces, Amer was able to deceive him with regard to Egypt's relative strength. At their May 24 meeting, Nasser told U Thant that his military chiefs had assured him that they were ready,⁴⁵ and Mahmoud Riad reports Nasser as saying, after the war, that Amer had told him he could hold off Israel with one-third of his strength.⁴⁶ Other members of the regime also seem to have been convinced. When Sadat, then speaker of the National Assembly, heard of the Israeli attack, his reaction was, "Well, they'll be taught a lesson they won't forget."⁴⁷ Likewise, Salah Bassiouny of the Foreign Ministry, hearing a military friend predict disaster, was deeply shocked and did not believe him.⁴⁸

The alternative possibility is that Nasser knew Israel to be stronger than Egypt, but was bluffing and did not really expect to fight. Mohieddin, for example, said that Nasser had ways of knowing what really was going on in the armed forces and knew that they were inferior in quality.⁴⁹ This should have been reinforced by the March 1967 report of the Unified Arab Command, which emphasized the poor defensive capability of Arab states. Moreover, Nasser had often expressed his awareness that the time was not yet ripe to fight Israel, and that "the way back to Palestine is hard and

long."⁵⁰ Heikal reported him as telling King Faisal in August 1965, "I believe that the conflict between us and Israel is a matter of a hundred years."⁵¹

The key to this apparent contradiction between Nasser's statements and behavior seems to be that Nasser's belief in Israeli strength was predicated upon two assumptions: that the Arabs were divided, and that Israel was supported by powerful external forces. He told the Beirut publication *al-Hawadis* on March 26, 1967, "We could annihilate Israel in twelve days were the Arabs to form a united front." Israel, when isolated from the aid of global imperialism, was consistently portrayed as weak. For example, it was generally believed that Israel had only survived the Suez conflict with the help of Britain and France. The United States had taken the place of the European powers as Israel's protector. Thus Nasser's operational image of Israeli capability should be described less in terms of objective strength or weakness, and more in terms of dependency. On Palestine Day in 1967, he explained, "Israel could not live for one day without U.S. economic and military aid."⁵² This belief was expressed during the shocked early hours of June 5 in the widespread conviction that the United States was fighting on the Israeli side.⁵³

Key Decisions

In order to use a decision-by-decision approach to explaining the importance of images of the enemy prior to the Six-day War, it is first necessary to establish that the whole course of events was not planned in advance by the Egyptian regime.⁵⁴ U.S. and other foreign representatives believed at the time that the Egyptians had a plan, due to small indications of forethought and organization such as the speed of the

movement into Sinai, and the atmosphere of overwhelming confidence in Cairo.⁵⁵ However, subsequent Egyptian accounts emphasize that in fact there was a high degree of confusion, and decision-making was frequently improvisational. The evidence of Nasser's own speeches is mixed. On May 22 he asserted, "We had no plan prior to May 13,"⁵⁶ though four days later he implied the opposite:

Recently we felt we are strong enough, that if we were to enter a battle with Israel, with God's help, we could triumph. On this basis, we decided to take actual steps.⁵⁷

However, it seems likely that, in front of an Arab audience, Nasser was merely trying to take credit for the inevitable.⁵⁸ Although the Egyptian military certainly had contingency plans for this sort of situation, the specific occasion seems to have come as a surprise.

THE MOBILIZATION IN THE SINAI

The first important decision made by the Egyptian regime in the crisis preceding the 1967 War was the mobilization of the Egyptian armed forces and concentration of troops in the Sinai desert. At the same time, Chief of Staff General Fawzi, was sent to investigate the apparent threat to Syria and assure the Damascus regime of Egyptian support.⁵⁹ The decision seems to have been made late on May 13 at Nasser's house, by Nasser, Amer, and Sadat, who had just returned from Moscow.⁶⁰ The following morning, Amer also met with Badran, Fawzi, and the heads of the various sections of the armed forces in order to decide military questions. The aim appears to have been to deter Israel from aggression, following the pattern of the mobilization of 1960,⁶¹ rather than to start a war.⁶² This is

confirmed by the fact that Egyptian troops passed through Cairo in ostentatious procession, rather than secretly, and were deployed in the Sinai according to the defensive "Conqueror" plan-- although offensive operations were not ruled out.⁶³ Nasser himself later said he estimated the likelihood of war at only 20% at this time.⁶⁴

It was generally stated that the key trigger for this decision was the receipt, on May 13, of a report that Israeli troops were massing in force on the Syrian border. Such reports had been received before, but this one was more convincing. First, circumstantial detail on the nature and location of the thirteen brigades was provided. Second, there were fewer troops than usual in the Israeli Independence Day parade in Jerusalem on May 15, which was intended as a gesture to reduce provocation, but interpreted, due to the rigidity of the Arab image of an aggressive Israel, as evidence they were busy elsewhere.⁶⁵ Third, and most importantly, the information was received through several channels, given particular emphasis by the USSR. The Soviet ambassador provided a detailed report to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry; Vladimir Semenov, the Soviet deputy foreign minister, gave similarly specific information to Sadat at the Moscow airport, and the story may also have been passed directly from the Soviet to the Egyptian intelligence service.⁶⁶

Nevertheless, this report alone seems insufficient to explain the Egyptian decision, especially since it was soon contradicted. Fawzi was sent to Syria to investigate on May 14, but he found no evidence of abnormal troop concentrations, and was told by the Syrian air force chief that the report was merely based on threats and past raids. He reported fully to Amer on his return to Cairo on May 15.⁶⁷ In addition, the Israelis repeatedly denied--through the

U.S, the USSR, and a secret channel previously used by Mossad—that unusual numbers of troops were present on the border.⁶⁸ The United States confirmed this. However, due to the fixed Egyptian belief in Israeli and American hostility, neither was believed, as the foreign minister later said to UN Secretary-General U Thant:

[The] U.S. Chargé told us that there were no concentrations but would not give us any guarantees. We were back in a similar situation as existed in 1956 when the U.S. ambassador gave us similar information, and yet we were attacked.⁶⁹

Naturally, such denials were not received until the Egyptian troops had begun to move into Sinai, when to withdraw them would have meant a loss of face. As Badran put it, "Everything had got escalated and we can't just turn the key and get all the troops back as if nothing happened."⁷⁰ However, this does not explain the continuation of the military build-up, which was perceived as increasingly threatening by Israel, in late May.⁷¹

It is therefore suggested that the real reason for the mobilization was less the presence or otherwise of troop concentrations, and more the image of Israel as having aggressive intentions, which caused contrary evidence to be discounted or ignored. Burdett even suggests the Soviet report was never taken literally, but seen to represent a political rather than a military reality.⁷² It is certainly true that, since Israel could mobilize within hours, the lack of troop concentrations was not in itself significant. The perception that Israel intended to attack Syria may therefore have been more closely related to threats uttered by Israeli decision-makers. For example, General Yitzhak Rabin gave a

press briefing on May 11 that was apparently misquoted and misinterpreted as a threat to occupy Damascus and overthrow the Syrian regime.⁷³ Prime Minister Levi Eshkol also threatened the Arab rulers with drastic measures:

We do not recognize the limitations they endeavor to impose on our acts of response... If they try to sow unrest on our border--unrest will come to theirs.⁷⁴

When even international observers thought that an Israeli attack might be forthcoming,⁷⁵ Nasser and the Egyptian media naturally took such words as evidence of aggressive intentions toward Syria. However, even an Israeli threat to Syria was not necessarily a sufficient reason for action. Syria was no longer part of the UAR, as it had been when Nasser mobilized in 1960, and the Egypt-Syria defense agreement did not mandate a response to normal raids, just as none had been made the previous month when six Syrian planes were shot down. The statements of Israeli leaders and reported troop movements seemed more threatening because they were perceived in the context of a U.S. conspiracy against Egypt, attacking Nasser's prestige by showing that he was unable to protect Syria. Bassiouny claims that the Foreign Ministry saw the reports as credible, because Israel had reached the level at which it could find strategic alliance with the United States.⁷⁶ Similarly, on May 12, Heikal had written the last article in his series about the clash between Egypt and America, in which he depicted the United States as finally prepared to deal the coup de grace to Egypt's government. In this atmosphere of danger, the heavy emphasis laid by the USSR on the warning of troop movements seemed like an

opportunity not to be missed. It implied an invitation for Egypt to confront her enemies with Soviet support, without which the United States was utterly unassailable.⁷⁷

The Expulsion of UNEF

The next decision made by the Egyptian regime was to expel UNEF from the Sinai. On May 16, General Fawzi wrote to the UNEF commander:

For the sake of complete security of all UN troops which install Observation Posts along our borders, I request that you issue your orders to withdraw all these troops immediately.⁷⁸

The UN's commander had no authority to agree, and referred the matter to the secretary-general, who made it clear that UNEF could be expelled but would not stand aside to allow the resumption of hostilities. Therefore, Foreign Minister Riad sent him a formal request "to terminate the existence of UNEF on the soil of the UAR and in the Gaza Strip."⁷⁹ Again, although Nasser does not seem to have intended war, he acknowledged that this action raised its probability--to anything from 20 to 80 percent, depending on the source.⁸⁰ Fawzi himself apparently failed to realize the significance at the time,⁸¹ but Riad claims to have become aware of the possibility of a military confrontation immediately upon reading Fawzi's letter.⁸² The UN commander thought it would make war inevitable, and was cheerfully told by his Egyptian liaison, Brigadier General Sharkawy, "We have arrived at this decision after much deliberation and are prepared for anything. If there is war, we shall next meet at Tel Aviv."⁸³

There is some ambiguity regarding precisely who took these decisions and

what they intended. Nasser certainly ordered both letters to be written. He planned the first on the morning of May 14 in consultation with his advisor for foreign affairs, delegating the task to Amer, who gave instructions to General Fawzi. However, when Nasser saw the English version, he displayed concern about the wording, since he wanted to make it quite clear that UNEF could remain in Gaza and Sharm al-Shaykh. He apparently asked Amer to change "withdraw" to "redeploy" and cross out "all" before "these troops." Amer reported that this was not possible, as the letter was already being delivered.⁸⁴ Therefore it seems likely that, two days later, Nasser ordered Riad to request the full withdrawal reluctantly, with no alternative that would avoid a loss of face. In the long term, he had wanted to get rid of UNEF, but at this juncture it led to confused changes of plan and raised new political issues for which the regime was not prepared.⁸⁵ However, once the lines had been drawn, he rejoiced with the Egyptian people at the expulsion, and he never had any intention of seeking a graceful way to back down, advising U Thant not to send an appeal that would certainly be refused.⁸⁶

On the other hand, it seems possible that Amer intended the complete termination of UNEF from the beginning. He had suggested it twice previously,⁸⁷ and the Egyptian army, which he controlled, preempted the withdrawal, demanding access not only to the border posts but also to Sharm al-Shaykh.⁸⁸ The occupation or otherwise of Sharm al-Shaykh was the crucial difference between the withdrawal and the redeployment of UNEF, since the military seems never to have considered the option of leaving it empty and vulnerable to Israeli attack. Amer apparently decided to occupy Sharm al-Shaykh on the evening of May 16, having changed his mind twice.

Troops were to be sent as soon as possible, arriving by May 18.⁸⁹ Since Amer seems to have been aware that the occupation of Sharm al-Shaykh would force the closure of the Tiran Straits, provoking Israel,⁹⁰ this suggests that he may already have planned war in mid-May.

Nasser, by contrast, was looking primarily to increase the political gains from his previous move. While Amer and his military supporters perceived Israel as the primary enemy, and its military inferiority as the key factor determining action, Nasser's calculations were more complex, since his emphasis on the hostility of the United States caused him to pay greater attention to the global situation. Unlike Amer, who apparently never seriously considered the option of partial UNEF withdrawal, Nasser was probably not committed to the occupation of Sharm al-Shaykh until at least May 17, when U Thant refused merely to evacuate the border posts.⁹¹ However, after that date, he must have approved it. The main negotiator with the UN military forces was General Fawzi, who was avowedly Nasser's man. On May 17, Fawzi definitely confirmed that UNEF had to withdraw from Sharm al-Shaykh, but gave them 48 hours. When the UN commander, hoping to delay the removal until Thant arrived in Cairo, then asked for three extra days, Fawzi refused, but granted him until May 22 as an act of cooperation.⁹² This particular date was almost certainly chosen because it was the day on which Nasser intended to announce the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba, which depended on an Egyptian military presence in Sharm al-Shaykh. It was therefore probably Nasser who gave the order.⁹³ He was aware of the implications, as he made clear in his speech of May 26: "Taking over Sharm al-Shaykh meant confrontation with Israel. It also meant that we were ready to enter a general

war with Israel."⁹⁴

The Closure of the Straits of Tiran

The decision to control passage through the Tiran Straits, closing the Gulf of Aqaba to Israel, was made on the morning of May 22 by a meeting of the Supreme Executive Committee, consisting of Nasser, Amer, the prime minister, and the remaining members of the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC). A vote was taken, but only the prime minister voted against closure, citing economic concerns.⁹⁵ On the evening of May 22, therefore, Nasser made a speech affirming:

Our rights and our sovereignty over the Gulf of Aqaba, which constitutes Egyptian territorial waters. Under no circumstances will we allow the Israeli flag to pass through the Gulf of Aqaba.⁹⁶

On the following day, Cairo Radio added that the president had also banned "the passage of strategic materials through the Gulf to Israel even on non-Israeli ships."

There is some controversy over whether Egyptian decision-makers believed this constituted a decision in favor of war. Israeli leaders had long reiterated that they would view the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba as a *casus belli*. Although only five Israeli vessels had passed through over the previous ten years,⁹⁷ Cairo Radio's explanation of Nasser's announcement threatened Israeli oil imports, access to Africa and Asia and, most importantly, deterrent capacity. There was the obvious precedent of 1956, when the Aqaba blockade was a key cause of the Israeli attack.⁹⁸ Officers in the Egyptian armed forces learned during training that Israel had laid down certain "red lines," including closure of the Tiran Straits.⁹⁹ Crossing these

lines would be a declaration of war.

As late as May 19, Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban had told the Soviet Ambassador, "There will be no war if the Egyptians do not attack and do not interfere with Israel's right of navigation."¹⁰⁰ Therefore, it seems certain that Nasser and Riad were being disingenuous when they expressed to U Thant on May 24 the belief that the Gulf of Aqaba was not really important to Israel.¹⁰¹ According to two of those present at the May 22 meeting, Sadat and Shafei, Nasser said then that the blockade would make war 100% certain, although in his speech of July 23, Nasser claimed his actual estimate at that time was 50% or 80%.¹⁰² It is, however, interesting that the pilots who were the original audience for Nasser's May 22 speech were apparently disappointed, because they thought he meant that considerations related to the U.S. would prevent war, and Amer had to reassure them, "don't worry children, we're going to fight."¹⁰³

The main reason for the Tiran blockade seems to have been the criticism directed at the Egyptian regime by the other Arab states, especially the Jordanians. Amman Radio asked on May 19:

Will Egypt restore its batteries and guns to close its territorial waters in the Tiran Strait to the enemy? Logic, wisdom, and nationalism make it incumbent on Egypt to do so...¹⁰⁴

Extravagant domestic propaganda had also gathered momentum and raised high expectations.¹⁰⁵ The loss of the Suez war eleven years earlier had long rankled, and there was a deep desire to wipe this defeat out. This opinion was expressed in Riad's words to Thant, "Israel will not profit from that aggression any more."¹⁰⁶

Some observers believed that Nasser never wanted to close the Gulf of Aqaba, but was forced to it by the occupation of Sharm al-Shaykh, which was in turn necessitated by the termination of UNEF.¹⁰⁷ The regime's credibility was involved. At the meeting on May 22, Amer apparently protested that his troops could not simply sit in Sharm al-Shaykh and watch the Israeli flag go past.¹⁰⁸ However, Safran denies that the closure followed inevitably from the occupation.¹⁰⁹ Even after UNEF had been asked to leave, the possibility of a blockade was hardly mentioned in the Egyptian press until it became reality. Rabin reported the testimony of Egyptian prisoners of war that Amer told a group of officers in Sinai on May 20 that the Straits would not be closed, which, even if he was lying, must have seemed plausible to his audience. Moreover, to the extent that it was a significant factor, the link between occupying Sharm al-Shaykh and closing the Tiran Straits seems to have been acknowledged earlier in the policy-making process, as outlined above—implying that the decision was taken then, rather than arrived at by accident. Nasser did not appear to feel trapped by the course of events. Indeed, U Thant, when he visited Cairo, was puzzled by Nasser's air of blissful confidence. Badran has even claimed, "Closing the Gulf was the main aim."¹¹⁰

It therefore appears that Nasser made a deliberate decision to blockade the Tiran Straits and run a high risk of war, and that decision must be explained. An important factor was the weak and apparently irresolute Israeli response to his previous provocations. In private, Eshkol had sent Nasser secret messages urging de-escalation. In public, he continued to assert Israel's peaceful intentions, call for international mediation, and avoid criticism

of Egypt. For example, in his May 22 statement to the Knesset, he stopped short of condemning the Sinai build-up.¹¹¹ This reinforced the existing image of Egyptian military superiority--if Israel wanted to avoid war, it was presumably because she thought she would lose, and if she relied on the international community, she must be too weak to stand alone. Nasser was therefore encouraged to believe Israel might not fight, especially if the United States urged a peaceful solution. At the same time, Amer was assuring him that his armed forces were more than ready to confront Israel,¹¹² and the other Arab states were seeking his leadership. If it did come to war, his prospects were looking better all the time.

The Question of Escalation

Over the following fortnight, from May 23 until the outbreak of war on June 5, the Egyptian leadership had three options. It could launch a first strike on Israel, continue to escalate the situation (forcing Israel either to attack first or to back down), or attempt to deescalate by making concessions to Israel. In the end, the Egyptian leaders seem to have chosen the second alternative. However, there are indications that the first option was under consideration and was rejected. The military command apparently urged a first strike, but later changed its mind, according to both Badran at his trial and Nasser in his meeting with U Thant.¹¹³

In the Sinai, there was deep confusion since, as late as June 5, officers were still not sure whether their purpose was offensive or defensive. While Nasser reiterated that Egypt would not strike first, tanks and planes were fully fuelled and not concealed, as if they were going to attack, implying that "the political decision did not match with the military one."¹¹⁴ There is

some evidence that an order was given for an offensive on May 27, which was then cancelled, due to the insistence of the United States and USSR that neither side should strike the first blow.¹¹⁵ Thereafter, according to Badran, "The situation was turned from attacking to defense," which was the cause of all the confusion.¹¹⁶

Oren has attempted to reconstruct Amer's changing intentions, based on Egyptian military memoirs.¹¹⁷ Replacing the established, defensive 'Conqueror' plan, Amer apparently introduced Operation 'Lion', which involved the elimination of Eilat and the acquisition of a Negev landbridge connecting Egypt to Jordan. After the closure of the Tiran Straits, he seems to have broadened objectives to include the entire Negev, with Operation 'Dawn,' the orders for which were to be issued directly from Amer's own house. Despite doubts expressed by Murtagi, Fawzi, and Sidqi Mahmoud, by May 25 everything was ready for an attack at daybreak on May 27. Fawzi implies that Amer made his plans independently and Nasser quashed them when he found out about them, which seems plausible given the evidence that Nasser and Amer were not on good terms in late May.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, Oren claims that Nasser was fully aware from the beginning but preferred to overlook the operation, canceling it a few hours before it was due only because he came to believe that Israel was forewarned. However, although Nasser gave Amer much latitude, it seems unlikely that he was prepared to allow him to start a war without taking at least a passing interest, and other evidence suggests that he never had any intention of striking first.

Indeed, all of Nasser's plans depended on the assumption that the Israelis would strike the first blow. Heikal claims that Nasser rejected the first-strike option,

because he thought it would give the United States and Israel the pretext they were looking for. International opinion would be alienated, the Soviets might withdraw their support, and the United States could enter the war on Israel's side. When Nasser met with the military commanders on June 2, he told the air force commander that Egypt had to wait for Israel to attack:

Sidqi just said 'Sir,' he said it in English, 'it will be crippling to me'.... Abdel Hakim Amer looked at Sidqi and said, 'Sidqi, do you accept the first attack or do you want to fight the United States?'¹¹⁹

It seems, therefore, that Amer had by this time accepted the political parameters within which Nasser was working, especially as regards his image of the United States. Badran also says that he tried to persuade Amer to allow a small first strike in order to provoke a war, but Amer unwillingly refused because of Nasser's wishes.¹²⁰

However, if the Egyptian regime had no intention of attacking first, neither did it make any great effort to defuse tensions with Israel. There were some minor concessions. In addition to the reiterated promise not to fire the first shot, Nasser agreed with U Thant to accept a two-week moratorium on action in the Strait if Israel did the same, and to refer the issue of passage to the International Court of Justice-- neither of which was acceptable to Israel. A British Foreign Office Telegram sent on June 2 optimistically noted "signs that the Egyptians were already tending to modify the application of their blockade."¹²¹ More significantly, on June 3, the U.S. envoy Charles Yost and Foreign Minister Riad set a date for the U.S. government to receive a visit from Vice-

President Mohieddin. This seems to have revived the hope in Egypt that the superpowers might compel Israel to accept the situation, and lead to a military relaxation. General Noufal reports that on that day, "We were ordered to deescalate and to get back to our offices."¹²² Nevertheless, Nasser's small concessions do not suggest that he was making a concerted effort to avoid war. The appearance of reasonableness kept the international community from turning against him, while every delay was to his advantage, since it gave Egypt time to complete its military preparations and coordinate with the other Arabs. Israel, by contrast, could not afford to sustain total mobilization for long.

In fact, certain actions taken by Nasser seemed designed to escalate the situation still further. On May 29, he gave King Hussein of Jordan permission to come to Cairo, and the Jordanian-Egyptian Joint Defense Agreement signed the following day certainly increased the risk of war. The Arabs had crossed another of Israel's "red lines" by explicitly encircling the Jewish state and giving Egypt control of its most vulnerable border. Indeed, Shimon Peres said that the key factor in Israel's decision to fight was:

[Seeing the behavior of] Nasser and Hussein at Cairo Airport. This was an historic and crucial kiss.... We were now surrounded by a sort of banana [shaped front] filled with Russian weapons.¹²³

In addition, Nasser used increasingly belligerent rhetoric, which worsened the crisis by making the issue one of the rights of Palestine--and thus, implicitly, the existence of Israel. On May 22 he suggested that peace could not mean ignoring "the

rights of the Palestinian people" and announced to Israel, "You are welcome [to attack], we are ready for war."¹²⁴ On May 28 he declared, "The rights of the people of Palestine must be restored. We accept no basis for coexistence with Israel."¹²⁵ By June 4, his tone had become even more triumphant:

We are, with God's help, advancing along the road towards our rights and the rights of the people of Palestine, and God willing, we shall be victorious.¹²⁶

Although all of these threats were explicitly conditional on Israeli aggression,¹²⁷ this could have provided small comfort when Nasser was also stating that "the mere existence of Israel is an aggression."¹²⁸

This raises the controversial question of whether Nasser actually expected war. He seems, throughout, to have been in two minds on this issue, making contradictory statements. The UN commander, meeting him on May 24, says Nasser clearly understood "that a continued blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba would eventually force Israel to take aggressive action," but he also claims Nasser believed Israel would not fight without U.S. help, which would not be forthcoming.¹²⁹ Nasser's confidant Heikal proclaimed the inevitability of an armed clash with Israel in *al-Ahram* on May 26, recommending that Egypt should wait to receive the first blow. However, he also said in July 1969 that this was not then Nasser's own opinion.¹³⁰ At his May 28 press conference, Nasser said that he expected an Israeli attack "daily."¹³¹ Yet, two days later, King Hussein received the impression that Nasser did not want war, did not believe it would happen and thought there was a way out, perhaps through international intervention.¹³²

There is general agreement that on June 2, following the Israeli cabinet reshuffle, Nasser concluded war was certain, telling a meeting of the Supreme Command that he expected an attack on the air force on Monday, June 5.¹³³ By the following day, however, new doubts seemed to have arisen, since in two interviews Nasser gave to the British press on June 3, he claimed in one interview that war was imminent, and in the other that the crisis had already passed.¹³⁴ It is difficult to draw a general conclusion from so many contradictions, but the central point appears to be that Nasser was not actually sure whether a war would occur. He changed his mind frequently, but not his policies, because, in one sense, the question was unimportant. He expected military victory if war did break out, political victory if it did not.

Nasser's confidence was therefore founded not only on his belief, acquired from Amer, that the Arabs were militarily capable of defeating Israel, but also on his perceptions of the international situation. In particular, his beliefs about the stance the USSR would take are crucial to explaining his image of the degree of threat from the United States. However, his actual views on this point are often misinterpreted. Badran returned from his mission to Moscow in late May and is said to have given Nasser the false impression that the USSR would provide Egypt with military support if Israel attacked first.¹³⁵ Nasser's speech of May 26 certainly might be interpreted as expressing this opinion, which seems to have been prevalent in Cairo.¹³⁶

On the other hand, it is unlikely that Nasser himself believed it for long. As he implied at his May 28 press conference, he knew that in such a case the United States would also intervene, perhaps resulting in world nuclear war. Therefore he suggested that "if war breaks out between Israel alone

and us alone, I think that it will be restricted to this area."¹³⁷ The truth appears to be that although Badran mistook an empty compliment by the Soviet defense minister and passed it on to Nasser in time to influence his May 26 speech, the Foreign Ministry gave Nasser the true picture that very evening.¹³⁸ Nasser was not, thereafter, relying on the USSR to do more than deter American intervention, which it did--for example, by moving additional naval units to the eastern Mediterranean as a "trip-wire." Since Nasser knew that the two superpowers had been in touch at the highest levels since May 22, to avoid misunderstanding, this action may also have affected his calculations insofar as it seemed indicative of a lowered Soviet estimate of the probability of U.S. intervention.¹³⁹

Nasser's judgment that the USSR would deter American intervention made it seem less likely that Israel, viewed primarily as an instrument of the United States, would act independently. This was partly because it was not perceived to be strong enough; to a certain extent due to the fact that Nasser assumed it would follow U.S. orders. The United States was clearly emphasizing a diplomatic approach, attempting to organize an international flotilla, dubbed the "Red Sea Regatta," to break the blockade, and agreeing on June 3 that the Egyptian and American vice-presidents should exchange visits.¹⁴⁰ Indications of the American search for a peaceful solution, if they could be taken at face value, must also be indications of the fact that Israel would not strike first.¹⁴¹ However, Nasser had an established image of the United States as deeply hostile towards him personally. Therefore, he did not take these signs at face value, and did not rule out the possibility of war, according to his July 23 speech. When he received Johnson's letter of May 23,

expressing friendliness and condemning aggression, he expressed doubt as to its sincerity.¹⁴² This suspicion was reinforced by indications from the American side, such as U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Richard Nolte's estimate that the chances of Israeli attack were about fifty-fifty and the report that Johnson had told his aides, "Israel will hit them."¹⁴³ However, so deeply ingrained were the images of American hostility and Israeli dependency that these were seen as indications of U.S. duplicity rather than genuine inability to dictate to the Jewish state.

Other factors were also interpreted within the Egyptian regime as further indications of Israeli weakness. For example, Amer sent two MiG-21s to make a reconnaissance flight over Beersheba, "laughingly" announcing the panicked Israeli response to Nasser over lunch on May 28.¹⁴⁴ Similarly, on May 30, Sidqi Mahmoud told the Jordanian delegation that Egyptian squadrons had been flying into Israeli air space, unchallenged for the last few days, and that "this indicated that Israel's fear of the Egyptian air force was sufficient to prevent them from challenging it."¹⁴⁵ King Hussein, with rather different preconceptions, interpreted such forbearance as Israeli intelligence-gathering.¹⁴⁶

At the same time, Israeli rhetoric condemning the Tiran blockade and subsequent developments was relatively mild. Eshkol, in his Knesset statements and May 28 broadcast, expressed his readiness to participate in a peace effort and repeatedly called for international support and action. Although he also emphasized the strength of the IDF and, in coded terms, Israel's willingness eventually to use force, his poor delivery of the speech--the hesitant tone of voice which many interpreted as showing weakness--confirmed the

impression of irresolution, among his own people as well as the Arabs.¹⁴⁷ Even the fact that the United States counseled restraint was interpreted as an attempt to protect Israel from Arab wrath--and therefore as further evidence of her need for protection.¹⁴⁸

The Egyptian attitude was fundamentally based on the Arab belief in Israeli military inferiority. Nolte sent a U.S. Embassy telegram on May 27, explaining that Nasser:

...appears sincerely to believe Egyptians can beat Israelis if we do not intervene and his estimate is shared by every official Egyptian we have talked to.¹⁴⁹

Most other foreign observers similarly noted the confidence of the ruling elite.¹⁵⁰ This exemplifies the ability of a group to preserve a deeply ingrained image, especially one to which there is a strong emotional commitment, by ignoring or reinterpreting all evidence to the contrary. Only a sufficiently dramatic and discontinuous event, such as the Six-Day War itself, is able to invalidate such a perception.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the Egyptian elite viewed the United States as its primary enemy: Strongly hostile, much more powerful than Egypt, and the head of a conspiracy involving Israel and the "reactionary" Arab states. Israel was also perceived as extremely hostile and aggressive. However, it was seen as subordinate to the United States in terms of both military capability and political capacity for independent action. This image encouraged Nasser to believe that Egypt could hold her own against Israel if the international conditions were suitable, i.e. with the Arab states

united and the United States held back from fighting on Israel's side by the Soviet counterweight.

During the crisis of 1967, events were neither planned in advance nor developing outside the control of the Egyptian leaders. Nasser chose at each stage not to draw back, motivated by the prospect of high political gains, and knowingly risking war, based on a persistent underestimation of an Israel seen as isolated from effective international support. The mobilization of Egyptian forces in Sinai was less a result of the reports of Israeli troop concentrations--which were soon contradicted--than of the fact that Israel was seen as having aggressive intentions, causing Egypt to focus on the rhetoric of Israeli leaders suggesting the possibility of an attack on Damascus. This was enhanced by the fact that the tensions in U.S.-Egyptian relations seemed to be coming to a head, suggesting that the United States might dictate an Israeli strike in order to embarrass Nasser.

The expulsion of UNEF was originally part of the same decision: a partial withdrawal was requested so that the Egyptian forces would present a credible deterrent. Marshal Amer may have instigated the demand for full withdrawal, perhaps even out of desire to provoke a war, but Nasser confirmed it, apparently willingly. On balance, however, the closure of the Straits of Tiran was not an inevitable consequence of the expulsion of UNEF, nor did the Egyptian elite fail to realize that this move carried a high risk of war. Prime Minister Eshkol's messages seeking to avert war, and emphasizing the role of the international community, had been interpreted as further evidence of Israeli military inferiority and unwillingness to take independent action. At the same time, Nasser saw his own position as constantly

improving, with more Arab states pledging support.

Finally, the decision not to strike first, but nevertheless to continue to escalate the crisis, is explicable in similar terms. The military establishment seems originally to have supported a first strike, but later bowed to the demands of the president. Nasser thought that the United States would not support Israel militarily in case of an Israeli first strike, not least because he felt assured that the Soviets would intervene if the United States became directly involved. Fighting Israel by itself, allied with Jordan and Syria under a united command, he thought that he could win, or at least hold out for a satisfactory UN-imposed solution. Finally, Nasser also assumed that Israel would follow the orders of the United States, which appeared to be seeking to avoid war. Indications that Israel might not follow suit were perceived as evidence of U.S. duplicity rather than inability to dictate to Israel.

Throughout the crisis, incoming information was distorted to fit the preconceived enemy images of the Egyptian elite. This was related to well-attested cognitive mechanisms,¹⁵¹ as well as to the general emotional commitment to the belief that Israel was inferior to the Arab states, and to the authoritarian structure of the regime. For example, it seems likely that regime propaganda in Egypt influenced those whose duty it was to collect military information on Israel, causing them to underestimate its potential, and the elite to believe that error. Regime dynamics also apparently limited Nasser's access to reliable information on the relative strengths of his own armed forces and those of the Israelis. However, the decision makers themselves also over-emphasized confirmatory evidence and ignored or distorted contrary information so as to

support the pre-existing and self-perpetuating belief in the hostility of both the United States and Israel, and in the military inferiority of Israel.

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the U.S. Department of State's conference "The United States, the Middle East, and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War," held on January 12 and 13, 2004.

NOTES

¹ In this paper, common Arabic proper nouns are spelled according to the generally accepted Western media usage, without reference to a specific system of transliteration. For nouns in less common usage, the paper follows the existing scholarly literature.

² In particular, Abdel Magid Farid, *Nasser: The Final Years* (Reading, England: Ithaca, 1994); Mohamed Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (London: New English Library, 1972); Gamal Abdel Nasser, *The Philosophy of the Revolution* (Buffalo: Smith, Keynes and Marshall, 1959); Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981); Indarjit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967* (London: Cass, 1980); Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

³ Extensive use is made of the transcripts of the background interviews of surviving participants performed in BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*, Private Papers Collection, The Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, Oxford, 1997. Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Avi Shlaim, "His Royal Shyness: King Hussein and Israel," *The New York Review of Books*, July 15, 1999; and Hussein of Jordan, *My "War" with Israel: As told to and with additional material by Vick Vance and Pierre Lauer* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), also reproduce relevant interviews, in full or in part.

⁴ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (Caversham Park, England: British Broadcasting Corporation Monitoring Service, 1967), supplemented by Fuad A. Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1970), is the major source for political speeches and radio transcripts.

⁵ Useful files in the UK Public Record Office include FCO 17/290, FCO 17/489, FCO 17/490, FCO 39/250 and PREM 13/1826. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* reproduces relevant US foreign policy documents in an Appendix.

⁶ A.I. Dawisha, "The Middle East," in Christopher Clapham (ed.) *Foreign Policy Making in Developing States: A Comparative Approach* (Westmead: Saxon House, 1977).

⁷ Farid, *Nasser: The Final Years*.

⁸ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Bassiouny interview.

¹⁰ A.I. Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy* (New York: Wiley, 1976). Although Heikal had no independent power base (Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London: The Penguin Press, 1971)), Nasser relied on him for the most current information, and according to the former US Ambassador, Lucius Battle, Heikal wrote important foreign policy speeches for Nasser in the early 1960s (Raymond Cohen, *Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)).

¹¹ Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography*, Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

¹² BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

¹³ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

¹⁴ This section draws on an intensive qualitative analysis of all Nasser's speeches during the pre-war crisis, on May 22, May 26, May 28, May 29, and June 4, 1967 (BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967)). Such rhetorical images are not necessarily identical to operational images, but there is sufficient accuracy to delineate the most salient enemies, Israel and the United States, which are later analyzed more specifically in terms of operational perceptions within the Egyptian regime of their intentions and capabilities.

¹⁵ "Unity Day" speech, February 22. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹⁶ Yehoshofat Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972).

¹⁷ February 22. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹⁸ Cairo Radio: Nasser's "Palestine Day" Message to Arabs in UK, May 15. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹⁹"Labour Day" speech, May 2. Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

²⁰ May 26. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

²¹ Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*.

²² Fawaz A. Gerges, *The Superpowers and the Middle East: Regional and International Politics, 1955-1967* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994). Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, recalls that within 24 hours Kennedy's assassination was said in Cairo to have been the result of a Jewish plot.

²³ Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*.

²⁴ May 15. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

²⁵ The fact that a major arms deal with Saudi Arabia coincided with the announcement of the Islamic Alliance lent credence to this suspicion (Dawisha, *Egypt in the Arab World: The Elements of Foreign Policy*).

²⁶ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

²⁷ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

²⁸ May 23. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

²⁹ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

³⁰ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*. Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*, reports a similar statement.

³¹ February 22. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

³² Harkabi, *Arab Attitudes to Israel*.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ Winston Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East: An Intimate Report on What Lies Behind the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Atheneum, 1969).

³⁵ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

³⁶ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*.

³⁷ PRO, PREM 13/1826.

³⁸ May 18. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

³⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fakhr interview.

⁴⁰ Nadav Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967* (New York: Pegasus, 1969).

⁴¹ Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East: An Intimate Report on What Lies Behind the Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

⁴² Michael Brecher and Benjamin Geist, *Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

⁴³ Ahmad Samih Khalidi, "An Appraisal of the Arab-Israel Military Balance," *Middle East Forum*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (1966).

⁴⁴ November 4. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (Caversham Park, England: British Broadcasting Corporation Monitoring Service, 1966).

⁴⁵ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁴⁶ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁴⁷ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

⁴⁸ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Bassiouny interview.

⁴⁹ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁵⁰ November 24. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1966).

⁵¹ Quoted in Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

⁵² May 15. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁵³ Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*; Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*; Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁵⁴ L. Carl Brown, "Nasser and the June War: Plan or Improvisation?" in S. Seikaly, R. Baalbaki, and P. Dodd (eds.), *Quest for Understanding: Arabic and Islamic Studies in Memory of Malcolm H. Kerr* (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 1991), makes a good case that Nasser had no master plan.

⁵⁵ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁵⁶ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁵⁷ May 26. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁵⁸ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

⁵⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* See also Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*. Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*, reports Nasser as telling Thanat the decision was made on May 13, but by the Cabinet, which was probably a constitutional fiction.

⁶¹ In February 1960, following a sharp increase in border incidents between Israel and Syria, at that time joined with Egypt as part of the United Arab Republic (UAR), Nasser concentrated his forces in the Sinai in order to put pressure on Israel. Despite a warning from Soviet intelligence sources on February 15 that Israel was massing troops on the Syrian border, Nasser neither objected to the presence of UNEF nor attempted to close the Straits of Tiran. He moved the Egyptian forces out again from March 1, announcing that his aim of deterring Israel had been achieved. This precedent figured in the minds of both sides during the crisis of 1967 (Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974)).

⁶² Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi and Badran interviews.

⁶³ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁴ "Revolution Anniversary" speech, July 23. BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁶⁵ Cohen, *Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf*.

⁶⁶ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁶⁷ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

⁶⁸ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*.

⁶⁹ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*. Appendix, Document 5.

⁷⁰ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*.

⁷¹ Michael Howard and Robert Hunter, "Israel and the Arab World: The Crisis of 1967," *Adelphi Paper*, No. 41 (1967).

⁷² Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East: An Intimate Report on What Lies Behind the Arab-Israeli Conflict*.

⁷³ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁷⁴ May 13. Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

⁷⁵ See *The New York Times*, May 13.

⁷⁶ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Bassiouny interview.

⁷⁷ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

⁷⁸ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁷⁹ Quoted in Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

⁸⁰ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

⁸¹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*.

⁸² Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*.

⁸³ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁸⁴ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*; BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

⁸⁵ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*.

⁸⁶ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁸⁷ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

⁸⁸ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁸⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Noufal interview. Murtagi, as quoted in Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, suggests that the decision was made later. However, Noufal's story accords better with

the testimony of Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*, and Thant's June 26 Report on the Withdrawal of UNEF (Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*).

⁹⁰ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Noufal interview.

⁹¹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

⁹² Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

⁹³ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Badran interview.

⁹⁴ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁹⁵ Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

⁹⁶ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

⁹⁷ Arthur Lall, *The UN and the Middle East Crisis, 1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970).

⁹⁸ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

⁹⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fakhr interview.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

¹⁰¹ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*; Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*. Appendix, Document 5.

¹⁰² Sadat, *In Search of Identity*; Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East: An Intimate Report on What Lies Behind the Arab-Israeli Conflict*; BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹⁰³ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Badran interview.

¹⁰⁴ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹⁰⁵ Walter Laqueur, *The Road to War: The Origin and Aftermath of the Arab-Israeli Conflict 1967-8* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

¹⁰⁶ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*. Appendix, Document 5.

¹⁰⁷ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*. BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Noufal interview.

¹⁰⁸ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

¹⁰⁹ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

¹¹⁰ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*.

¹¹¹ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹¹² Sadat, *In Search of Identity*.

¹¹³ Burdett, *Encounter with the Middle East: An Intimate Report on What Lies Behind the Arab-Israeli Conflict*; Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*.

¹¹⁴ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi, Shazly and Fakhr interviews.

¹¹⁵ Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order*. However, Gamassy firmly denies that there was ever an offensive plan. BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*.

¹¹⁶ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Badran interview.

¹¹⁷ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*.

¹¹⁸ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi and Bassiouny interviews.

¹¹⁹ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Badran interview.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ PRO, FCO 17/489.

¹²² BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Noufal interview.

¹²³ Quoted in Randolph S. Churchill and S. Winston, *The Six Day War* (London: Heinemann, 1967).

¹²⁴ BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967).

¹²⁵ Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Cohen, *Culture and Conflict in Egyptian-Israeli Relations: A Dialogue of the Deaf*.

¹²⁸ May 28. Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

¹²⁹ Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder: Withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force leading to the Six-Day War of June 1967*.

¹³⁰ Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography*.

¹³¹ Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

¹³² Hussein of Jordan, *My "War" with Israel*; BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Hussein interview.

¹³³ The military command did not take this warning seriously, or pass it on to the lower ranks, largely because it seems to have been based either on the precedent of the Suez crisis or on a conversation with an American journalist. "Revolution Anniversary" speech, July 23, BBC, *Summary of World Broadcasts. Part 4: The Middle East and Africa* (1967); Sadat, *In Search of Identity*; Farid, *Nasser: The Final Years*; BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi, Noufal and Badran interviews.

¹³⁴ Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War*.

¹³⁵ Badran insists he only reported to Nasser that Marshal Gretchko, the Soviet Defense Minister, had promised support if the US

interfered. BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi and Badran interviews.

¹³⁶ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*.

¹³⁷ Jabber, *International Documents on Palestine, 1967*.

¹³⁸ Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*; BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Bassiouny interview.

¹³⁹ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

¹⁴⁰ The Egyptians later claimed that they had believed the United States was also endorsing Thant's moratorium and putting pressure on Israel to comply (Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents*).

¹⁴¹ This basic belief was at the root of the many Arab conspiracy theories prevalent after the war.

¹⁴² Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*; BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Fawzi interview.

¹⁴³ Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East*.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Samir A. Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹⁴⁶ BBC, *Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs: Interviews*. Hussein interview.

¹⁴⁷ Brecher and Geist, *Decisions in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973*.

¹⁴⁸ Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation*.

¹⁴⁹ Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*. Appendix, Document 12.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* Documents 1 and 9; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (London: Constable, 1972); PRO, FCO 39/250.

¹⁵¹ See Ole R. Holsti, "Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy: Dulles and Russia." In David J. Finlay, Ole R. Holsti, and Richard R. Fagen, (eds.), *Enemies in*

Politics (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967); Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1968), pp. 454-479.