(U) Cryptologic Almanac 50th Anniversary Series

(U) The Yom Kippur War of 1973

Part One

"On Rosh Hashanah it is inscribed and on
the Fast Day of Atonement it is sealed and determined
How many shall pass away and how many be born;
Who shall live and who shall die,
Whose appointed time is finished and whose is not..."

-- Part of the U'Netaneh Tokef, a prayer recited on Yom Kippur

(U) Foreword

(U) Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the most solemn holy day in the Jewish religion. It is a day of fasting, introspection, remembrance of those who have passed on, reconciliation and attendance at synagogue or quiet remembrance at home. In September 1973 the political leaders of Syria,Egypt, and Jordan agreed to launch a preemptive strike against Israel. D-Day was fixed at 6 October 1973 - Yom Kippur. They could not have picked a worse day to start a war. For on Yom Kippur nearly every Israeli fighting man and woman who was not at his/her post could be recalled or mobilized with greater facility than any other day of the year.

(U) Background

(U) The origins of the Yom Kippur War of 1973 lie in the unsatisfactory resolution of the Middle East War of 1967. While there was a cease-fire, and Israel acquired sufficient land to make its borders more defensible, bitterness remained. The Arabs, stunned by a preemptive Israeli attack, were humiliated in the ensuing battle. United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, which served as the basis for the cease-fire, established an all-important quid pro quo: if the states of the Middle East recognized Israel's right to exist and its territorial integrity, Israel would withdraw from the occupied territories. The resolution also provided free and unhindered passage through international passageways, including the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, and for the repatriation of refugees.

(U) Resolution 242 was a flawed document, in that it left too much subject to

interpretation: The Arab states construed withdrawal from the occupied territories to mean complete withdrawal from all occupied territories, while Israel argued that withdrawal meant a partial withdrawal to "defensible borders," and certainly not from the West Bank (of the River Jordan) and Jerusalem. Israel also considered "repatriation of refugees" to mean that the Arab states should absorb the refugee Palestinians, while the Arab view held that the Palestinians should be allowed to return to their previous place of residence. Thus, to the Arabs there was no satisfactory end to the 1967 war, although the cease-fire more or less endured. They came to characterize the situation as "this situation of neither peace nor war."The United Nations lacked either the machinery or the courage to enforce the full meaning of its resolution.

(U) The Soviet Union was quick to replace and upgrade the equipment lost by Egypt and Syria in the 1967 war, and sent military advisors to train their clients in the use of the new equipment and in Russian tactics. They also provided both countries with something that was sorely missing in 1967: a first-class antiaircraft system. This system was based on the new SA-6 surface-to-airmissile and, for low altitude defense, the potent ZSU-23-4 SP mobile antiaircraft gun.

(U) In 1969 Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser announced that he would conduct a "war of attrition" against Israeli positions in the Sinai Desert. For several years, artillery duels raged in the desert and escalated to good-sized raids against targets on both sides of the Suez Canal.
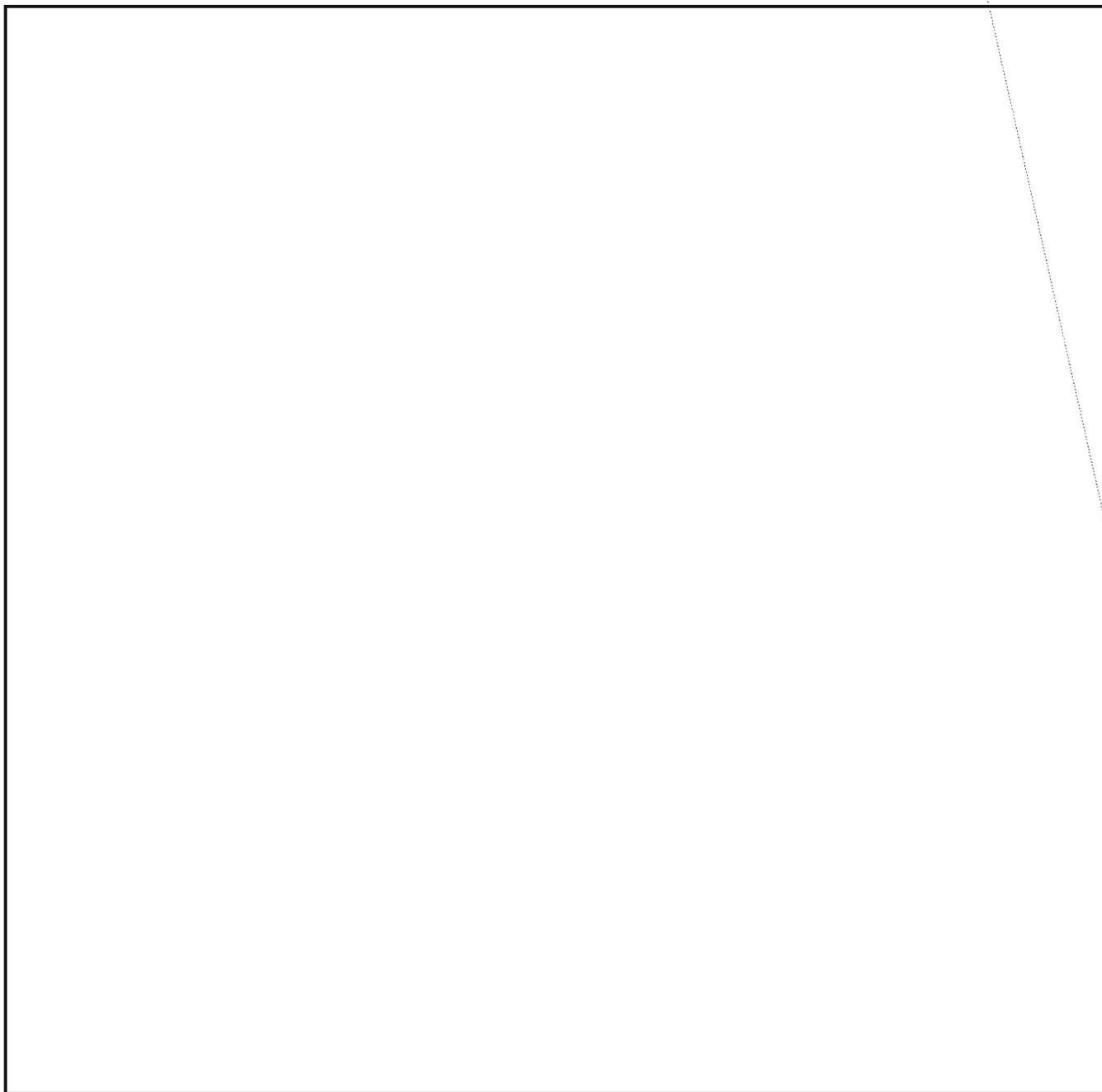
(U) Anwar Sadat Moves Reluctantly toward War

(U) Anwar Sadat assumed the Egyptian presidency upon the death of the ailing Nasser. Initially, Sadat appeared to incline more towards diplomacy than military force. In 1971 pressure from Egyptian "hawks" nearly forced a war with Israel, which he narrowly averted by declaring that he was not against fighting to regain the Sinai, but everything depended on the timing. From 1971 through 1973, Sadat publicly mentioned from time to time that he might have to resort to armed conflict if the Sinai could not be regained by diplomacy. Behind the defensive berm on their side of the Suez Canal, the Egyptians conducted endless "exercises," which were no more and no less than rehearsals for crossing the Canal and taking back the Sinai in the next war with Israel.

(U) Egyptian minister of war General Ahmed Ismail visited Damascus,Syria, in January 1973 for the first planning meeting. On 22 May Ismail issued his Concept of Operations, with additional instructions following on 7 June. The appropriate politicians were informed and approved 6 October 1973 for the commencement of hostilities, and on 1 October, H-hour was set for 1405 hours, 6 October.

(U) The Intelligence Picture

(U) From 1967 on, the Middle East was a volatile area -- the home of terrorists, rapid and unexpected changes of governments from friendly to hostile, and diplomats, travelers, and ordinary people killed by terrorists.It behooved the United States to keep a SIGINT eye on events taking place in that region.

(U) Those Who Have Ears, But Will Not Hear...

(S//SI) ⬚ was a Special Research Intern assigned to ⬚ (the Office of Middle East and North Africa) only a few weeks before ⬚. While no expert on the Middle East, she was a talented and convincing briefer, and she had a core of experts to support her. ⬚ chief of staff, had been convinced early on that

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war was imminent, and as events unfolded in September, more and more ☐ analysts came to believe that hostilities were in the offing. However, they had no vehicle to get their views on record, because NSCID-6 specifically prohibited NSA from producing "finished intelligence," the evaluative reports which would be taken as "intelligence." ☐ became as convinced as the others, and her skills as a briefer were the way to get the word out. NSA decided that she would brief the information to the intelligence community. ☐ faced a skeptical audience on 4 October. CIA had become concerned about ☐ Egyptian and Syrian activities in mid-September,

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(b)(3)-18 USC 798
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(S//SI) ☐ had more evidence to offer -- ☐

☐ It was known that the Israelis, apparently doubting their own conclusions, had launched reconnaissance missions over the Canal that morning. Their intelligence experts were unconvinced; they still believed what they were seeing was ☐ Deputy DCI Lieutenant General Daniel Graham was sufficiently concerned that he had ☐ repeat the briefing to Samuel Hoskinson, the community's Mideast expert.

(S//SI) Hoskinson remained unconvinced, in the belief that the political climate was not right for an attack, and logically arguing that all of the evidence could well be related to heightened exercise activity --the Egyptians had been conducting a large number of exercises during the preceding two years. (Time would tell that those "exercises" were rehearsals for crossing the Canal when the war broke out.) The USIB Watch Report issued in the afternoon of 4 October indicated that war was not expected, a conclusion that was to haunt the intelligence community like no other since Pearl Harbor. Israeli intelligence stuck to its evaluation that no war was in the offing. A 5 October report from the U.S. defense attaché in Tel Aviv reported that the Israelis were waffling on their convictions and had requested guidance. No guidance was provided, and it was not until midday of Saturday, 6 October, that the Israeli cabinet reached a consensus that war was imminent, and a call for full mobilization went out.

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