

## THE WAR OF ATTRITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST, 1969 – 1970.\*

Karol SORBY

Institute of Oriental Studies, Slovak Academy of Sciences

Klemensova 19, 813 64 Bratislava, Slovakia

kaorkaso@sav.sk

After the June War of 1967 the issue at stake was the return of territories occupied by Israel. The purposely ambiguous UN Resolution 242 became a controversial issue as each party stressed another part of the resolution. As the Israelis refused the equation “land for peace” and the withdrawal from all territories, the Arab states at Khartoum decided to adopt a unified position. The Arab states agreed to unify efforts to “eliminate the effects of aggression” – not eliminate Israel. Although they pledged not to negotiate with Israel, they looked to the superpowers – the USA and USSR – to resolve the dispute. The USA was all too willing to sit back and wait for the Arab states to come around. After all, the Arab States wanted their land back and all they had to do to get it back was to sign peace treaties with Israel. To re-engage the Americans, Egypt engaged Israel in the so-called War of Attrition artillery duels and aerial dogfights across the Suez Canal (solely within its own occupied territory). The US Department of State made an attempt to break the impasse announcing the Rogers Plan in December 1969. Both sides at first turned down the plan, but the escalation of war during the first half of 1970 and the threat of superpower involvement may have changed the situation. In July 1970 Egypt and Israel accepted the Rogers Plan.

**Key words:** UN Resolution 242, the principle “land for peace”, Arab summit at Khartoum, effort to “eliminate the effects of aggression”, the War of Attrition, the Bar Lev line, the Rogers Plan.

The survival of the Egyptian regime after the crushing defeat in June 1967 and its determination to stand up to Israel reflects the moral strength of the Egyptian people. The citizens were willing (ready) to bear the austerity measures which were inevitable owing to the disorganised economy. In July 1967 Jamāl °Abdannāṣir used the celebrations of the fifteenth anniversary of the revolution

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and at Cairo University delivered an essential speech to the nation and it was the first public speech after his resignation and return to power.<sup>1</sup> Answering to accusations that the defeat was caused by his refusal to attack first what offered this chance to Israel he stated that if Egypt started the war it would have to face US intervention in favour of Israel and to face condemnation from the USSR, France and the international community. For the defeat, he blamed the army command which despite his grave warnings was not properly prepared to repulse the expected Israeli attack. Afterwards he refused the “forced peace” which means surrender. He called the Egyptians not to despair and not to leave their values and pointed to the determination of the Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the British after Dunkirk and mentioned further examples of unbending will.<sup>2</sup> He refused to give up the pledge given to the Palestinian Arabs saying that “despite defeat and occupation of the Sinai Peninsula we would not give up the rights of the Palestinian people”.<sup>3</sup>

During August 1967, all the Arab states, the USSR and the socialist states tried to achieve in the UN Security Council a balanced and just for the Arabs too. In addition to that they politically and militarily supported Egypt and its army in the most critical moments when the effort of the president and other political representatives and military commanders was concentrated on speedily building up advanced defence line on the Suez Canal.<sup>4</sup>

The clarification of the Soviet position played a decisive role in Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir’s decision to accept convening of a conference of Arab leaders in Khartoum at the end of August 1967. The purpose of this gathering was to draw up a collective Arab strategy toward Israel and the West. In Khartoum Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir changed sides and added his voice to the moderates who advocated a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The moderates also preferred to

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<sup>1</sup> President’s speech on the occasion of 15th anniversary of 23 July 1967 revolution. In ‘ABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmū‘a al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-ra’īs Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir], Vol. I, pp. 272–305.

<sup>2</sup> ‘ABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmū‘a al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-ra’īs Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir], Vol. I, p. 293.

<sup>3</sup> ‘ABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmū‘a al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-ra’īs Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ‘Abdunnāṣir], Vol. I, p. 304.

<sup>4</sup> FAWZĪ, Muhammad. *Ḥarb at-talāt sanawāt, 1967 – 1970. Mudakkirāt al-farīq awwal Muḥammad Fawzī* [The Three Year War, 1967 – 1970. Memoirs of Colonel-General Muḥammad Fawzī]. Vol. I, pp. 196–197.

keep the dialogue with the West and to maintain the flow of oil. They deemed it crucial to Arab interests.<sup>5</sup>

Immediately after the war Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir moved swiftly to end the ill feeling that was disturbing Arab-Soviet relations. He was only too aware that for the next period he would be extraordinary dependent on Soviet help. He told to the commander in chief of the army, Muḥammad Fawzī that his only alternative is to collaborate with the communist bloc to obtain weapons for rebuilding the Egyptian army.<sup>6</sup> He informed Soviet officials that Egypt was ready to sign any pact or agreement to organise the relationship between their two countries on a more permanent basis.<sup>7</sup> These measures understandably ran counter to one of the basic principles of his foreign policy: to preserve Egypt’s independence and freedom of manoeuvre. The constantly growing Soviet collaboration with Egypt and Syria pushed the Arab-Israeli conflict still deeper into the Cold War rivalry between the superpowers. The Egyptians were frustrated as they expected Kremlin’s more active involvement on their side. The Soviet side kept its promise to restore lost Arab inventories,<sup>8</sup> however with exception of offensive weapons.

The June war had demonstrated a number of problems for the Soviet presence in the Middle East: the instability of the Kremlin’s own clients and the lack of Soviet control; the instability of the area itself and the risk that a local war could lead to superpower confrontation. The war had served a blow to prestige and the credibility of the Soviet’s, tarnishing their reputation both with regard to the quality of their arms and training and to their willingness to assist their clients in a crisis situation. The Soviets repaid Egypt’s and Syria’s loyalty and by a massive airlift begun to restore their lost arms. The superpower status obliged the Soviet leaders to keep their honour and reputation and support their regional clients. Since more than a decade Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had opened the gates of the Arab world to the USSR and Egypt had served as its basis in the

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<sup>5</sup> FARĪD, ʿAbdalmajīd. *Min maḥādir ijtimāʿāt ʿAbdannāṣir al-ʿarabīya wa ad-dawlīya* [From the Protocols of Arab and International Meetings of ʿAbdannāṣir], pp. 52–57.

<sup>6</sup> FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Ḥarb at-talāt sanawāt, 1967 – 1970. Mudakkirāt al-farīq awwal Muḥammad Fawzī* [The Three Year War, 1967 – 1970. Memoirs of Colonel-General Muḥammad Fawzī], Vol. I, p. 189.

<sup>7</sup> EI-HUSSINI, Mohrez Mahmoud. *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945 – 1985*, p. 54; FAWZĪ, Muḥammad. *Ḥarb at-talāt sanawāt, 1967 – 1970. Mudakkirāt al-farīq awwal Muḥammad Fawzī* [Three Year War, 1967 – 1970. Memoirs of Colonel-General Muḥammad Fawzī], Vol. I, pp. 189, 194–195; ʿABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-raʿīs Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir], Vol. I, p. 280.

<sup>8</sup> HEIKAL, Mohamed. *Sphinx and Commissar. The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Arab World*, p. 192.

Third World countries.<sup>9</sup> Therefore Egypt, despite its defeat, would continue to play a critical role in the Arab and developing world, and its president would still be useful politically for the advancement of Soviet global interests. To the Soviet military, Egypt was also important strategically. Its naval facilities were highly prized by the commanders of the Soviet fleet. On 16 June, a Soviet military delegation arrived in Cairo to study Egypt's military needs. Then on 21 June Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny visited Cairo for further talks. He informed the leadership that he sent a message to Moscow relating to Egypt's air-defence system and to Egypt's wish for a Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean to balance the US Sixth Fleet – which Israeli considered a strategic reserve.<sup>10</sup>

In such an atmosphere, the Arab summit conference was held in Khartoum, between 28 August and 2 September 1967. It was the first meeting of the heads of Arab States and the PLO, since their defeat in the June War. The Syrian delegation was not present.<sup>11</sup> At this conference Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir accepted the legitimacy and the primacy of the separate Arab states and promised not to interfere in their internal affairs. He could not afford another prolonged ideological battle with the “reactionary” forces. He needed their financial aid to rebuild his army and to compensate for the lost revenue from the closure of the Suez Canal. Arab solidarity prevailed and the leaders came to a decision in the Arab-Israeli conflict that in the foreseeable time the pressure on Israel to withdraw from the occupied territories would be only possible by diplomatic means.<sup>12</sup> The decision defined the limits for the political solutions, the famous three “nos” of Khartoum: no recognition, no negotiation, and no peace with Israel.<sup>13</sup> The decision supported the full rights of the Palestinian people and granted annual financial aid for Egypt and Jordan from the oil-producing states:

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<sup>9</sup> GOLAN, G. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East. From World War II to Gorbachev*, p. 68.

<sup>10</sup> RIYĀD, Mahmūd: *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978]. Vol. I, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Present were: President Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir (Egypt), King Fayṣal (Saudi Arabia), King Ḥusayn (Jordan), President ʿAbdarraḥmān ʿĀrif (Iraq), Emir Ṣabāḥ as-Sālim aṣ-Ṣabāḥ (Kuwait), President Shāriḥ Ḥulw (Lebanon), President ʿAbdallāḥ as-Sallāl (Jemen), Emir Ḥasan ar-Riḍā (successor of the Libyan throne), Ahmad ash-Shuqayrī, leader of the PLO, ʿAbdalʿazīz Būtaflīqa (Algeria, acting for the President Hawārī Būmadyan), Muḥammad Ibn Hayma (Morocco acting for the King Ḥasan II), al-Bāḥī al-Adḡam (Prime Minister of Tunisia acting for the President al-Ḥabīb Bū-Ruqayba /Bourgiba/). In RIYĀD, Mahmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978], Vol. I, p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> AL-ḤULW, Ibrāhīm. *Ḥarb 5 Ḥuzayrān* [The 5 June War], pp. 89–91.

<sup>13</sup> DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 447.

Libya, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.<sup>14</sup> At a separate meeting between Egypt and Saudi Arabia an understanding was reached in settlement of the conflict in Yemen and on the return of the rest of the Egyptian troops to Egypt. In that way the relations between the two countries improved.<sup>15</sup>

In Khartoum Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir had to reverse the integral and long held tenet of his Arab policy: the pursuit of Arab unity. In reality a real Arab unity was impossible to attain out of heterogeneous components: the Arab monarchies would have to pass at least the bourgeoisie revolutions. In circumstances of irreconcilable social formations, the idea of unity was attractive for the people, but not for the rich ruling elites. Anyway, they were sufficiently protected against danger of revolutionary changes from below first by the British policy and then by the policy of the USA. The Arab cold was to a large extent the result of the tireless effort of Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir to build up a strong bloc of Arab states with a common and clearly defined foreign policy. “He has used the ideology of Arab nationalism as a rallying cry against a host of Arab rulers who opposed Egypt’s hegemonic drive.”<sup>16</sup> The Egyptian president led a hopeless struggle, because his goals did not correspond with the interest of the superpowers. Neither the USA, nor the USSR had interest in the creation of a single great and powerful Arab state in the Middle East.

For all these reasons in Khartoum the Egyptian president joined the side of the “moderates” who supported a political rather than a military solution to the conflict. They later made it clear that they were prepared to conclude peace with Israel in return for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Arab territories occupied in 1967 and for a just solution to the Palestinian problem.<sup>17</sup> The shift in the internal and external relations of the Arab states was a product of the changing

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<sup>14</sup> ḤAMRŪSH, Aḥmad. *Qiṣṣat tawrat 23 yūliyyū* [The Story of the 23 July Revolution]. Vol. V, pp. 199–203.

<sup>15</sup> BĀDĪB, Saʿīd Muḥammad. *Aṣ-Ṣirāʿ as-saʿūdī al-miṣrī ḥawla al-Jaman ash-shimālī, 1962 – 1970* [Saudi-Egyptian Struggle for the Northern Yemen], pp. 137–138;

HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Ḥarb at-talātīna sana. Al-infijār 1967* [The Thirty Years War. The Explosion of 1967], p. 932.

<sup>16</sup> JIRJIS, Fawwāz. *An-niẓām al-iqlīmī al-ʿarabī wa al-quwā al-kubrā* [The Superpowers and the Arab Regional Order], p. 310.

<sup>17</sup> STEPHENS, R. *Nasser. A Political Biography*, p. 523; MAHGOUB, Mohamed Ahmed. *Democracy on Trial: Reflections on Arab and African Affairs*, p. 146; United Arab Republic, 2 January 1968, No. 41. In *LBJ Files, 1963 – 1969*, reel 7 of 8; MUTĀWĪʿ, Samīr. *Majmūʿat khuṭab al-malik Ḥusayn. 25 ʿāmm min at-tārīkh, 1952 – 1977* [Collected Speeches of King Ḥusayn. 25 Years of History]. Vol. I, p. 622; FARĪD, ʿAbdalmajīd. *Min maḥādir ijtimāʿāt ʿAbdannāṣir al-ʿarabīya wa ad-dawlīya* [From the Protocols of Arab and International Meetings of ʿAbdannāṣir], p. 92; ḤAMRŪSH, Aḥmad. *Qiṣṣat tawrat 23 yūliyyū* [The Story of the 23 July Revolution], Vol. V, pp. 235, 244.

international situation.<sup>18</sup> When Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir advised King Ḥusayn to explore the possibility of a peaceful settlement with Israel, the Khartoum summit marked a real turning point in Egypt’s attitude to Israel. This was at the time not known in Israel where only the official Khartoum declaration was commented.

Egypt after adopting Resolution 242 began a new phase of political and diplomatic activity aimed at exploring all of the possibilities for a just and lasting settlement of the Middle Eastern problem and the creation of an international climate well-disposed towards the Arabs.<sup>19</sup> The first period after the refusal of defeat named “the phase of defiance” (marḥalat aṣ-ṣumūd), lasted from July 1967 to March 1968. During this period the Egyptian armed forces concentrated on building the first defensive line on the west side of the Suez Canal against the ongoing danger of the Israelis crossing of the Canal. Some 150,000 Egyptian troops were by now concentrated along the Suez Canal. The Egyptian commanders and the Soviet advisers considered that the time had now arrived for action to raise the morale of the army and eliminate the effect of the 1967 defeat. This tendency coincided with the president’s drive to raise the morale in the country as a whole and to enhance the prestige of the army.<sup>20</sup>

At the meeting of the Egyptian cabinet on 18 February 1968 Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir said: “We will cooperate with /Gunnar/ Jarring although we already believe he will fail in his mission. We will listen to the United States, although she wants to make us enter a dark room called ‘negotiations on Resolution 242’. We will cooperate with the devil himself, if only to prove our good intentions! However, we know from the start that we are the ones to liberate our land by the force of arms, the only language Israel understands. Let the US assist Israel in its invasions, let them both try to bury the Palestinian issue. But they know very well that we have not been defeated in the war as long as we have not negotiated with Israel, not signed a peace treaty with her and not accepted the eradication of the Palestine issue.”<sup>21</sup>

In the second period named “the phase of confrontation” (marḥalat al-muwājahā) – from March 1968 to the beginning of 1969 – all efforts were concentrated on the rebuilding of the armed forces which was a formidable task. Most of the senior military officers had been jailed or obliged to retire; the air force had lost almost all of its fighter planes and the ground forces some 80 per

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<sup>18</sup> JIRJIS, Fawwāz. *An-niẓām al-iqlīmī al-ʿarabī wa al-quwā al-kubrā* [The Superpowers and the Arab Regional Order], p. 312.

<sup>19</sup> EL-GAMASY, Mohamed Abdel Ghani. *The October War. Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt*, p. 105.

<sup>20</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 200.

<sup>21</sup> RIYĀḌ, Maḥmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978], Vol. I, p. 168.

cent of its equipment. It was not just a matter of putting broken units together and rearming them. Profound changes had to be made in the organisation, training, and mode of operation for the army.<sup>22</sup> First of all, the shattered morale of the troops had to be restored. When the shipments of weapons finally reached Egypt, the defensive plan gained clearer outline together with growing combat ability of the troops.

Israel also consolidated its defensive positions using the lowest footing of troops to avoid recalling reservists. The Egyptians disposed of a wide range of conventional Soviet artillery and the Israelis were outgunned by an overwhelming concentration of this artillery on the Egyptian side. The tendency of the Israeli Command not to place adequate emphasis on the importance of artillery was to prove a very costly mistake.<sup>23</sup> In March 1968, after the improvement of the combat ability and the strengthening of the defence positions west of the Canal, the Egyptian armed forces with the objective to forestall the standstill of the front situation entered the “phase of confrontation”.<sup>24</sup> On 8 September 1968 the Egyptian artillery opened a highly-concentrated barrage on Israeli targets along the Canal and pounded it for nine hours causing heavy casualties. Most of the installations above ground had also been badly damaged.<sup>25</sup> As the war dragged on and the number of casualties mounted, the Israeli General Staff was obliged to search ways of protecting the troops along the Suez Canal. This led to the construction of a defensive line of fortifications: a chain of thirty-two strong points stretching 180 km from the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez.<sup>26</sup> Thick layers of fill and stone covered the bunkers which were situated behind a high and thick sand ramp. The line was named after the then Chief of Staff Chaim Bar Lev.

As the Israeli author, A. Bregman states the opinion in the Israeli high command was divided regarding the idea of constructing a line of defence along the Suez Canal. Generals Ariel Sharon and Yisrael Tal strongly opposed the building of the line arguing that the advantage would lie with those armies that could manoeuvre and concentrate forces at crucial points in the battlefield, and that the offensive was more in tune with Israel’s character and its forces.<sup>27</sup> In the ensuing debate there was no suggestion of leaving the Canal, but there was

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<sup>22</sup> El-HUSSINI, Mohrez Mahmoud. *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945 – 1985*, p. 89.

<sup>23</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 200.

<sup>24</sup> FAWZĪ, Muhammad. *Ḥarb at-talāt sanawāt, 1967 – 1970. Mudakkirāt al-farīq awwal Muḥammad Fawzī* [The Three Year War, 1967 – 1970. Memoirs of Colonel-General Muḥammad Fawzī], Vol. I, p. 202.

<sup>25</sup> DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 449; HERZOG, Chaim. *The Arab-Israeli Wars*, p. 201.

<sup>26</sup> BREGMAN, A. *Israel’s Wars. A History Since 1947*, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

an argument as to the mode of deployment. The Chief of Staff decided in favour of fortifications, and the team headed by Major-General Abraham Adan proceeded to supervise the construction of the line, which was finished on 15 March 1969.<sup>28</sup> Thus the so called “Bar-Lev Line” came into being. The creation of this line was the largest engineering operation ever undertaken in Israel.

In the meantime, the Egyptians finished work on the western bank of the Canal and the Red Sea and undertook several combat operations to persuade the Israelis, that for further occupation of the Sinai Peninsula they would pay a high price. Failure to bring about Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories by diplomatic means led Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir to coin the slogan “That which was taken by force can only be recovered by force!”<sup>29</sup> At that time the most important objective for the Egyptian command was boosting morale of the troops and erasing psychical complexes caused by the defeat in 1967 by directly confronting the enemy. The continuance of combat activity on the front contributed positively to the domestic political situation. At this stage, Israeli command tried to distract and dilute the Egyptian military efforts by carrying out bombing raids deep inside Egypt so as to reduce pressure on the Canal front, while continuing to engage Egyptian forces and hit at civilian targets in the area.<sup>30</sup> This situation continued until February 1969. Then on 8 March Egypt decided to destroy the Bar-Lev Line and to embark on a new stage of highly intensive clashes, which became known under the name “the War of Attrition”.<sup>31</sup>

Egypt’s immediate goal was to prevent the conversion of the Suez Canal into a de facto border. The military strategy adopted for this purpose consisted of the heavy artillery bombardment of Israel’s positions on the canal front, occasional air attacks, and hit-and-run commando raids. The purpose was to inflict enough damage on the Israeli armed forces in Sinai in arms, equipment, and to its fortifications, in addition to losses in life, to convince it that its stay in the occupied Arab lands would be at a very high cost, not only in terms of actual losses sustained – with all the negative psychological impact this would have on the Israeli forces and people – but also in terms of the size of the forces it would have to commit to Sinai and with the need for continuous mobilisation over long periods, which would inevitably have heavy economic consequences on Israeli society. The idea was to take advantage of Egypt’s massive

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<sup>28</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 202.

<sup>29</sup> Speech of the president on 27 March 1969. In ʿABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-raʿīs Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir], Vol. II. p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> EL-GAMASY, Mohamed Abdel Ghani. *The October War*, p. 106.

<sup>31</sup> In English “War of Attrition”, in Arabic “Ḥarb al-istinzāf”. The word “istinzāf” means not only “to become exhausted” but also “to lose much blood, bleed to death”.



superiority in manpower and Israel's comparative disadvantage in static warfare and well-known sensitivity to casualties in order to exhaust Israel militarily, economically, and psychologically, and thus pave the way to an Egyptian crossing to dislodge Israeli forces from Sinai.

On 9 March 1969, Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General ʿAbdalmunʿim Riyād travelled to the front to inspect the outcome of the previous day's fighting and to be visibly present among the troops. Despite intense firing, he wanted to get a firsthand look at the battle and to show the troops that he was there with them. He was accompanied by the commander of the Second Army, Major General ʿAdlī Ḥasan Saʿīd on the frontlines north of Ismāʿīliya.<sup>32</sup> During the tour ʿAbdalmunʿim Riyād, the highly-regarded commander and strategist, was fatally wounded by Israeli artillery and died on the way to the field hospital. His death was a great loss to the armed forces and to Egypt.<sup>33</sup> For the rest of the month the Suez front was mostly quiet. Major General Aḥmad Ismāʿīl ʿAlī was appointed Chief of Staff in his place.

On 12 March 1969, the UAR official spokesman, Muḥammad Ḥasan az-Zayyāt, announced that, in effect, the UAR would no longer be bound by the cease-fire saying, "the cease-fire cannot be exploited to legalise aggression". Israel concluded that it meant that Egypt was preparing the way for a cross-canal operation to recover Sinai. That was not regarded as a very credible possibility in Washington at the time, given the military superiority of Israel.<sup>34</sup>

The War of Attrition steadily escalated and crossing of the Canal and the Gulf of Suez by small groups of Egyptian soldiers became commonplace. Raids and ambushes increased in scale and intensity, and the firing continued unabated. The military situation was becoming more volatile day by day, and both sides lived in a continuous state of combat.

The system of defence along the Canal was to keep to a minimum the number of casualties Israel would have suffer. For this purpose, the bunkers were constructed to withstand the heaviest artillery barrage. The new deployment would be such as to enable Israel to wage its "counter-War of Attrition" against the Egyptians and force them to return to an acceptance of the cease-fire. But, as the Egyptians have foreseen, this new system required the Israeli forces to adapt themselves to the unaccustomed strategy of static defence.<sup>35</sup> Despite Israeli expectations, the hostilities escalated gradually along the front and combat actions expanded and intensified. The Egyptians continued artillery bombardment of Israeli positions on the east bank of the Canal,

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<sup>32</sup> EL-GAMASY, Mohamed Abdel Ghani. *The October War*, p. 108.

<sup>33</sup> KORN, D. A. *Stalemate. The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967 – 1970*, p. 108.

<sup>34</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 135.

<sup>35</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 208.

inflicting unpleasant losses. The Israelis soon discovered that the objectors of the Bar Lev line were probably right, for the line played into the hands of the Egyptian army, which was thus able to proceed with Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir’s plan and impose an all-out war of attrition on the Israelis.

The growing success of the Egyptian forces despite hard Israeli retaliation and the increasing losses of the Israeli forces as a result of the continuous bombardment by Egyptian artillery and the accompanying raids across the Canal were instrumental in making Israel reconsider its military strategy in June 1969.<sup>36</sup> Egypt’s combat performance in the first months of the war was perceived by Israelis as sufficiently threatening to require a review of military strategy and strategic objectives. The Israelis had to decide on a suitable response to the Egyptian challenge. Their traditional doctrine called for carrying the war to the enemy’s territory. It was important for them to devise a policy that would convince the Egyptians that a peace arrangement or at least a cease-fire was to their advantage, for war would cost them dearly.<sup>37</sup> Therefore the Israelis decided to escalate the course of the war radically by using their air force in a policy of counter-attrition against Egypt, striking at both military and civilian targets.

January 1969 was marked with the entry of Richard Nixon into the White House. At the same time, William Rogers replaced Dean Rusk as secretary of state and Henry Kissinger replaced Walt Rostow at the White House as national security adviser. In the Middle East violations of the cease-fire along the Canal continued. President Nixon in a press conference on 27 January stated that the situation in the Mideast should be cooled off, because it reminded of a powder keg which needed to be defused: “The next explosion in the Mideast could very well involve a confrontation between the nuclear powers”.<sup>38</sup> However, Israel objected saying the situation was under control because it did not want to have the United States getting excited about the risks of an explosion in the region and pressuring it to make concessions.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the Israelis minimised the importance of Egyptian artillery bombarding and of the casualties it was taking. In Israel, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol died on 22 February 1969 and was succeeded by Golda Meir, a considerably less peaceable person than he was.

Israel realised that the continuance of the situation on the battlefield, connected with the relatively high losses suffered by its forces,<sup>40</sup> had a negative impact on the home front. Therefore, it(she/Israel) needed to find an effective

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<sup>36</sup> BREGMAN, A. *Israel’s Wars. A History Since 1947*, pp. 98–99.

<sup>37</sup> DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 450.

<sup>38</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 135.

<sup>39</sup> RABIN, Y. *The Rabin Memoirs*, p. 143.

<sup>40</sup> BAR-SIMAN-TOV, Y. *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition 1969 – 1970*, p. 82; DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 451.

means to end the War of Attrition, and check the growing effectiveness of the Egyptian forces so as to be in a position to take the military initiative once more. By July 1969 it was becoming clear that restraint was not worth the costs and it was necessary to make the Egyptians stop shooting.<sup>41</sup> The Israeli command had set itself a strategic objective of disrupting the Egyptian army, as well as exerting psychological pressure on the Egyptian people in order to weaken the home front until it collapsed. The Israeli air force under Major General Mordechai Hod chose to launch raids on selected targets in a planned longer air campaign. This approach suited Israel best because it already possessed sophisticated French fighter-bombers *Mystère* and *Mirage* and since March 1969 it had been receiving advanced US *Skyhawks*, which were part of a 28-plane deal.<sup>42</sup>

The most significant change in Israeli policy was the decision to throw the air force into the battle and utilise it as “flying artillery” which, from the short-range tactical point of view, proved to be an unmitigated success. Israeli air operations brought on an Egyptian air reaction, and dogfights developed along the Canal. In the course of July 1969, five Egyptian aircraft were shot down. The main Israeli targets were the artillery emplacements and the SAM-2 surface-to-air missile bases that protected them.<sup>43</sup> At the end of July, following two air-to-air encounters in which 12 Egyptian planes were brought down, the commander of the Egyptian Air Force was dismissed.<sup>44</sup> Starting from 20 July 1969, the Israeli air force began strafing the Egyptian positions west of the Canal. Neither the air defence nor the air force could stop these raids despite intense efforts. Until the end of 1969, clashes continued using all ground force weapons at hand, with intermittent air battles and constant air raids on military targets on both sides. The most important of the commando raids took place along the Gulf of Suez coast on 9 September. Israeli command used tanks, aircraft, and ships to attack coastal defence and economic installations, and killed many soldiers. The Egyptian performance was so incompetent that Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir fired the Chief of Staff, Major General Aḥmad Ismāʿīl ʿAlī, and replaced him with Major-General Muḥammad Ṣādiq, who had been the director of military intelligence.<sup>45</sup> Vice Admiral Fuʿād Zikrī was also relieved of his command of the naval forces and Vice Admiral Maḥmūd Fahmī was appointed in his place.

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<sup>41</sup> KORN, D. A. *Stalemate. The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967 – 1970*, p. 167.

<sup>42</sup> HELLEBRAND, K. – RADINA, V. *Izraelské letectvo* [The Israeli Air Force], p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 210.

<sup>44</sup> DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 452.

<sup>45</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 137.

Unable to put an end to the War of Attrition, and under strong public pressure to stop the bloodshed caused by this static war of positions, the Israeli military command devised a new strategy of deep penetration by air force, aimed at bombing both military and civilian positions deep within Egypt, thus relieving pressure on Israeli troops along the Canal. The plan to bomb deep into Egypt was much helped by Israel's recent purchase of *Phantom* and *Skyhawk* fighter jets.<sup>46</sup> Having rejected US peace proposals, Israel returned to wage the War of Attrition.<sup>47</sup> In the last week of December 1969 the cabinet took a fateful decision – to initiate strategic bombing of the Egyptian hinterland. The original proponent of this idea was Major General Ezer Weizman. He had a powerful ally in Yitzhak Rabin, the soldier turned diplomat.<sup>48</sup> The aim was to put the Egyptian people under heavy psychological pressure and make the political leadership weak, forcing it to halt the war and possibly unseat President Jamāl ʿAbdunnāṣir by making it impossible for him to accept a compromise settlement, which Israel also did not want, and eliminating any chance of a rapprochement between him and the USA.<sup>49</sup>

The process of the conflict escalation was paralleled by a series of diplomatic initiatives growing out of two sets of talks which had begun under the Nixon administration, one between the four powers and one between the two superpowers. The first led nowhere. The two-power talks were essentially between Joseph Sisco, assistant secretary for Near Eastern and South African affairs, and Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador to Washington, the abortive Rogers Plan of 28 October 1969, grew out of them.<sup>50</sup> The Rogers Plan consisted of a short preamble calling for the conclusion of a final and reciprocally binding accord between Egypt and Israel, to be negotiated under the auspices of UN Ambassador Gunnar Jarring following procedures used at Rhodes in 1949. The plan also called for Israeli withdrawal from Sinai, for an agreement signed by both parties ending the state of war, and for the agreement on demilitarised zones and the return of 100,000 Palestinian refugees to Israel over ten years.<sup>51</sup> The Rogers Plan was not welcomed by the Israelis or the Egyptians, both of whom found serious faults.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> BREGMAN, A. *Israel's Wars. A History Since 1947*, p. 99.

<sup>47</sup> RABIN, Y. *The Rabin Memoirs*, p. 165.

<sup>48</sup> SHLAIM, A. *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, p. 291.

<sup>49</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 141.

<sup>50</sup> QUANDT, W. B. *Decade of Decisions. American Policy Toward the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1967 – 1976*, pp. 89–90.

<sup>51</sup> The full text of the Rogers plan is available from [www.brookings.edu/press/appendix/peace\\_process.htm](http://www.brookings.edu/press/appendix/peace_process.htm).

<sup>52</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A. Z. *Red Star on the Nile. The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship since the June War*, p. 100.

The Rogers Plan was a sincere effort to find a proposition the Arabs and Israel could both accept, but it was so watered down in the name of realism that there was not enough in it for either side, although in retrospect the document looks considerably more favourable to the Arabs than to Israel.<sup>53</sup> The Israelis objected to the prospect of an imposed superpower settlement without any direct negotiations between the principals to the dispute. On 22 December 1969, the Israeli cabinet issued a statement saying that “Israel will not be sacrificed by any power or interpower policy and will reject any attempt to impose a forced solution on her ...”.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the Israelis saw in the plan the seeds of a US-Soviet attempt to impose a settlement which would force Israel to withdraw without a firm Arab commitment to formal peace and would undercut Israel’s position on borders, making negotiations pointless.<sup>55</sup> This was not to mention the proposal to permit the repatriation of 100,000 refugees, which was an anathema to Israel. The Egyptians, who considered themselves victims of aggression, rejected it as an attempt to put unacceptable conditions on Israeli withdrawal. The Soviets, who went along with the Egyptians, also rejected it stating that the US ruling circles are still sticking to their one-sided and obviously anti-Arab stand.<sup>56</sup>

Both Israelis and Arabs took the continued supply of Phantoms F-4 as evidence of US approval of the raids. These planes did the bombing in the Nile Valley and were essential to the deep penetration strategy. The Israelis hoped that their military success would free the United States from the need to give way to Soviet-Egyptian pressure to impose a political solution in favour of Egypt.<sup>57</sup> The Egyptian armed forces continued to be exposed to Israeli air strikes and Egypt became vulnerable to strikes in its heartland. The Egyptian air force had not yet completed reconstruction and was not equipped with sophisticated aircraft to match those of the Israelis. Egypt was seeking advanced equipment from the Soviet Union to help itself to deal with its loss of air cover, a loss which was due more to pilot inadequacy than to the nature of the Soviet equipment being supplied. The USSR still refused to supply Egypt with offensive weapons, therefore Egypt did not have any fighters or fighter bombers capable of threatening Israel’s interior, not even to reach east Sinai and the Israelis were aware of this.<sup>58</sup>

On 22 January 1970 President Jamāl ‘Abdannāṣir flew to Moscow and remained there for five days. He chose to be accompanied on his trip by only

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<sup>53</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 138.

<sup>54</sup> Quoted in QUANDT, W. B. *Decade of Decisions*, p. 91.

<sup>55</sup> KISSINGER, H. *The White House Years*, p. 376.

<sup>56</sup> RUBINSTEIN, A. Z. *Red Star on the Nile*, p. 100.

<sup>57</sup> BAR-SIMAN-TOV, Y. *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition 1969 – 1970*, p. 121.

<sup>58</sup> EL-GAMASY, Mohamed Abdel Ghani. *The October War*, p. 114.

two men: Muḥammad Haykal and General Muḥammad Fawzī. The main purpose of the visit was to explain the situation on the Canal front following the entry of the Israeli air force, and to get a Soviet agreement for an integrated advanced air defence system to face Israeli air superiority effectively and stop its raids inside the country.<sup>59</sup> President's meeting with Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev was important at the local and international levels. He said that "the fate of the whole Middle East was going to be decided in the strip of land about thirty kilometres either side of the Suez Canal. Israel's deep penetration raids and low-flying attacks on the interior of Egypt were designed with two objectives: first, they were intended to forestall all attempts by Egypt to build up a missile wall which could cover an attack across the Canal; and second: they were aimed at breaking the morale of the home front. Israel had failed to force Egypt into surrender in 1967, but was determined to do so now".<sup>60</sup> Therefore he asked for more advanced defence weapons and equipment – missiles, planes, and radars.

When Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir arrived in Moscow the Kremlin leaders were still thinking of weaponry rather than fighting forces as their contribution to Egypt's war effort and he found them ready to reiterate their offer of SAM-3s. The problem was that it would take six months to train Egyptian crews to operate them.<sup>61</sup> The president told frankly: "If we do not get what I am asking for, everybody will assume that the only solution is in the hand of the Americans. We have never seen the Americans backward in helping the Israelis. But Egypt is an anti-imperialist outpost in the Middle East, if Egypt falls to American-Israeli forces the whole Arab world will fall. We are not asking you to fight for us – we want to keep our independence. But as far as I can see, you are not prepared to help us in the same way America helps Israel. This means that there is only one course open to me: I shall go back to Egypt and I shall tell the people the truth. I shall tell them that the time has come for me to step down and hand over to a pro-American president. If I cannot save them, somebody else will have to do it."<sup>62</sup>

The Soviet officials were shocked by these remarks. After hasty deliberations, they summoned the politburo and took a collegial decision to, in effect, take over the air defence of the Nile Valley. They would provide SAM-3s missiles with crews to operate them as well as advanced aircraft with pilots to fly in conjunction with the missile defence. Never before had the USSR

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<sup>59</sup> HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 214.

<sup>60</sup> HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-Ṭarīq ilā Ramaḍān* [The Road to Ramaḍān], p. 82.

<sup>61</sup> KORN, D. A. *Stalemate. The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967 – 1970*, p. 190.

<sup>62</sup> HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-Ṭarīq ilā Ramaḍān* [The Road to Ramaḍān], p. 84.

injected such sophisticated military equipment into a non-Communist country in such a short time. Fourteen thousand military personnel were sent to Egypt, including 150 pilots. The Soviet military effectively took over the air defence of Egypt, except for the Canal Zone.<sup>63</sup> In Washington it had been expected that the Egyptian president would go to the Soviets for help, however, based on past behaviour it was regarded that the Soviets would commit equipment, but not military forces.<sup>64</sup>

It is clear that Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir’s visit to Moscow was a turning point in the conflict between Egypt and Israel. Soviet military support came at a time when Egypt faced a critical military situation as a result of the Israeli air war. Reaching such an agreement was no easy matter. It was not easy for Egypt to accept certain new conditions and circumstances. Neither was it easy for the Soviet Union to take such a step, given its implications and consequences. The main reason for this step must have been Soviet concern over the very survival of the Egyptian regime and also the credibility of the USSR was at stake.<sup>65</sup> On 31 January 1970, Soviet ambassadors in Washington, London, and Paris delivered nearly identical letters from Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin to President Richard Nixon, Prime Minister Harold Wilson, and President Georges Pompidou. The key paragraph read: “We would tell you in all frankness that if Israel continues its adventurism, to bomb the territory of the UAR and other Arab states, the Soviet Union will be forced to see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal with the help of which due rebuff to the arrogant aggressor could be made.”<sup>66</sup>

Richard Nixon replied harshly, rejecting the Soviet interpretation, and holding Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir responsible for the military escalation after having violated the cease-fire and initiated the War of Attrition. With regard to advanced weapons for Egypt the US State Department informed Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko that the United States was prepared to seek an understanding on a mutual cease-fire and hold talks with the Soviet Union on limiting the arms race in the Middle East. But if the Soviet Union sparked off an escalation by supplying sophisticated weapons to the Arab countries, the Americans will not hesitate to provide arms to friendly states as the need arises.<sup>67</sup> This showed that the United States supported the Israeli air raids into Egyptian territory to coerce Egypt into stopping the war. President Nixon

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<sup>63</sup> SHLAIM, A. *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, p. 294.

<sup>64</sup> PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, pp. 143–144.

<sup>65</sup> GOLAN, G. *Soviet Policies in the Middle East. From World War II to Gorbachev*, p. 73.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in QUANDT, W. B. *Decade of Decisions*, p. 192; also in PARKER, R. B. *Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, p. 145.

<sup>67</sup> KISSINGER, H. *White House Years*, p. 561; RABIN, Y. *The Rabin Memoirs*, p. 130.

declared in a statement that peace could only come on the basis of an agreement between the parties. The advice for Egypt was to return to the ceasefire as defined by the Security Council Resolution 242, which must not be linked to an Israeli withdrawal.<sup>68</sup>

Early in February 1970, American and Israeli intelligence did detect large new Soviet air shipments of equipment to Egypt, but the first really disquieting news was not received until 25 February, when on a secret briefing in the White House it was told that a large numbers of Soviet aircrafts carrying SAM-3s batteries and radar and Soviet military crews had begun to arrive in Egypt.<sup>69</sup> A complete air defence system, including SAM-3s missiles and some eighty fighters (MiG 21-23s), had to be installed.<sup>70</sup> The new air defence from the Soviet Union needed special installations which had to be constructed under continuous pressure from enemy air raids, day and night. The Egyptians were beginning large-scale construction works along their second defence line, some 15 to 30 kilometres west of the Canal. From the beginning of March Israeli planes were sent to attack the works.<sup>71</sup> The Israelis concentrated all the power of its air force on preventing the Egyptians from preparing the reinforcements and positions for the new missiles in the Canal area. The operation exacted tremendous cost in lives, both military and civilian, and was accomplished under the worst imaginable conditions. Setting up the installations for the air defence became a national symbol, a test of will and self-sacrifice. The volume of the necessary engineering works was enormous and was completed in forty days.<sup>72</sup>

The Israeli raids on the Egyptian heartland lasted from 7 January to mid April 1970. Golda Meir denied that the raids were deliberately intended to topple the president, but if they brought about a change of the regime, it would be good news.<sup>73</sup> On 14 and 15 April, Israel launched intensive air attack on Egyptian positions along the Canal. On 16 April, Egyptian aircraft retaliated in a large-scale attack on Israeli positions in Sinai, to signal the beginning of a series of systematic Egyptian air attacks. It was in such a climate that on 10 April the Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco visited Cairo. He repeated the US request for a resumption of diplomatic relations with Egypt, asserting Egypt should place its confidence in the United States now that it was about to

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<sup>68</sup> RIYĀD, Maḥmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978], Vol. I, pp. 236–237.

<sup>69</sup> KORN, D. A. *Stalemate. The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967 – 1970*, p. 194.

<sup>70</sup> EL-HUSSINI, Mohrez Mahmoud. *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945 – 1985*, p. 186.

<sup>71</sup> DAYAN, M. *Story of My Life*, p. 452.

<sup>72</sup> EL-GAMASY, Mohamed Abdel Ghani. *The October War*, p. 119.

<sup>73</sup> SHLAIM, A. *The Iron Wall. Israel and the Arab World*, p. 293.



adopt a new policy. The president's answer was: "We do not trust you because of your alignment with Israel. Every time you present us a new project you ask us for new concessions."<sup>74</sup>

The Soviet forces arrived and took up their assigned positions in the interior of Egypt. The Egyptian air defence forces occupied positions on the west bank of the Canal where Israel continued its heavy attacks. The situation changed on 18 April, when Israeli pilots intercepted radio communications between aircraft flying deep inside Egypt and realised that they were manned by Soviet pilots. And to avoid the danger of clash with aircraft of the Soviet Air Force, Israel's deep raids stopped as of that date.<sup>75</sup> On the morning of 30 June, Israeli planes were surprised by Egyptian air defence missiles now in position. They suffered unexpected losses and their air force command sent a second strike to penetrate and destroy the defence line. The outcome was even more losses in *Phantom* and *Skyhawk* planes.<sup>76</sup> The decision of Israel's leadership to construct the Bar Lev line, to send troops on raids across the Canal, to bomb along the Canal, and finally to dispatch fighter-jets to bomb deep into Egypt, were all desperate attempts to respond to the public demand to put an end to an immensely unpopular war. After the euphoria of the 1967 victory there could be nothing as disappointing and frustrating for the Israelis as the War of Attrition.<sup>77</sup>

The escalation of the War of Attrition, developments in the region following the arrival of the Soviet forces, and the growing Soviet presence in Egypt created a new set of factors for the US policy to consider. Egypt's determination to continue the war and rejection of the Israeli and US view on the need for direct negotiations were coupled with growing anti-American feelings in the Arab world. The Americans came to the conclusion that it would be useful to limit the military escalation by sponsoring an initiative for a ceasefire.<sup>78</sup> In a meeting with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban in May 1970 – also attended by Israeli ambassador Yitzhak Rabin and Assistant Secretary of State Joseph Sisco – President Nixon apart from other things said to the guests: "We will back you militarily, but the military escalation can not be allowed to go

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<sup>74</sup> Quoted in RIYĀD, Maḥmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978], Vol. I, pp. 244–245.

<sup>75</sup> WANNER, J. *Krvavý Jom Kippur. Čtvrtá a pátá arabsko-izraelská válka ve světové politice* [The Bloody Yom Kippur. The Fourth and Fifth Arab-Israeli War in World Politics], p. 63; HERZOG, Ch. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 216.

<sup>76</sup> HELLEBRAND, K. – RADINA, V. *Izraelské letectvo* [The Israeli Air-force], p. 158; KORN, D. A. *Stalemate. The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967 – 1970*, p. 230.

<sup>77</sup> BREGMAN, A. *Israel's Wars. A History Since 1947*, pp. 100–101.

<sup>78</sup> KISSINGER, H. *White House Years*, pp. 567–569.

endlessly. We must do something politically.”<sup>79</sup> The Americans found themselves in a very awkward position, sufficient to destroy all the bases on which US policy. Richard Nixon was now trying to act in a way that would remove the stigma of total alignment to Israel and, at the same time, improve relations with the Arab states in order to avoid the dangers that were beginning to surround US interest. Simultaneously Nixon was seeking to undermine Soviet presence in the area. His main predicament was that he could find no solution to that complex equation.<sup>80</sup>

At a news conference on 25 June 1970 William Rogers announced that his government had undertaken a new political initiative to encourage the Arab states and Israel to stop shooting and start talking. The initiative called on all parties to restore the ceasefire for a limited period of three months and a resumption of the Jarring mission to implement SC Resolution 242. When Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir took a closer look at the plan, he decided that it fitted in with his overall strategy.<sup>81</sup> On 29 June the president paid his second visit of that year to the Soviet Union where he underwent a two weeks’ treatment. He returned from the visit a frustrated and very sick man. He was realising the scope of the political cost for Soviet involvement in Egypt. He believed he could use a ceasefire to advance his military plans. He had decided that his acceptance of the Rogers’ initiative would be contained in a speech he was to deliver on 23 July, the anniversary of the revolution.<sup>82</sup> Like Egypt, Israel too agreed to accept the initiative. A ninety-day ceasefire would take effect at midnight 8 August in Israel and at 1:00 am of Cairo time. The agreement stipulated that neither side would change its military positions in an area extending 50 kilometres east and west of the Canal. The two parties were not to introduce or set up new positions in this area, and any activity was to be confined to the maintenance of existing positions or to the change and provision of the troops already stationed there.<sup>83</sup> Egypt hurried to complete positions for the air defence network in the night hours before the limited time. In the morning of the following day, Israel found itself facing a complete network of defence missiles without any breach of the imminent ceasefire.

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<sup>79</sup> RABIN, Y. *The Rabin Memoirs*, pp. 137–138.

<sup>80</sup> RIYĀD, Maḥmūd. *Mudakkirāt Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978* [Memoirs of Maḥmūd Riyād, 1948 – 1978], Vol. I, p. 247.

<sup>81</sup> HAYKAL, Muḥammad Ḥasanayn. *Aṭ-Ṭarīq ilā Ramaḍān* [The Road to Ramaḍān], p. 89.

<sup>82</sup> In ʿABDANNĀṢIR, Hudā Jamāl (ed.). *Al-majmūʿa al-kāmila li-khuṭab wa taṣrīḥāt ar-raʾīs Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir* [Complete Collection of Speeches and Statements of President Jamāl ʿAbdannāṣir], Vol. II, p. 578–582.

<sup>83</sup> HERZOG, C. *The Arab-Israeli Wars. War and Peace in the Middle East*, p. 219.

The War of Attrition was the longest of wars between Egypt and Israel, lasting for almost 18 months, from March 1969 to August 1970, during which time land, air, naval, and air defence forces were used. Its political objective and its military strategies and operations were of a special nature. Tactically, it was one of several stages in the armed conflict with Israel after the 1967 defeat and in this respect, it differed from a comprehensive war. The war of attrition is usually ignored or only casually mentioned by analysts. Opinions of it have also differed, some criticizing it either because it did not settle anything, either militarily or politically, or because of the tremendous, possibly unnecessary, losses which drained Egypt's capabilities rather than Israel's. The War of Attrition against Israel was launched after two other strategic stages: resistance and active defence. It was of vital importance for the Egyptian armed forces. It significantly influenced the preparation and planning for the October 1973 war and ensured the efficient performance of the armed forces during that war.

From a political perspective, for Egypt the war ensured that the Middle East problem remained alive and priority for international policy. It also meant that Israel, despite its great victory in June 1967 war, could not impose its political will on Egypt and force her into accepting direct negotiations and peace on its own terms. Moreover, this war sent out a forceful message worldwide that Egypt and the frontline states had not abandoned their occupied lands and would liberate the land by military force if political channels failed. Lastly, it meant that despite the bitter June defeat the Egyptians had not lost the will to fight and that Israel was paying a very high price for its presence in Sinai. From the military perspective, the War of Attrition provided to the Egyptian army essential practical training in actual fighting conditions with Israel. The Egyptian soldiers and officers found a new confidence in themselves, their weapons, and their leadership. The armed forces came out of this war with useful lessons, particularly on points of weakness and strengths in the enemy and in themselves.

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