**Chapter 8**

**The God Who Failed**

Gen. Muhammad Abdel Ghani al-Gamasy, Director of Egypt’s General Staff’s Operations Division and Deputy Chief of Staff during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and later Egypt’s Minister of Defense, once said, “In the October War, we got our revenge for the 1967 War. It was personal between me and Dayan... I hated Dayan more than I ever hated Sharon or Bar-Lev.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

On Oct. 6, 1973, Judaism’s holiest day, Yom Kippur, Israel came under a coordinated Egyptian-Syrian assault, considered among the greatest and most successful strategic military surprise attacks of all time. Israel’s recovery after the defeats of the first few days and ultimate victory in the war despite its terrible opening are also considered among the most dramatic reversals in military history The astute Dayan understood the disaster’s dimensions perhaps better than anyone around him. It was to Dayan that commanders and soldiers looked in the nation’s difficult hours for confidence and hope. But Dayan could not provide them.

After the initial shock of the opening salvos, the Israeli army, buoyed by the heroism and self-sacrifice of the soldiers, regrouped within just a few short days. Dayan, too, recovered and regained his powers. He soon became a key player, especially after the most intense battles were over, effectively steering difficult negotiations. However, his immense personal prestige had suffered a mortal blow. The Israeli public, furious at the leadership’s perceived hubris before the war and at the number of casualties, never forgave him. His role in history appeared to have ended.

To this day, questions about Israel having been taken by surprise and failing to respond adequately in the war’s first few days remain unanswered. For example, how did Dayan, with all his experience and wisdom, err regarding both the Egyptians’ intentions and their capabilities? Dayan is still blamed for not calling up the reserves in time, for failures to heed intelligence, for ill-judged responses in the war’s first days, followed by an alleged failure of nerve and messages of doom he conveyed to the public. This chapter addresses these questions and offers some possible answers.

**The Yom Kippur War: The Strategic Background**

With half a century having passed since the Yom Kippur War, we can now better see the trends and processes that led to the war – undoubtedly Israel’s most difficult, excepting the War of Independence – through a broader historical lens.

Undoubtedly, Israeli faced a strategic quagmire between the 1970 War of Attrition and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. It could either pay very steep costs in human life and resources to attain its political objectives of not conceding any territory without satisfactory and commensurate political security; or it significantly reduce human and other costs while making some territorial concession. With its ends not congruent with its means for attaining them, Israel either had to adjust its ends or change the possible means.

To understand how Israel confronted this situation and Dayan’s role in this, we must revisit the end of the Six-Day War and the War of Attrition to examine the political and military processes and events that brought Israel to this point.

At the end of the Six-Day War – after 19 years of vulnerability to Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian forces abutting its rear and threatening it from higher elevations – Israel finally felt more secure. With Israel’s borders pushed to the Suez Canal and Jordan River, and the Golan Heights under its control, Israelis were now living beyond the range of enemy fire, the first time since the country’s establishment.

Still, on June 19, 1967, less than two weeks after the war’s end, the Israeli government decided it was prepared to return the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt, all of the Golan Heights to Syria, and even most of the land conquered from Jordan, in exchange for peace treaties backed by acceptable security arrangements. A September 1, 1067 Arab League decision provided a stark response: no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no negotiations with Israel. Even earlier, on July 1– less than three weeks after the end of the Six-Day War – fighting resumed on the Egyptian border, followed soon by Syrian shooting. This fighting made it clear that despite the Arab armies’ recent crushing defeat, Israel’s fundamental strategic situation remained unchanged. While secret negotiations were conducted between the Six-Day War and the Yom Kippur War, the Arab demands of full territorial withdrawals in exchange for nothing or, at best, a limited something that would be ensured only after the lands were returned, were unacceptable to Israel and rigidified its positions.

**Calling up the Reserves**

With the 1967 Arab defeat only temporarily changing the regional balance of power, Israel had to continue relying on its reservists for its military power and on early intelligence warnings for moving them to the front. However, with call-ups proving costly, Israel had to minimize them as much as possible, delay them to the last moment, and end any war quickly so reservists could return to productive economic activity. Frequent full-scale call-ups could so damage the Israeli economy that it would be unable to withstand a joint Arab assault. Consequently, Israel had to avoid unnecessary call-ups and ensure that any call-up would so weaken its enemy that a future call-up could be postponed. While the toll of war – certainly when unprepared – is far greater than an unnecessary call-up, the economic costs of such a call-up can approach those of war. Unnecessary call-ups also undermine morale: the public loses trust in the government, possibly even suspecting its motives. A reservist, paying an economic and personal price for call-ups, may be reluctant to report, fearing an unnecessary call-up. Consequently, even if a call-up reflects a genuine military emergency, many might not come or might postpone coming until certain that “this time it’s for real”; either way, not making it to the front in time. Moreover, frequent unnecessary reservist call-ups would harm Israel’s democratic government’s stability.

Another key consideration in Israel’s national security policy between 1949 and 1967 was the proximity of the civilian rear to the nation’s borders. With no strategic depth, Israel could never allow itself to be taken by surprise, its standing army incapable of keeping the enemy from reaching the civilian rear. Israel always preferred striking first, keeping the fighting as far away from the rear as possible.

The Six-Day War’s political and military outcomes resolved some matters and complicated others regarding Israel’s need for reserves. One complication was Israel’s growing dependence on the United States, as its political backer and as its almost-sole arms provider, making starting a war without explicit U.S. permission unthinkable. The United States clearly demanded that Israel not shoot first; thus, any future war would have to be started by the Arab nations. With Israel’s new borders resulting in mostly uninhabited land between Israel’s fronts and its civilian rear, Israel was better able to absorb enemy attacks before they reached civilians. Thus, the U.S. demand not to fire first was easier to accept.

Nonetheless, the added territory proved a mixed blessing, adding two new complications in planning for the next war. One was that it would now take many reservists longer to reach the front from their homes, requiring an earlier call-up, or letting the regular army handle the fighting on its own at the front, where they were greatly outnumbered by the regular Arab armies. The possibility of failure was, ironically, greater than before and the assumption was that even if the regular soldiers succeeded, Israel’s losses would be massive. The second complication was that it now took longer to allocate and move troops from one front to another, meaning it was now more critical than before 1967 that the General Staff correctly decide how to allocate forces.

Because of the enemies’ absolute superiority in population size and because of their dictatorial regimes, the Arab nations could – and did – maintain very large regular armies near the fronts at a relatively high, if imperfect, state of alert. For these armies, the reserves were used for very particular niches, and could shift from calm to war quite rapidly. Tiny Israel had no such luxury.

In this situation, Egypt and Syria could maneuver Israel into an impossible predicament. Egypt could permanently maintain tens of thousands of fighters and two entire armies along the Suez Canal prepared to strike at any time, and another army to defend the approach to Cairo. Against this force, Israel had – in the case of a surprise attack – fewer than 1,500 men permanently stationed at the front, a force that could be augmented by at most another 1,000 troops within three hours of an order being issued. The Syrian force, ready to fight on short notice, numbered some 15,000 men against Israel’s permanent force of fewer than 1,500, and the weapons gap was similar. Israel would need 24 to 48 hours to call up the reserves and move them to the Golan Heights, and anywhere from 72 hours to seven days to Sinai, depending on how they travelled. As if this were not enough, Egypt and Syria could complete almost all their preparations for war without actually attacking for an extended period of time. While these nations would have paid a certain economic toll, it would have been much lower than the financial and social costs to Israel of calling up and holding its reserves over time.

With Egypt and Syria able to continuing threatening war without specifying when, the imbalance of army size and troop availability between the sides enabled Egypt to manipulate Israel, constantly forcing it to decide whether or not to call up the reserves. Israel found itself in a untenable situation, like that of the boy who cried wolf, made worse by Egypt ostensibly negotiating with Israel over a political settlement, so that some Israeli leaders came to consider any bellicose declarations all talk and bluster.

In hindsight, these constraints, Israel’s dilemma about reservists, and the risks they faced at the moment of truth on October 6, 1973, had clear dimensions. But that is not how it seemed then. Some Israeli leaders did not fully grasp the dilemma’s impact and the depth of the predicament in which Israel found itself. Others, believing that the regular army could hold out longer at the front, were less concerned about late reserves mobilization than were those who considered the regular troops’ capacity to withstand an attack more limited.

Shortly before his death, Dayan analyzed Israel’s dilemma then:

The three Egyptian armies were a standing army. They were all soldiers. Not teachers, not craftsmen, not engineers… For two and a half years of attrition, [the Israeli reservists] spent one month in the army for every month at home, for a total of 172 days per man.

What should we have done? Called up the entire IDF? How long could this have gone on? A week, two, three?... And then what? You go home because the factory worker has to work at the factory and the engineer has to work and the teacher has to go back to school, otherwise you’d just be extending the [War of] Attrition…

Sadat could have waited two weeks, because he knew we didn’t have more than two weeks’ worth of air, and then he’d postpone the invasion by two weeks, because his army at the Suez Canal only needed a few things: backgammon, to grease and check the distilled water of batteries, and fava beans to eat.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

When the war broke out, Dayan told the government:

When a state with fewer than three million Jews wants to hold the lines for years and live a normal life, it holds [the lines] very sparsely, knowing that we live on our reserves and that it takes time to call them up. So until we get around to doing that, things will be uncomfortable and at time risky, and that’s currently the situation at the canal.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It’s arguable that Dayan tried to justify himself in hindsight for his failure to call up the reservists in time. There are no reliable Egyptian sources about the Egyptian leadership’s true pre-war intentions. Egyptian witnesses published material only after the war to promote their own political agendas, and their work is rife with contradictions, even over Egypt’s plan for war on October 6. The Egyptian archives remain closed. Some support for Dayan’s claims is provided by Maj. Gen. Herzl Shafir, Director of the Manpower Directorate during the 1973 war, who later represented Israel at the Geneva Conference in 1975. There he spoke with Egyptian generals, trying to uncover their intentions on the eve of the war. He was curious what would have happened had Israel discovered Egypt’s plans and called up its reserves in time: would Egypt have called off the attack, or would it have gone on the offensive according to plan? Only years later, after the generals had retired from the military and met with Shafir again, did they answer him. Even then they were careful to say they were merely speculating, because Sadat made all decisions on his own. The Egyptians felt that the element of surprise was crucial to Egypt’s planning and therefore, had the true intentions been revealed, Egypt would have concluded the exercise as an exercise and not launched an attack.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The security challenges Israel faced were obvious to its political and security leaderships. To understand how the security leadership, spearheaded by Dayan, planned on confronting them and to appreciate the trouble the plans ran into, the defensive plans and the arguments about them in the years preceding the war must be examined.

**Pre-War Defense Plans**

After the Six-Day War ended, the general expectation, including among the senior IDF command, was that the deployment along the new frontlines was only temporary. However, over the next few months, it became increasingly clear that Israel would have to hold the new lines over an extended period. Senior IDF command members decided to prepare an orderly defensive plan.

This plan tried to integrate a response to two strategic threats – the continuing attacks of attrition and a full-scale assault – into a unified framework. In the five years preceding the Yom Kippur War, this plan was the subject of professional debates and various updates. Ultimately, the military designed three defensive plans for each front differing in their scope of reservist call-up should war break out: Sea Sand (later renamed Small Dovecote) – with no reservists beyond those already doing routine annual reserve duty; Chalk (later renamed Full or Big Dovecote) – partial reserve call-up; and Rock – full reserves call-up.

Arguments revolved around the operational concept, especially for the Egyptian front, with the range of opinions representing two basic schools of thought: the static defense school versus the mobile defense school. Those favoring a static defense on the Egyptian front, first and foremost Maj. Gen. Gavish and Maj. Gen. Eden, felt that the defensive battle should be conducted along the Suez Canal, creating 30 strongpoints to identify points from which the Egyptian forces were liable to launch their crossing and alert the tank troops to embark immediately on an attack. This defense was based on a counteroffensive rather than on a fixed placement at pre-selected positions and firing at the approaching enemy until it was stopped in its tracks.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Those championing a mobile defense in the south, led by Maj. Gen. Israel Tal and Maj. Gen. Ariel Sharon, who had also opposed constructing strongpoints during the War of Attrition, preferred allowing the Egyptians to cross the canal and to wait for them as they tried to move deeper into Sinai. Warfare dozens of kilometers from the Suez Canal and west of the mountain passes would be more mobile. In 1969, Sharon was appointed the new commander of the Southern Command and he pushed for his plans.

The first round of arguments between the two viewpoints ended when Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev made his decision: while from a purely military standpoint, a mobile defense was preferable, politically, it did not reflect the government’s insistence on denying the enemy any success. Pushing the Egyptians back to their territory with a mobile defense would take two weeks or so, whereas any Egyptian achievements against a static defense could be quickly reversed within days. Bar-Lev claimed that Israel’s experience showed that the superpowers might impose a ceasefire within days; therefore, under a mobile defense plan, the Egyptians would gain conquered territory and the IDF would have failed in its mission.

On January 1, 1972, David Elazar (Dado) replaced Bar-Lev as Chief of Staff. While he appreciated the advantages of a mobile defense, due to political considerations, he ultimately endorsed plans based on a static defense integrated with mobile troops. Nonetheless, arguments continued over the number of strongpoints, so that the final plans were presented and again approved in late April and early May of 1973, during the Blue-and-White state of alert for reservists, when, following intelligence alerts, the IDF called up IDF reserve units and made organizational changes and equipment upgrades to improve its state of readiness.

One of the e Yom Kippur War’s enduring myths is that the IDF command thought it was possible to stop the Egyptians and keep them from achieving any territorial gains, no matter how small or temporary. It must be stressed, however, that this was not the prevailing opinion. Dayan didn’t agree, either; his conceding “not one inch of land” stance related not to conditions at a war’s start but to those at its end.[[6]](#footnote-6) All the exercises and war games assumed that the enemy would make territorial gains, with drills focused on how to repel them. In August 1972, the IDF conducted the Battering Ram exercise, a war game centered on a scenario in which the army had only a two-day early warning of war. In the game, the Israelis quickly reversed Egyptian advances, and even crossed the canal. Still, after the exercise concluded, Chief of Staff Elazar expressed scepticism about the speed of the reversal of fortunes during the war game: “The number of losses, the speed, and the place we reached within such and such number of days…. Personally, I have certain reservations with the scope of the success, the speed of the success, and the ease of the success as it was played out here.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The difference between the political and the tactical “not one inch” was lost on the junior commanders who thought their mission was to repulse the Egyptians before they could set foot on the Israeli side of the Suez Canal.[[8]](#footnote-8) In contrast, the top brass was discussing the question of how far the Egyptians would advance into Sinai before the IDF could launch a counteroffensive to repel them back across the canal.

Unquestionably, the upper echelon of the IDF disdained the enemy, despite their advantages. They felt that the Arabs would not try their luck again for years to come, and even if they did, they would be defeated with relative ease. This self-confidence of Israel’s top military leadership was fueled primarily by Israel’s unequivocal aerial superiority (notwithstanding problems the IAF had with Egyptian anti-aircraft defense in the War of Attrition, now greatly enhanced by the Soviets both along the Suez and in Syria), even though the IAF’s leaders insisted that in the first two or three days, ground troops could not rely on aerial support because the IAF would be busy trying to destroy the enemy’s aerial defenses. Dayan later admitted on several occasions that his own confidence came from the fact that he had underestimated the enemy and perhaps overestimated Israel’s own power.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The way out of the predicament was a preemptive strike on the enemy’s anti-aircraft defense system. But even a limited first strike was a political impossibility. However, it seems that the senior military leaders had not internalized that permission for a preemptive strike would be denied until the very moment of truth. Given the Yom Kippur War’s unique political and military conditions, it remains unclear how effect a first strike could have been. On October 6, nature – heavy cloud cover – and political reality were on the Arab armies’ side, rendering a first strike against Syria impossible.

**Sadat Prepares a Surprise**

A retrospective study of strategic surprises like the Yom Kippur War often raises the question, “How did they not see it coming? It was all right in front of their eyes!” With all the information available, it seems that all that was needed was to put the puzzle pieces together correctly. Those who lived through that period and paid the price for the mistake seem the most incredulous.[[10]](#footnote-10)

There are several approaches to studying this surprise. One is a retroactive analysis, reconstructing the flow of information and the work of intelligence, the knowledge and insights derived from that information, and the decision-makers’ lacunae in correctly reading reality that led them – chiefly Golda Meir, Moshe Dayan, and David Elazar – to make key and painful errors in decisions.[[11]](#footnote-11) A different approach examines not information, but the leaders’ presumptions, based on what can now be seen as faulty assumptions about the enemy’s objectives and capabilities.[[12]](#footnote-12) A third perspective examines whether the political echelon, armed with political biases, persuaded the military that no immediate attack was expected.[[13]](#footnote-13) Some, going even further, while others argue that decision makers were aware of the impending attack but did nothing, hoping it would result in a favorable political settlement for Israel,[[14]](#footnote-14) a popular theory since soundly refuted.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Research shows that intelligence was crucial to both sides of the conflict in terms of operational decisions, presumptions, and political considerations. Sadat, for example, decided to go to war after realizing the United States would not pressure Israel to withdraw from the all of the Sinai Peninsula. Consequently, in November 1972, Sadat ordered his generals to prepare for war. Aware of these developments, Dayan acknowledged the possibility of renewed conflict along the Suez Canal to the government on November 26, citing AMAN’s intelligence failures in predicting the removal of Soviet “advisors” from Egypt earlier that year. These “advisors were actually Soviet units that had fought in the last half of the War of Attrition, instructed Egypt’s military forces, and, importantly, reinforced Egypt’s aerial defense systems. Dayan therefore believed that a renewal of violence was likely.

In a December 1 government meeting, Dayan predicted, “We must assume that Egypt will renew fire at the canal in early 1973.” AMAN Director Eli Zeira differed: “The chances that Egypt will begin a war are not high… The chances they’ll try to cross the canal are close to zero”[[16]](#footnote-16) Dayan responded:

All of the AMAN Director’s rational analyses explain why it is not worth Egypt’s while to open fire, but he has no advice to give Egypt on how to secure Sadat’s position in Egypt, how to reach a pan-Arab arrangement, how to jumpstart some political activity. In Egypt, an irrational rationale can hold sway, and it may be quite rational in intra-Egyptian terms… It’s not to be expected tomorrow, but it may certainly occur before next spring.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Kissinger warned Israel against a preemptive strike. This was not the first such American warning, and it would be a mistake to underestimate how much this caveat influenced Meir’s and Dayan’s pre-war strategy.

In February 1973, Sadat dispatched a peace initiative to Kissinger, demanding Israel’s full withdrawal from territories seized in 1967, creating a Palestinian state, and granting Palestinians the right to return. In return, Egypt would end the state of war but would not sign a peace treaty until negotiations with Jordan, Syria, and Palestinians were concluded. Sadat hoped the United States would force Israel to accept these conditions, including a full withdrawal and the Palestinian right of return.[[18]](#footnote-18) Frustrated after the initiative’s failure, Sadat accelerated Egypt’s preparations for war. In April and May 1973, Israel received warnings of possible renewed hostilities in May. Whether Egypt really intended to go to war that May remains unclear.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In April, sources warned of Sadat’s disappointment with the political route and his resolve to resume hostilities. Israeli intelligence suggested two potential dates: May 15 and 19. They also learned of an Egyptian plan to cross the Suez Canal with five infantry divisions, isolate the area to be captured, erect a bridgehead, and move armored divisions into Sinai to seize the mountain passes.[[20]](#footnote-20) Historians still argue over Egypt’s war strategy: would conquering a 10-km strip suffice, or would they try to seize control of the entire expanse, reaching 40 km from the canal?[[21]](#footnote-21) Success hinged on a concurrent Syrian attack on the Golan Heights to distract Israel, especially the IAF. Sadat accurately anticipated that IDF would split its forces between the Syrian front, close to civilian settlements, and the Egyptian front, thus enabling the Egyptian force to more easily establish its bridgehead. However, Syria was kept unaware of Egypt’s intentions, so that Egypt misled both Israel and its Syrian ally.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Nonetheless, there was no increased activity on the southern front suggesting war preparations. At an April 13 meeting General Staff meeting, AMAN Director Zeira downplayed the threat’s severity, with Dayan and Chief of Staff Elazar more concerned. Dayan found in AMAN’s data: “implications and hints that very much strengthen the idea of war in terms of [Egypt’s] general approach.”[[23]](#footnote-23) On April 18, AMAN reiterated that Sadat aimed to unnerve Israel as in the past, but was not really preparing for war. Dayan, like Zeira, believed Sadat was taking military steps to strengthen himself politically; unlike Zeira, Dayan thought Sadat really intended to fight. “Sadat will sleep well even if 20,000 of his soldiers are killed,” said Dayan. “He’ll sacrifice them for the sake of his political goal.”[[24]](#footnote-24) By May 1973, Dayan and Elazar developed their own assessment contrary to AMAN’s underestimation of war.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The most important discussion of the probability of war in May occurred on April 18 at a meeting of Prime Minister Meir’s closest associates in “Golda’s Kitchen Cabinet.” Attendees included Meir, Galili, Dayan, Elazar, Zeira, and Mossad Chief Zamir, the handler of Ashraf Marwan, an important intelligence asset, who provided information on Egypt’s war preparations, including a potential war in May.[[26]](#footnote-26)

Dayan first focused on the central issue of the probability of war. Zeira believed the Egyptians were not ready and that AMAN would be able to know if and when they were. Zamir, in contrast, felt that Egypt was ready to launch an attack: anti-aircraft missiles now covered the Suez Canal and bridging materials had been placed nearby. Similarly, Elazar felt that while a reserve call-up wasn’t yet necessary, the plans needed to be updated. Dayan’s opinion was likewise grim: “If you ask me… I believe they are heading for war.” Dayan feared that the IDF’s strength might actually push the other side to decide it had nothing to lose. He added, “If going to war doesn’t provide military results, it will cause a change to the political order… They are counting on the Russians and the Americans and the oil more than on their own commandos.” Dayan thought any Egyptian fire would begin along the Suez Canal.[[27]](#footnote-27)

The next day, Elazar announced that the IDF must prepare for a two-front war, these preparations codenamed the Blue-and-White alert.

On May 21, Dayan predicted a high chance of war with Egypt and Syria in the latter half of 1973, without Jordan but with help from other Arab nations. Believing that Egypt would use a limited military move for political gain, Dayan exhorted Elazar: and “We the government say to the General Staff: ‘Gentlemen, please prepare for war…’ This is what we ask of the General Staff: to be ready by this summer.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Several times Dayan mentioned a preemptive strike, but it wasn’t clear if this was even conceivable politically.[[29]](#footnote-29) He did promise a good excuse: “If a provocation is needed, we’ll get you that too… If it emerges that Tel Aviv is about to be bombed, there’s no need to wait for it to happen… As for explaining to the world that we didn’t start a war at that time – we’ll take care of that.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Dayan did not rule out a preemptive first strike in spring 1973, despite Israel’s commitment to the United States.

During the Blue-and-White alert, improvements were accelerated in military personnel, infrastructures, and equipment. The IDF received more tanks and weaponry, while roads and strongpoints were strengthened. Despite the alert being lifted on August 12, the IDF’s readiness for the October war undoubtedly benefited from these changes.[[31]](#footnote-31) However, there were shortcomings, such as uncompleted tasks, causing some confusion among the units called up when the war broke out.

The alert also had drawbacks, including high costs, leading to careful consideration of future call-ups,[[32]](#footnote-32) and a growing complacency due to the lack of immediate conflict. A false sense of security resulted, with Dayan’s views shifting from imminent war to a distant threat. In the same month that the state of alert was cancelled, we now know that Syria and Egypt decided to wage war on October 6, secretly strengthening their front lines.[[33]](#footnote-33)

On September 13, disputes on the Syria border escalated due to an air fight that the IAF won, but with shattering repercussions for Israel, resulting in a false sense of security for Israel and enabling the Arab armies to surprise them less than a month later. The Syrians had two operational principles: react to every Israeli act and have the last word, usually meaning firing artillery at IDF positions.[[34]](#footnote-34) Therefore, after the air fight, Syrian reinforcements in the Golan Heights were misunderstood as preparations for a limited action, thus leading to the eventual surprise attack.[[35]](#footnote-35)

In the weeks before the war, Israel’s Northern Command, led by Yitzhak Hofi, was concerned about Syria's aggression due to the vulnerability of Israeli towns near the border and the lack of intelligence on Syrian forces.[[36]](#footnote-36) At a September 24 General Staff meeting, Hofi urged prioritizing the Syrian front over Egypt, arguing that while weaker, the Syrians posed a greater threat. Dayan felt that a Syrian surprise attack was a more perilous scenario because of civilian settlements’ proximity to the border.[[37]](#footnote-37) Dayan and Elazar, certain the Syrians could not take the Golan Heights, discussed various scenarios. Elazar foresaw a comprehensive Syrian invasion while Dayan considered a limited Syrian action designed to punish Israel.[[38]](#footnote-38) Dayan’s insistence that a response was needed to the Syrian threat probably led to the decision to reinforce the Northern Command.[[39]](#footnote-39)

On September 25, King Hussein of Jordan met with Prime Minister Golda Meir, warning that Egypt and Syria were preparing to join forces and go to war.[[40]](#footnote-40) Dayan immediately allayed Meir’s fears, assuring her that the intended to reinforce the northern front the next day. Israeli intelligence noted Hussein’s assessment that Syria would go to war only if Egypt also did, but, busy with struggles over authority with the IDF’s Intelligence Corps, the senior command ranks never gave it proper attention.[[41]](#footnote-41)

On September 26, the eve of the Jewish New Year (Rosh Hashanah), Dayan and Elazar agreed with AMAN’s assessment that Egypt would not start a war, and consequently, neither would Syria. With Elazar dismissing Dayan’s concerns about Syrian retaliation,[[42]](#footnote-42) Dayan toured the Golan Heights. Although worried about massive Syrian reinforcements there, Dayan tried to calm the Israeli public, now alarmed following the escalation there.[[43]](#footnote-43)

Due to the possibility of Syrian action, the outcome of deliberations and Dayan’s visit to the Golan Heights resulted in troop reinforcement and anti-aircraft deployment in the north, with additional armored troops and artillery placed on standby. The total forces placed in the Golan Heights increased significantly, and the IAF was set on alert to attack Syria’s missile systems on short notice. As of September 30, Israel’s security establishment, including Dayan, felt that war was unlikely but expected increased border activity from Syria.

On September 29, the CIA warned Israel that Syria intended to reclaim the Golan Heights, and Israel learned of Egypt’s upcoming military exercise in the Sinai.[[44]](#footnote-44) This information did not alarm AMAN, that rationalized Egypt’s troop movements towards the Suez Canal as part of the exercise. The next day, AMAN Director Zeira, supported by his deputy, dismissed the CIA’s warning regarding Syria’s intentions, Golan.[[45]](#footnote-45)

In the days leading up to the war, multiple sources indicated that Egypt and Syria were preparing for war. However, AMAN held a firm belief that Egypt and Syria would not initiate war until they held stronger positions, causing AMAN to ignore every sign to the contrary.[[46]](#footnote-46) For example, on the night of September 30, a warning of imminent war came from inside Egypt, but AMAN did not inform Elazar. Instead, Zeira told Dayan that he believed Egyptian movements were just part of a military exercise.[[47]](#footnote-47)

On October 1, regarding the CIA warning, AMAN repeated its assessment, authorized by Dayan, that Syria would not engage in the Golan without Egypt, and that Egypt was embarking on an exercise that might appear to be war, but added, “Our assessment is that it is just an exercise.”[[48]](#footnote-48) On October 2, a written warning arrived that Egypt was planning to launch an attack.[[49]](#footnote-49) Despite increasing signs of war preparations, AMAN continued maintaining that there would be no war.[[50]](#footnote-50)

When Dayan and Elazar Staff met, the latter assured Dayan that he and AMAN were convinced that the situation in Egypt was linked to the Egyptian exercise and Syria was unlikely to attack. Elazar felt the Golan reinforcements were sufficient, and assumed the IDF would have early warning if Syria launched a large-scale offensive. Dayan was uncertain about Syria’s preparations and the reliability of the warnings on war.[[51]](#footnote-51)

On October 3, the CIA transmitted another assessment indicating Syria’s intention to go to war. Dayan called for a comprehensive military-political consultation, saying he “wanted to share responsibility for the issue.”[[52]](#footnote-52) In the ensuing meeting, Elazar accepted AMAN’s assessment that Egypt and Syria did not plan to wage war.[[53]](#footnote-53)

On October 4, reports AMAN received of an Egyptian military delegation in Syria did not trigger alarm among decision-makers or cast doubt on “the conception”[[54]](#footnote-54) That night, the leadership consensus remained; there was no danger of a full-scale war. Dayan, although worried about Syria, accepted AMAN’s assessment about Egypt.

On the night of October 4–5, Israeli intelligence learned about the sudden and hasty evacuation of Soviet advisors’ families from Egypt and Syria, suggesting preparations for war. Information from Ashraf Marwan indicated war was imminent and aerial photos taken above the Suez Canal that night showed a significant reinforcement of Egyptian troops.

At a meeting on October 5 of Dayan, Elazar and Zeira, Dayan, reading data on Egyptian and Syrian forces from a piece of paper, opened: “The numbers alone are enough to give anyone a heart attack.” He then turned to the officers in the room, saying “You don’t take the Arabs seriously.” AMAN Director Zeira hypothesized that the Soviet evacuation could indicate Arab fear of an Israeli attack following bellicose Israeli rhetoric and the Golan reinforcement.[[55]](#footnote-55)

He maintained his assessment despite the evacuation, and shared Marwan’s information with Dayan and Elazar. He mentioned a meeting with Marwan, concluding by saying, “[After the meeting], we’ll be wiser.” Dayan, thinking that Egypt’s exercises could be a cover for a real attack, accepted his aide Tzvi Tsur’s recommendation to communicate to Egypt via the United States that Israel did not want to start a war notwithstanding its knowledge of Egyptian intentions. Delayed by Kissinger, the message reached Egypt only on October 6 at 1:05 p.m., an hour before the strike was launched.[[56]](#footnote-56) While it is unlikely that an earlier arrival of the message would have made a different, its delay let to conspiracy theories about Kissinger deliberately delaying it in order to encourage war.[[57]](#footnote-57)

Apparently, during the Oct. 5 meeting, Dayan averred that “special means” referring to Israeli listening devices, surreptitiously placed on Egyptian communications lines for use only if Egypt was about to attack, had in fact been activated. A wary Dayan asked Zeira: “In all this [communications] traffic over the Egyptian lines, is there anything unusual or not?” Although Zeira had already reported to Elazar on October 1 that the “special means” had already been activated, Zeira now answered Dayan, “It’s absolutely quiet,” thus placating Dayan. What neither Dayan nor Elazar knew was that Zeira, without consulting anyone, had decided not to activate the listening devices.[[58]](#footnote-58) The Agranat Commission of Inquiry later described this decision as “a grievous professional blunder.” Zeira claimed that he activated the devices at 1:45 a.m., after he authorized their activation at midnight.[[59]](#footnote-59) After evidence came to light after the war, that the devices had not been activated, Zeira provided a vague explanation, claiming it was difficult to decipher existing information, and therefore he didn’t feel there was any need for additional data.[[60]](#footnote-60)

On October 5 at 11:30 a.m., the, Elazar, meeting with Zeira and government ministers, reassured them that, “AMAN’s basic assessment that we are not facing a war is the most probable assessment in my opinion… The enemy’s forces bear all the characteristics of a defense.”[[61]](#footnote-61) At 8:30 p.m., the CIA’s answer about the Soviet airlift arrived. Regrettably, the answer was reassuring, supporting the erroneous assessment that war was not imminent. Although there had been increasing signs of Egyptian and Syrian call-up and preparations, AMAN’s assessment only started to crack after receiving many intelligence reports on the reinforcement of Egypt’s and Syria’s front lines.[[62]](#footnote-62) Historian Shimon Golan outlined Dayan’s stance during the critical period of October 4–5, when it was still feasible to mobilize reserves with 48-hour notice, per IDF plans:

[Dayan] raised questions about the basis of AMAN’s assessment that... were left unresolved. On October 5, he didn’t protest AMAN’s assessment, and confirmed that, militarily, the steps [Elazar]ff had taken were sufficient. Nonetheless, given the uncertainty about the enemy’s [intentions], he decided to add a [political step] to the...military ones. He advised [Meir] to contact the United States to [learn more about Egyptian intentions]... He also recommended that...[if]t Egypt and Syria were indeed on the warpath, the United States should inform them that Israel was ... prepared to meet their onslaught, and thus deter them from war...[A]nother reason for contacting the United States was to ensure that, if war did break out, it would provide Israel with political backing and critical equipment.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Dayan apparently relied on AMAN’s assessments and the military’s preparations, seeing his task as operation at the political-security level, especially ensuring critical U.S. support in case of war. Dayan also feared creating tension that might deteriorate into war, recalling the 1959 “Night of the Ducks” incident, when an emergency call-up for a drill escalated tensions unnecessarily, resulting in forced General Staff resignations.[[64]](#footnote-64) He aimed to balance between the prospect of war and the fear of an accidental war. The information that changed the opinion of Israel’s decision makers came from Marwan, who warned of impending war on the night between October 4 and 5.[[65]](#footnote-65)

Meetings took place with Marwan in London at midnight (Israel time). Marwan had not forgotten of past warnings of war that had not materialized and he was aware that the final decision on going to war was Sadat’s alone; having not been by Sadat’s side lately made him doubt the reliability of the information he’d forwarded. Responding to Zamir’s pressure for certainty, Marwan erupted: “How do I know?! He’s crazy! He can go forward, he can say forward, and then go backward.”[[66]](#footnote-66)

Zamir’s message, sent on October 6, indicated that war would start that day “at sundown.” It reached Israel at 2:40 a.m., wending its way through the maze of bureaucracy for two hours before eventually reaching the Dayan and Elazar between 4 and 4:30 a.m.[[67]](#footnote-67) Another problem, which would have chilling repercussions, was that at some point along its bureaucratic journey, the war’s expected commencement was changed from “at sundown,” scheduled to begin at 5:20 p. m. that day, to “at 6 p.m.” In any case, Marwan’s information was incorrect, as the Egyptians and Syrians had decided on 2 p.m., much earlier, to open attack. These times differences would have fateful consequences.[[68]](#footnote-68)

Upon receiving the information from Zamir, Israel’s leaders prepared for imminent war. Elazar immediately instructed the IAF to ready for a preliminary strike, expecting readiness by 11 a.m., But Dayan remained doubtful about war:

The source of the information was trustworthy… but similar information had been provided in the past and then, when the Arabs didn’t attack, the explanation was always that Sadat had changed his mind “at the last minute.” This time, too, it was noted that if Sadat learns we have found out about it and the element of surprise has been taken from him, he may cancel or at least delay the time of the attack.[[69]](#footnote-69)

The time available for Israel’s leaders to act was less than expected. Nobody knew that the Egyptian defense minister and the Syrian president had decided on the 2 p.m. start.[[70]](#footnote-70) In fact, Dayan had received information from the United States that Egypt and Syria were not about not to attack, along with conflicting information from another source later described by Zamir as “not the most reliable.”[[71]](#footnote-71)

All the scenarios Israel considered presumed an early warning of at least 24 – perhaps even 48 hours – based on various Israeli intelligence sources and CIA input, all suggesting that a warning would come in plenty of time.[[72]](#footnote-72) However, the conditions actually created a perfect storm, and Zeira’s “conception” brought Israel to a state which led to Israel entering battle with only its regular, not fully deployed, army. The mobilization of reservists to the front lines in Sinai took between 48 and 72 hours (compared to 12 hours for the Golan Heights), although they arrived in record time.

Israel’s advantage was its air force. Indeed, Elazar’s first call was to the IAF commander, who decided to focus on Syria. Due to weather conditions, the IAF would first carry out operation “Gore” (Butt) to destroy Syrian airfields and then implement operation “Dogman” to destroy Syria’s surface-to-air missiles The goal was to establish aerial superiority and support ground troops to quickly halt the Syrian army. The preemptive strike was planned for the afternoon.

On October 6 at 5:50 a.m., Dayan, Elazar, and others discussed two critical issues: a preemptive strike and a general call-up in anticipation of war. Dayan was open to a preemptive strike against Syria even if only Egypt launched an attack, but noted that such a strike would occur only “with 5 minutes to spare” before the enemy’s attack. Dayan was proposing a parallel counteroffensive designed to disrupt the enemy’s action.[[73]](#footnote-73)

He opposed a preemptive strike due to U.S. objections, as Israel relied on U.S. support. There was a heated debate over the scope of the call-up, with Elazar advocating for a full call-up and Dayan suggesting 20,000–30,000 primarily for the northern front, feeling the south had adequate forces. Dayan, assuming a 6 p.m. start of war, saw no significant difference between an immediate call-up and one closer to war, considering the latter a reasonable risk. He finally agreed to call up two divisions, one for the Golan and one for the south, reserving decision about a third division and the remainder of the reservists if a comprehensive war broke out. He worried a full call-up could provoke the Arabs to go to war. According to a government decision the day before, only Dayan and Meir could jointly decide on a call-up. Unable to reach Meir, Dayan decided to wait to meet with Meir and let her decide.[[74]](#footnote-74)

The post-war question was: why didn’t Elazar initiate the limited call-up that had been authorized? Two divisions could have made a significant difference, particularly in the north, which could be reached relatively quickly. Misunderstandings and communication issues often occur under stress, which was the case here. At the Agranat Commission, Dayan claimed he had given Elazar permission to call up two divisions and thought Elazar had begun the process. Elazar, however, believed that the proposals needed to be approved by Meir, and that because preparations had begun, waiting would not be overly damaging.[[75]](#footnote-75) Dayan and Elazar both thought they had the go-ahead for the call-up, but were waiting for Meir’s approval for further action. Indeed, Dayan green-lit the call-up of two divisions and the IAF reserves.[[76]](#footnote-76) The Agranat Commission blamed Elazar for the delay and recommended his dismissal. In retrospect, the Agranat Commission was harsh on Elazar. Both he and Dayan were responsible for carrying out the instructions, as Dayan himself conceded in his testimony.

**October 6: Pre-War Hours**

With war looming, Elazar suggested using unmanned aircraft to take aerial photos of Egyptian preparations. Dayan, worried about escalation, approved, but only from the Israeli side. Elazar wanted to maximize military preparations, preferring a call-up that would either deter the enemy or improve Israel’s opening position, while Dayan had to consider diplomatic, social, economic, and internal political factors. Dayan feared a full call-up could trigger war if the Egyptians were bluffing. It was a catch with no exit.

At 7:15 a.m., Elazar held a meeting at which Dayan was absent. Elazar predicted war would start at 6 p.m. and mentioned political opposition to a preemptive strike. He stated a partial call-up had been approved, and there would be a comprehensive call-up at the start of hostilities. He anticipated that the IDF would initially maintain their position under fire, then launch an assault between October 8 and 10.[[77]](#footnote-77) The expectation was for a brief war, resulting either in a decisive Israeli victory or superpower intervention.

Following this, Elazar met with Maj. Gen. Gonen, the Southern Command commander, to discuss southern preparations, a meeting also fraught with misunderstandings regarding the positioning and timing of the two tank brigades. Zeira joined Elazar and Gonen and informed them that he did not anticipate war, and warned Gonen that mobilizing the brigades from deep in Sinai to the front line could instigate war and that Gonen should wait until close to 6 p.m. Post-war, Gonen testified that he was not convinced Marwan was a reliable source and therefore doubted that a war was imminent. Regardless, he adjusted his forces’ frontline arrival to the specified 6 p.m., with no flexibility. The late departure from base significantly impacted the war: finally arriving at the frontline, the brigades encountered entrenched Egyptian infantry prepared for Israel’s arrival, and were met with fatal volleys of anti-tank missiles. The decision to deploy just before the war’s expected outbreak profoundly affected the war’s opening conditions.[[78]](#footnote-78)

At 8:05 a.m., Dayan, Galili, Allon, Elazar, and Zeira convened at the Meir’s office to make decisions about the most pressing issues.[[79]](#footnote-79) Raising the question of the call-up and a preemptive strike only around 9 a.m., Zeira, echoing the U.S. position, stated that despite Egypt and Syria’s offensive formations, “...it seems that Sadat is not in a position in which he must go to war.” Dayan reiterated that a preemptive strike was not feasible, but a parallel one immediately preceding or coinciding with the enemy’s assault was. He added that an airstrike was possible on Egypt only if the Egyptians carried out a provocation (e.g., launched a single missile or made a “hair-raising” move) or on Syria if Egypt began a war even if Syria did not.[[80]](#footnote-80) Meir accepted Dayan’s political consideration and decided against a preemptive strike at that time, authorizing an airstrike against Syria if Egypt initiated war (she actually left the decision for later in the day depending on developments). As for the troop call-up, Elazar convinced Meir to call up four divisions and their support troops, amounting to 100,000 to 120,000 people.[[81]](#footnote-81) Israel Tal, the Deputy Chief of Staff, began the call-up of two divisions at 9:05 a.m., and the call-up of the remaining troops started at 9:25 a.m.[[82]](#footnote-82)

The disagreement over a preemptive strike revolved around two interlinked issues: the potential U.S. response and the effectiveness of such a strike given the weather conditions. The cloud cover that day would have limited the IAF’s ability to assist ground troops and to effectively destroy Syrian missile batteries.[[83]](#footnote-83) Dayan, in hindsight, explained his opposition to a preemptive strike, thinking it would have being ineffective,[[84]](#footnote-84) but with no contemporaneous confirmation, it seems that his opposition at the time was due to political considerations.

Elazar supported a preemptive air strike, despite weather conditions an attack on the missile batteries impossible. Perhaps he overlooked them or was optimistic that they would change.[[85]](#footnote-85) He ambiguously said if not approved, the IAF would attack “simultaneously with the enemy’s attack.[[86]](#footnote-86) Elazar was aware that a war was expected at sundown, when an effective airborne attack would not be possible. Dayan eventually pressed for an immediate decision because “we’re losing time.”

Meir chose a diplomatic approach, using the U.S. channel to try avert war by signaling to the enemy that its intentions were known At 10 a.m., she met with U.S. Ambassador Keating, notifying him that Israel was aware of Syria and Egypt’s plan to attack, but would not strike first. Keating maintained that the Arab troop formations seemed defensive, to which Meir asked him to convey to Egypt and the Soviets that Israel would not attack but would retaliate if attacked. The ambassador promised to pass the message on to Kissinger, mentioning he was asleep.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Meanwhile, the General Staff discussed war plans. At 11 a.m., they briefed Dayan about the troops’ positions along the southern front and anticipated reinforcements by 6 p.m. Still not realizing the gravity of the situation at the Suez Canal,[[88]](#footnote-88) Dayan, upon learning of the full call-up at its peak, asked, “What happens if war doesn’t break out?”; meaning that he still believed there was a real chance war would not break out, and was therefore concerned what to do with the reservists who may have been called up in vain.

At this point, the military high command was relatively calm. IDF troops were supposed to hold the line until October 8 and then transition to offense once all the reservists were in place, with the IAF attacking concurrently with the enemy’s assault. Although AMAN kept receiving data indicating the start of a war, it continued to insist that war was not certain.[[89]](#footnote-89)

At noon, the government gathered, and Dayan informed them of a likely outbreak of war that evening, based on Marwan’s intelligence. The Egyptians were expected to seize Sharm El Sheikh and the Syrians aimed for the Golan Heights. Dayan believed the IDF could counter the Egyptian forces but was concerned about the situation in the north, worrying about the destruction of Israeli civilian settlements. He was confident that the IAF patrols in the North could respond to an earlier attack and emphasized the importance of targeting Syria first to eliminate its threat and to prevent Jordan or Iraq.[[90]](#footnote-90)

**War Breaks Out and Starts on the Wrong Footing**

At the same time, IAF Commander Peled was informed there would be no preemptive strike and at 1 p.m., he ordered the planes to change their munitions and prepare for defense and assisting the ground troops against the attack expected that evening.[[91]](#footnote-91) To take out the enemy’s ground forces from the air, the hundreds of concrete-penetrating bombs on dozens of planes had to be unloaded and reloaded with air-to-air missiles and other more suitable munitions. The process required many hours and was still incomplete when, shortly before 2 p.m., the first reports came in about Egyptian and Syrian air force planes taking to the skies. Peled, afraid his planes would be caught on the ground, ordered most planes into the air, with some intercepting enemy aircraft and others offloading ineffective bombs at sea and returning for new ones. When the war started at 2 p.m., and the IAF was caught in the middle of the process,[[92]](#footnote-92) upending IAF plans on the first day of the Yom Kippur War.[[93]](#footnote-93)

The leaderships’ confidence in the IAF and ground defense plans was high. It was assumed there would be enough time to call up reserves even if there was a delay, as regular troops could hold the front until reserves arrived. To understand the gaps between expectations and reality during the war, understanding the “Rock” operation and- the full defense plan[[94]](#footnote-94) is vital.

Under the Rock plan, three armored divisions and several infantry brigades would oppose Egypt’s 10 divisions and independent brigades and battalions; on the Golan Heights, two full armored divisions and several independent infantry brigades would face Syria’s five divisions and several independent infantry brigades; one armored division and several independent infantry brigades would be deployed along the Jordanian border to face the Jordanian army’s three divisions. Despite being outnumbered, even with a full mobilization, it was believed that the IDF's qualitative superiority would prevail.

The full defense plan required a partly reservist-reinforced regular army for defense from the Suez Canal to 30 kilometers inside Sinai. Two other divisions were meant as backup – one each for the canal’s northern and southern sectors. The Sea Sand operation, was to be implemented should the reservists not arrive at all, whereupon the Israel would be fighting with four rather than five brigades and without backup. In the Golan Heights, where there were fewer regular troops, reliance on reserves was greater, even for the Chalk plan.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Implementation issues affected the IAF and Southern Command ground forces. Only regular troops fought on October 6, as reservists were only called up late in the late morning. Despite the Rock plan, when the Egyptian assault started, Israel had only one regular armored brigade and one augmented infantry battalion of reservists.

On the morning of the 6th, Elazar informed his generals that war would begin at 6 p.m., with Ze’ira still insisting that no war was imminent. As mentioned, Elazar ordered Gonen not to advance toward the Suez Canal with his troops until after 17:00 to avoid provoking the Egyptians into war. Gonen therefore delayed troop movement.[[96]](#footnote-96) But before the brigades had evened warmed their tanks’ engines, the war had begun. The 14th Brigade, commanded by Amnon Reshef, was left to confront five Egyptian divisions with just 85 tanks. Moreover, when the tank brigades split up according to plan, numerous Egyptian soldiers armed with anti-tank rocket launchers were already waiting for them on both sides of the canal.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Gonen, Sharon’s replacement as the commander of the Southern Command, and diametric opposite, had reopened several strongpoints planning to implement a rigid defense using tanks.[[98]](#footnote-98) However, the onset of war interrupted these plans. Moreover, there was confusion among the mid-ranking and junior officers about whether the Egyptian offensive was a full-scale assault or another limited incursion. Consequently, the soldiers remained besieged in the strongpoints[[99]](#footnote-99) leading to heavy losses. By the time the order to abandon the strongpoints came, doing so was nearly impossible. Only a few managed to retreat, with most either killed or captured.

In the afternoon, the Egyptians crossed the canal and fortified their position along the Israeli bank. The Egyptian marine brigade, meant to provide a barrier between the Second and Third Egyptian Armies, was destroyed, leaving a gap for Israeli troops. At1:55 p.m., reports arrived that enemy airplanes were taking off and heading to Israel and that camouflage nets were being removed from vehicles. The war had started. Within minutes, heavy Syrian and Egyptian artillery attacks were reported along the northern and southern fronts. Clearly, enemy ground troops were ready to advance immediately. At the Suez Canal, 2,000 artillery barrels targeted the IDF’s strongpoints, and 240 aircrafts bombarded from above, with nearly 10,500 shells falling on Israel’s troops in the first few minutes. On the Israeli side, 450 soldiers manned some 16 strongpoints, with three tanks placed about 8 kilometers apart alongside strongpoint Oracle, and 82 other tanks scattered along the first- and second-line strongpoints. After 15 minutes or so, the first wave of 8,000 Egyptian infantry crossed the Suez Canal on rubber rafts, shielded by tanks and missile launchers. Three hours later, 200 additional tanks arrived, despite critical initial delays.

The IDF began deviating from their initial plan following the first salvos. Zemora asked if the IAF could carry out a parallel strike, unaware that earlier, IAF Commander Peled had decided to change the munition configuration of the plans from an offensive to a defensive one protecting the nation’s skies and assisting the ground troops.[[100]](#footnote-100)

At 2:30 p.m., after the Arab attack had begun, Peled responded that no attack on enemy airfields was possible as IAF planes were still in the midst of the munition change.[[101]](#footnote-101) A preemptive strike, initially planned on missile systems and airfields, was eventually cancelled, marking a critical failure of the IAF at the critical outset of the war.[[102]](#footnote-102)

Here, it is important to discuss the issue of the IAF’s aerial support for ground troops. The IAF and General Staff disagreed due to a misunderstanding of when the IAF could assist ground troops. The IAF had consistently maintained that it could not aid ground troops for the first two to three days of war, as it would be busy establishing aerial superiority. Therefore, even a successful preemptive strike in Syria would not enable the IAF to support ground forces on the Golan Heights immediately. Until nightfall, most IAF planes would be engaged in a preemptive or parallel strike. In addition, after attacking Syria, the IAF would need to handle the situation on the Egyptian front. Thus, ground troops wouldn’t receive help even with a preemptive strike. A preemptive strike would have been useful in two ways: first, it could damage damaging the morale and confidence of the Arab high command. Second, after completing the preemptive strike, the IAF could have turned its full attention to assisting the ground troops.

Aerial support was a critical issue in planning the IAF’s initial war participation. The IAF believed ground troops would have to manage alone and any support would be sporadic. The IAF’s strategy did not include stopping the advancing enemy. Instead, the IAF argued that without achieving aerial superiority, any assistance would have little impact. But from the perspective of the ground troops and the ratio of forces on the ground on October 6, a little air assistance in the critical hours was preferable to a lot later on. This point was not considered by the IDF high command, including Dayan. Technically, responsibility for aerial decisions lay with Elazar and former Chief of Staff Bar-Lev. Neither understood the IAF’s plans, and IAF Commander Peled, in reporting his plans, never properly explained their effect on the ground forces.[[103]](#footnote-103)

Reports from the frontline position Budapest near the northern Suez Canal indicated Egyptians were breaching defenses, while Syrian troops were infiltrating the Golan Heights. Around 3:30 p.m., Dayan was informed of Egyptian forces crossing the canal and Syrians attempting to bridge anti-tank trenches. At 5:25 p.m., Dayan learned that the situation in the Golan Heights was “all right,” despite small Syrian local gains. However, on the southern front, the situation was unclear obscured by the fog of war.[[104]](#footnote-104)

The Deputy Chief of Staff and IAF commander discussed where to concentrate forces. After hearing that the southern situation was worse than in the north, Dayan gave instructions to focus aerial efforts there. Given the changing frontline situation, making decisions for the next day was challenging. Despite this, at 6 p.m., Dayan reaffirmed focusing aerial forces in the south due to distress calls from southern soldiers about strongpoints falling and heavy attacks.[[105]](#footnote-105) In consultations later that evening, Dayan again described the situation in the north as relatively stable compared to the south, where it was clear that the enemy was crossing into Israeli-held territory in four separate locations. Therefore, Dayan decided to focus aerial efforts on the southern front.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Accordingly, the IAF planned a missile system attack for 7 a.m. the next day. Dayan and Elazar agreed on the IAF’s southern focus, but disagreed on the main mission. Elazar favored destroying missiles, while the Dayan preferred attacking enemy armored troops and pontoon bridges.[[107]](#footnote-107) Peled sided with Elazar so the original plan remained unchanged.[[108]](#footnote-108) Dayan’s perspective suggests that he now understood different air support options and aimed to alter the IAF’s original priorities. At this crucial juncture, Dayan preferred immediate, minimal air support to potential future large-scale aid.

At a 10 p.m. cabinet meeting, it was reported that enemy forces on the Syrian front were halted, whereas Egypt had some successes in the south.[[109]](#footnote-109) It’s important to remember that in 1973, some time would elapse between an event occurring and information about it reaching the senior command ranks. The first reports on the Syrian success in breaking through Israel’s defensive line in the Golan Heights started arriving around 8 p.m. By 10 p. m, it was clear that there were Syrian forces deep in the Golan Heights, but the extent of the breach was unclear to the high command until several hours later. In the south, 40,000 Egyptian soldiers crossed in the south against a single Israeli brigade. Despite losses, optimism prevailed, including from Dayan.

However, by October 7’s first light, the regular army division had lost two-thirds of its tanks in the south. Reinforcements on the Syrian front helped hold the line initially.

**The October 7 Crisis and the October 8 Crash**

The General Staff began realizing that the Syrians were gaining ground in the North by 3 a.m. The Northern Command reported that the situation was bad, with the Syrians breaching Israel’s defensive line, advancing using night vision devices. Dayan asked Peled about air support; Peled responded only one squadron was available for the north; all the rest focusing on the south as planned.[[110]](#footnote-110)

At 5 a.m., Dayan met with Elazar, who reported some improvement on the southern front but a troubling situation in the north, including Syrian penetrations into Israel and besieged troops in several locations.[[111]](#footnote-111) Consequently, Elazar ordered the 146th Division, their only ground reserve, to the Golan Heights. This proved to one of Elazar’s most important decisions of the war, made moments before Dayan reached the same conclusion.be a key decision.[[112]](#footnote-112) This decision about a reserve troop was critical, because, unlike the IAF, which could be quickly redirected, sending the 146th north was nearly irreversible. Thus, by October 8, the IDF had three armored divisions on each front.

With the fog of war still thick, Dayan, not confined to headquarters like Elazar, decided to follow his pattern of visiting the front to see the situation for himself, telling Peled that the campaign on both fronts now depended on the IAF.[[113]](#footnote-113) At the Northern Command since 6:05 in the morning, Dayan issued instructions for preparing defense lines and counterattacks, and for focusing on destroying the invading forces. Dayan reportedly found the Northern Command personnel, including Commander Hofi, were exhausted and pessimistic. The situation was so critical that the Jordan River bridges were ready for demolition following a full IDF retreat from the Golan.[[114]](#footnote-114) Hofi told Dayan that the Golan’s southern sector was breached, with reinforcements expected only by midday. With the situation dire, Dayan tried unsuccessfully to contact Elazar. Deciding this was not the time to insist on the chain of command, Dayan told Peled, “Unless there are quartets of fighter jets there by noon… we’ll have lost not only the Golan but also the Jordan Valley.”[[115]](#footnote-115) Peled responded by dispatching several Skyhawk planes to the north.

Dayan and the IAF are credited with halting Syria's advance in the southern Golan Heights.[[116]](#footnote-116) The truth seems to be somewhat more complicated. The Syrians’ pause was due to various factors including Israeli resistance, internal uncertainty, and a lack of coordination among their units, all common phenomena of war. When Dayan learned the IAF would target the northern sector and that the 146th Division was arriving, he thought the Syrians would be stopped; thus, he saw no need to destroy bridges,[[117]](#footnote-117) telling Hofi, “I’m not in love with the idea of blowing up the bridges, because the tanks will be here within the next couple of hours… We should instruct the commanders to execute counterattacks and establish blocking regions from which they will not retreat.”[[118]](#footnote-118)

Post-war, Dayan was criticized for considering a Golan Heights withdrawal[[119]](#footnote-119) and for urging the IAF to divert planes north, thereby disrupting the southern Operation Tagar.[[120]](#footnote-120) However, based on the above, Dayan’s decisions were reasonable and justified, and any pressure on Peled, never mentioned by Peled, is simply a matter of speculation. Dayan never mentioned Operation Tagar or the possibility of cancelling it.

Around 7 a.m., Elazar consulted with Peled about ongoing fighting plans. The IAF was concluding its anti-aircraft attack, the first phase of Operation Tagar to destroy the missiles in the south. Despite Dayan's request for Golan Heights attack missions, Elazar wanted a larger action to break the Syrian army. Implementing Operation Dogman to attack Syrian missiles in the north meant cancelling Operation Tagar in the south. With Dogman needing several hours of preparation, it wouldn’t immediately affect the Golan Heights situation. However, under pressure from Elazar, Peled decided to halt Operation Tagar and embark on Operation Dogman by 12 noon.[[121]](#footnote-121) This decision ended up being flawed, an example of a fundamental misunderstanding. Peled explicitly said that Dogman would not stop the Syrian armored troops. Yet, he and Elazar decided to focus IAF efforts on Dogman instead of attacking Syrian ground forces.

Dayan returned to Tel Aviv from the Northern Command at 8:35 a.m., and shared his findings and activities with Elazar. He believed the IAF would be crucial on both fronts, and could halt the Syrian tanks in the Golan Heights. He didn’t expect a counteroffensive before October 8.[[122]](#footnote-122) For the south, Dayan advised not insisting on holding fast to the Suez Canal line and strongpoints. “A strongpoint under pressure should be evacuated… We must not insist forces reach the first-line strongpoints but rather stabilize the second line.”[[123]](#footnote-123) Elazar agreed, already having ordered besieged strongpoints to be abandoned”[[124]](#footnote-124) It was Dayan accused of abandoning men, who received the most criticism for this ostensibly cold-blooded decision. However, this decision was necessary to protect the limited troops and heavy IDF losses.

Around 9 a.m., Dayan announced he was heading to the Southern Command room, and asked Elazar to participate in the 10 a.m. cabinet meeting At 9:25 a.m., reports arrived of Egyptian forces breaching the southern line, urgently requesting air cover. Now the IAF had to split between two fronts, contrary to plans. Elazar redirected the IAF to the south.

Dayan reached the southern front at 11:45 a.m. on October 7, to learn that large Egyptian forces had penetrated several kilometers into Israeli territory and grueling battles were being fought in the narrow strip of the strongpoints. At 12:20 p.m., he was informed that Operation Dogman in Syria had failed.[[125]](#footnote-125) By 12:30, Elazar reported that the north was stabilizing, whereas the situation in the south was worsening. Informed that most of the reserve tanks would reach the south in the evening, Dayan instructed those manning the strongpoints to evacuate and instructed that a new defense line be established without depleting the force on the strongpoints. “Let us not insist on holding the canal waterline, because the main effort to hold it means a great deal of depletion, and the chance of holding it is low.”[[126]](#footnote-126) Dayan reportedly told Gonen, “The second thing I insist on is that you establish a new line and not deplete the force on the strongpoints. Talk to Dado about what line – the artillery line or some other line.” To Gonen’s response that it was impossible to hold the artillery line, Dayan replied, “My authority is to tell you to hold a line that we can handle, otherwise we’ll reach Israel [1967 line]. Let it be the artillery line or the passes. Decide after you see what the IAF can accomplish.”[[127]](#footnote-127)

Dayan would later be attacked for this instruction, too. [[128]](#footnote-128)

Dayan was criticized for claiming the artillery line was untenable, a position actually held by Gonen, the local commander, thinking that armored reservists would arrive only in the evening. Gonen initially planned to fall back, hoping to hold Tasa Base until the 143rd Division arrived.[[129]](#footnote-129) The situation seemed worse than ever. Those in the room heard the Chief of Staff saying, “The situation is very bad. He [Gonen] has withdrawn to the passes.”[[130]](#footnote-130) However, his view changed after Dayan left around 1 p.m. He then decided he could hold the artillery line, with support from arriving armored units.[[131]](#footnote-131) Elazar stressed the need for a solid second defense line rather than deplete the forces.[[132]](#footnote-132) Ultimately, Elazar and Dayan reached similar conclusions, their instructions differing because Elazar had received an update before Dayan was informed of the latest battlefield developments.

Shimon Golan described the change after 1 p.m. (after Dayan left his headquarters) as dramatic:

Given this information [that reinforcements had arrived]…, the mood of the conversations between the Southern Command commander and the General Staff changed.... Instead of the gloomy reports,... ideas on transitioning to a counteroffensive and even crossing the canal were discussed.[[133]](#footnote-134)

The differing views were reflected in General Staff and government talks that afternoon:

[Visiting the Southern Command, Dayan] realized the commanders on the ground were sure there was no way to return to the canal waterline and doubted the possibility of stabilizing a line near the cannon line. He suggested,... instead, stabilizing a line en route that... the enemy could not breach. [H]is visit to the Northern Command in the morning... had been tough, the commanders pessimistic about ... holding out in the face of the enemy’s attack… He returned to Tel Aviv in the afternoon carrying the burden of the situation on both fronts. By contrast, [Elazar] had not been at the fronts. His impressions were formed [through] telephone conversations ...with the commanders in their command posts and [radio] reports... rather than via unmediated contact.[[134]](#footnote-135)

Dayan, en route to Tel Aviv by helicopter when the Southern Command’s situation assessment changed, was not informed of this dramatic change in conditions on the ground. It is worth noting that Dayan, throughout the war, spent significant time on the ground, often interacting with the IDF commanders in the Chief of Staff’s office during impromptu visits rather than summoning them to his own. On October 7Dayan arrived in Tel Aviv during a discussion between Elazar and his staff officers at 2:30 p.m., Dayan was pessimistic: “I am worried about what’s coming. This is now a war over the land of Israel.” Israel’s defense doctrine had always stressed a quick decision because of the fundamental asymmetry between the Arab nations and Israel and Dayan was worried about Israel’s ability to sustain a long campaign. He stressed the need for U.S. aid and for shortening the lines to defend the nation. About the possibility of withdrawing from Sinai, Dayan cautioned that, “including [a concession of] the oil,” must be considered though such a withdrawal was not a foregone conclusion.[[135]](#footnote-136) As for the first-line strongpoints, he advised that troops who could withdraw should do so; the rest would be captured. Regarding the northern front, Dayan said it was necessary to prepare a line that would be held no matter what in the Golan. He also urged preparation for potential conflict with Jordan and Arabs within Israel’s borders. After this gloomy assessment, he turned to Elazar, asking if he disagreed.

Elazar agreed operationally but was more optimistic about the northern front’s stability and potential counteroffensives at the southern front, where he felt the Egyptian army would be stopped and the momentum of its attack would be halted by Israel. Dayan’s suggestion for a second defensive line matched the General Staff's plan.

Dayan’s assessment of the situation was seen as pessimistic possibly due to his mood after observing difficulties on both fronts. He gave his assessment based on the atmosphere at Southern Command before 1 p.m., while Elazar’s report was post-1 p.m., after Dayan had left.[[136]](#footnote-137)

After visiting IDF headquarters, Dayan briefed Meir. Zeevi later claimed that Dayan’s despair was deeper during his flight back to Tel Aviv, with Dayan even alluding to the destruction of the Third Temple (referencing the First and Second Temples in Jerusalem, destroyed by invaders in 586 BCE and 70 CE respectively).[[137]](#footnote-138) But Braun, who accompanied him, denied hearing Dayan make such statements during that trip.[[138]](#footnote-139) Nevertheless, Dayan admitted, “I don’t remember feeling such worry and anxiety at any other point in the past.”[[139]](#footnote-140)

After Dayan left, Zeevi defended Dayan’s message, telling them, “I don’t think that Dayan’s situation assessment is pessimistic. I think you’re too optimistic. When I came back from the Golan Height, too, I saw overly-optimistic [faces]. About Sinai as well.” Zeevi explained that Dayan’s direct impressions had led him to feel disheartened.[[140]](#footnote-141) Despite proposals for a counteroffensive, Elazar opted to focus on setting up new defensive lines.[[141]](#footnote-142)

At Golda’s Kitchen Cabinet meeting, held around 3 p.m., Dayan, still gloomy, again proposed withdrawal to the Sinai passes, believing the Suez Canal line could not be restored – a prediction that proved correct. He also reiterated his fear of Jordan entering the war. Dayan highlighted the discrepancy between earlier optimism and the reality of the Arabs’ effective use of anti-tank and anti-missile missiles, neutralizing both the Armored Corps and the IAF.

Despite all this, Dayan believed it was feasible to stabilize a line at the passes and defend Sharm El Sheikh. He felt a counteroffensive was not advisable, instead suggesting preparation for a prolonged war and potential Arab involvement. Dayan also hedged, conceding, “Perhaps I’m too pessimistic.”[[142]](#footnote-143) He was open to a ceasefire, but doubted Arab acceptance. Still, he emphasized that, “We do not have to initiate a ceasefire, but if one happens, we won’t be sorry.” Dayan also advised against attacking Syrian infrastructure, saying that a power outage in Syria wouldn’t stop a single tank, because “no one dies from [loss of electricity].” He also emphasized preserving Israeli strength for a war of unknown duration. He also believed Israel could hold the northern front and predicted Jordan would aid Syria rather than open its own front.[[143]](#footnote-144) Dayan was correct on this point as well. When he concluded his situation assessment, which was rather dismal, Galili asked the Chief of Staff to join the meeting to hear his assessment.[[144]](#footnote-145) Galili and the rest of the Kitchen Cabinet, likely stunned by Dayan’s dispiriting report, wanted to hear Elazar’s opinion.

Elazar presented three southern action plans: withdrawing to the passes; establishing a temporary defensive line near the canal; or crossing the Suez. He found none ideal, and sought to postpone decisions until he could assess the Suez situation personally. Despite recent positive reports, he voiced concerns about the feasibility of the other two was in question.[[145]](#footnote-146) Elazar didn’t really differ from Dayan, but wanted to postpone a decision so that he could travel to the Suez Canal and see the situation for himself, having been somewhat cheered by the most recent reports and Gonen’s and Sharon’s counteroffensive proposals.

Elazar told the group that he didn’t know if Dayan’s proposed line was feasible, fearing it could expose the Refidim airbase to artillery fire. He aimed to halt the enemy assault, attack bridges, and stabilize the current line in preparation for a later counteroffensive.[[146]](#footnote-147) He believed an attack was possible and, unlike Dayan, did not rule out the concept of the canal line.

Dayan, after hearing Elazar’s updates about the southern reinforcements and front improvements, agreed to the possibility of transitioning to an offensive against the forces entering Sinai. He suggested Elazar visit the southern front to decide on an attack strategy. Despite his reservations, Dayan supported Elazar’s position on the possibility to transitioning to an assault on the troops crossing into Sinai.[[147]](#footnote-148) Dayan suggested, “Dado should travel to the southern front, and if he reaches a decision there to attack, I’m for it.”[[148]](#footnote-149)

In an afternoon briefing for ex-Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev, Dayan reiterated his pessimism about the ongoing war between Jews and Arabs, emphasizing that Israel’s forces would diminish while Arab reinforcements increased.[[149]](#footnote-150)

On October 7at 9 p.m., the government met to discuss the situation. Dayan gave updates about the IDF and enemy losses, and the current situation on the fronts. He pointed out the difficulties IDF had faced, including the entrance of the Syrian 1st Division to the war and the repair of the Egyptian bridges damaged by the IAFat the Suez Canal during the night. He reported that the IAF was attacking the bridges and Elazar was exploring counteroffensive options. Meir declared that Israel must not concede territory without negotiations, but that holding a particular line was up to the commanders on the ground.[[150]](#footnote-151)

Elazar reached the Southern Command at 6:45 p.m., following Dayan’s recommendation. The commanders there convinced him they could attack. They agreed on a counteroffensive in the south and north was late on October 7. The plan was to cross the Suez Canal if the southern attack on the Israeli side succeeded. They planned to stay out of the range of the anti-tank missiles and destroy as many forces as possible.[[151]](#footnote-152) Elazar ordered the troops to prepare for a crossing if they achieved success.[[152]](#footnote-153) The attack was planned for October 8. At 11:42 p.m., Elazar informed Dayan about his decisions for both fronts. He planned offensive action for both, depending on overnight developments and the arrival of troops.[[153]](#footnote-154)

In the morning of October 8, before the assault began, Dayan instructed Elazar to think about where the IDF should strive to be when the U.N. Security Council decided on a ceasefire: beyond the Suez Canal, or the previous line? Dayan was already thinking about the-day-after conditions, and was asking Elazar to consider the political significance of the military targets he would set Having caught by some of Elazar’s optimism, Dayan wanted Elazar to exploit the opportunity to take the port cities of Port Said and Port Fuad.[[154]](#footnote-155) Now, Elazar dampened Dayan’s enthusiasm, saying it was too early to consider such eventualities. “Conceptually, ...we’re not in disagreement. At the same time, I have a feeling it’s too soon.”[[155]](#footnote-156) Interestingly, by the time the cabinet meeting was held shortly thereafter, at 10 a.m., Elazar – for some unknown reason – had fallen into line with Dayan, and announced his intentions to seize Port Said when the opportunity arose.[[156]](#footnote-157)

Midday October 8, Elazar began receiving reports of successes in the attacks on both fronts, and a sense of optimism grew.[[157]](#footnote-158) However, reports remained confused and misleading.[[158]](#footnote-159) In the early afternoon hours, ominous reports of difficulties encountered by the assault in the south came in. However, Elazar’s attention that afternoon was on the north. Dayan joined Elazar in his office and suggested a few operative ideas, some of which were accepted.[[159]](#footnote-160) Now Dayan was optimistic about a decision in the north whereas Elazar was uncertain. “I suggest you feel good,” Dayan told Elazar.[[160]](#footnote-161) Dayan now wanted to seize strongpoints on the other side of the canal in the south to serve as bargaining chips should the Security Council impose a ceasefire. “They’re occupying a little bit of us, we’ll occupy a little bit of them,” said Dayan[[161]](#footnote-162) While Elazar was clearly focused on military achievements, Dayan was already thinking about the political significance after hostilities ended. Within a few hours, it would become clear that both had miscalculated.

In the evening, Dayan and Elazar met with the media and presented a hopeful view on transitioning from defense to offense. Elazar’s statement at a subsequent press conference would haunt him for years: “We will continue to attack, and we will continue to strike, and we will break their bones. I don’t want to commit to how long it will take us.”[[162]](#footnote-163)

Intelligence later suggested that the Egyptians might only want a narrow strip east of the canal for a stronger position at the start of a potential ceasefire.[[163]](#footnote-164)

At 25 minutes past midnight between October 8 and 9, Dayan and Elazar arrived at the Southern Command. It was now clear that the October 8 counteroffensive had been a defeat with substantial losses and that no canal crossing would happen soon. The meeting at the Southern Command focused on what had gone wrong and future assessments. Summarizing various assessments that had proven incorrect, include the armored corps’ and the IAF’s abilities, Dayan added, “We have to learn life anew. The Arab nations went to war against Israel. They have a lot of power and we have to know there are no magic formulas; things aren’t simply going to work out for the best, only by means of a military decision.”[[164]](#footnote-165) Dayan now proposed that that the army should focus on the Syrian front first, potentially even bombing Damascus. He suggested that the main effort on October 9 should be in the north, with the south taking a break.

The inevitable question is why the October 8 assault failed. The answer: Elazar and Gonen were relying on incorrect intelligence about the Egyptian army’s location during planning. The plans were to station troops 8-10 km from the canal by the end of October 7. However, the Egyptians were still arrayed only 3 km away, having encountered fierce IDF resistance and various mishaps. However, Elazar and Gonen, relying on AMAN and Southern Command intelligence, incorrectly believed the Egyptians had completed their plan to reach the canal, causing them to attack empty terrain.

Gonen mistakenly thought the lack of resistance meant the Egyptians had fled Due to this unforeseen development that never was, he decided to transition from attack to pursuit, and to cross the canal using the Egyptians’ own pontoons, leading to a disorganized attack. This, coupled with Egyptian communications blockades, resulted in a scattered attack that was easily defeated. Sharon’s division, busy blocking an Egyptian assault on second-line strongpoints, was ordered. to proceed south to attack the Egyptian Third Army. Sharon’s forces lost the hills they had been defending, leading Sharon to lose any respect he had left for Gonen and refusing to obey his orders. This inevitably led to a crisis in the Southern Command. Gonen’s eventual dismissal was now a mere formality away.[[165]](#footnote-166)

**Dead End: From the October 8 Defeat to October 12**

On the morning of October 9, the situation worsened suddenly. The IDF had expected to repel the invasion swiftly after the October 7 crisis, but the failure on October 8 caused a rollercoaster of emotions. The unsuccessful counteroffensive on the Egyptian front put the nation in one of the most difficult situations it had faced in its 25-year history.

The northern counteroffensive managed to resist the Syrians, but the enemy was not defeated. On October 10, the Northern Command reported that they controlled the Golan Heights except for Mt. Hermon. The decision was made to focus on the north and regroup in the south, hoping to strike the Egyptian divisions at the canal. The high command recognized the army’s need to reorganize and recharge due to the failure in the south. They feared a UN resolution halting the war at this stage, as well as losing their deterrence and the possibility of other nations joining the campaign. The realization that the IDF now lacked options and was unprepared for a long war, as Dayan had feared, was a blow to the high command. They worried that the IDF’s omnipotent image was cracking, thus potentially tempting other Arab armies – and possibly even Israel’s Arab citizens – to join in the fighting. They also doubted the loyalty of its allies, always concerned with Arab oil. Dayan was again proved right, as Western European nations, fearing an oil embargo, did not allow the United States to transfer arms to Israel through them.

Already on October 8, the IDF command changed its approach, focusing on regrouping and then gradually shifting to assault first against Syria and then Egypt. Some of Dayan’s instructions were: not to withdraw – “not even an inch” – from the northern front; regarding the south, clarify what the best line was; and until a defensive line was stabilized, not to engage in any offensive action. Worried about a possible third front with Jordan, Dayan also issued instructions to do everything possible to deter the kingdom from joining the campaign.[[166]](#footnote-168)

Dayan spoke of the need to inform the nation of the truth, even though it would be difficult, warning of a crisis once the truth was known. He raised the possibility of another war of attrition with extended depletion to the point that the IDF would run out of soldiers, making it necessary to enlist and train Israelis below and above recruitment age as well as Jewish volunteers from abroad Dayan added that if Elazar didn’t agree with him about informing the country, it could be discussed in the cabinet, which could decide differently. He noted that the government ministers didn’t completely comprehend the severity of the situation. “If everything is clear and there is no argument, we can begin to act in the spirit of what I’ve said,” he concluded. [[167]](#footnote-169)

Although the intelligence services had received information that Egypt intended to conquer only a narrow strip of land to use as political leverage (indeed, in May of 1973, Dayan himself spoke about this possibility as an objective of Egypt’s war), Dayan on October 9 was worried about an intensive war of attrition liable to irreversibly weaken Israel. Perhaps Dayan thought that, despite Egypt’s limited objectives in the campaign, Egypt and Syria might decide to exploit their vast manpower and materiel advantages and expand the war’s objectives, continuing to whittle away at Israel. There is no other way to explain Dayan’s concern, especially given that on May 14, Dayan described Egypt’s war objectives as “leverage for political achievements.”[[168]](#footnote-170) “The Arab assumption is not that opening fire will lead to the conquest of Sinai or any significant concrete result,” he said on May 15.[[169]](#footnote-171)

It seems that Dayan of October 9 was calmer than Dayan of the 7th and more optimistic than some of those around him. In a briefing provided to Meir shortly after the discussion with Elazar, she asked him how long the IDF could hold the second line in Sinai. Dayan, knowing that the army had already stabilized a line in the Golan Heights and calculating it was possible to do the same on a defensive line at the passes answered, “Forever.”

On October 9, Elazar was pessimistic, albeit characteristically far less dramatic in demeanor than Dayan. In a discussion with the high command, Elazar said, “For the IDF, the situation is very bad and difficult,”[[170]](#footnote-172) Elazar noted that these conclusions were identical to Dayan’s of the preceding day, only Elazar hoped the situation at the canal could be changed. Operatively, Elazar ordered that Dayan’s plan to break Syria first before attacking Egypt be implemented. Elazar accepted Dayan’s advice on stabilizing the line in Syria: “Not even an inch back,” and authorized Peled to attack infrastructure targets in Syrian cities.[[171]](#footnote-173)

Dayan proposed exploring all means to remove Syria from the conflict, following encouraging reports indicating Syrian weakening in the Golan Heights. Elazar planned the bombing of strategic targets in Syria, including Damascus, which Dayan authorized. The two of them suggested these steps to Meir in a political-military meeting In that meeting, with Dayan urging her to bomb Damascus to drive Syria out of the conflict. Meir was worried that bombing Damascus would affect U.S. aid, which had just then entered high gear. “Yesterday, Nixon decided to hand over Phantoms,” she said.[[172]](#footnote-174) Finally, they reached a compromise to bomb the Syrian General Staff. Afterwards, Dayan spoke about the situation on the southern front, explaining that the objective was to stabilize a defensive line along an Artillery Corps line, provided there was a decision in the north first. Failing that, falling back to the passes was an option. He added, “In the present situation, the Artillery Corps line should not be evacuated. A second line at the passes should be prepared, but it will be necessary to withdraw there only if the situation grows worse... Many of our truths have been proven false… We’re facing a new reality and we must prepare to meet it.”[[173]](#footnote-175) Elazar said that the IDF had not yet struck with full force and that once it did, it should be possible to cross the Suez Canal, although not before October 10 at night. Dayan made it clear that the objective with Syria was not a ceasefire agreement but to force them to stop the physical fighting.[[174]](#footnote-176) If Syria requested a ceasefire, Egypt would be isolated, making it easier to fight it. Dayan and Elazar again applied the strategy they had agreed upon in the morning of October 6: to focus on Syria to try to eliminate it from the circle of fighting.

In the afternoon, positive reports arrived. Dayan received news of successful Damascus attacks, including hits on the Syrian General Staff, air force command center, and oil and electricity installations.[[175]](#footnote-177)

In a 5 p.m. press conference, Dayan explained Egypt’s limited advance into Sinai and expressed faith in Israel’s Armored Corps, although they were later repelled by Egyptian infantry anti-tank missiles.[[176]](#footnote-178) He and Elazar voiced doubts about Gonen’s suitability as the Southern Command leader.[[177]](#footnote-179) Both felt appointing Bar-Lev as Gonen’s assistant was a good idea; neither wanted to dismiss a serving commander in the middle of a war.[[178]](#footnote-181)

On October 9, three IDF divisions held a line near the canal, with the Egyptians deployed along a parallel strip. The Egyptians’ attempts to move deeper into Israeli territory were blocked in the evening of October 9. To break the stalemate, Elazar’s strategy was to let the Egyptians move past their missile umbrella, giving the IDF a chance to destroy them “Let them break their heads over us,” said Elazar.[[179]](#footnote-182) In the north, the IDF regained most territory occupied war, leaving the Syrians, who had taken massive losses, in control of just a small enclave. After touring the Egyptian front on October 10, Dayan stressed the importance of ending the fight with IDF on the Egyptian side of the canal and constantly being on the lookout for opportunities to shift troops onto the Egyptian side.[[180]](#footnote-183) Informed by Meir of the Egyptian’s lack of interest in a ceasefire, Dayan responded that there was no reason for it, since they had only taken a narrow strip east of the canal and seemed about to lose Port Said Dayan asked Meir to try to “get Kissinger to put his [political] stopwatch down,” adding, “It would be bad for a ceasefire to be decided on before the IDF repels the enemy forces from the territories they have occupied.”[[181]](#footnote-184) Dayan’s stance had changed from October 7 when he thought a ceasefire was in Israel’s best interest.

At 5 p.m., Dayan met with the Editors’ Committee, giving rise to a new myth. An allegedly shattered Dayan spoke about the Third Kingdom being at risk, reportedly making Hannah Zemer, the legendary editor of *Davar*, burst into tears. The truth is that Dayan, who came to the meeting with Peled, reported that the war was difficult but was confident that the defensive lines would hold. During the meeting, Dayan did not speak about a Third Temple destruction, but comforted Peled, who had just been informed that his son was missing in action after his plane had been downed, saying “Benny, the Third Kingdom is now in your hands.” soon which Still, some accused Dayan of referring to the demise of the state. Apparently, during a telephone conversation at 7 a.m., Dayan had implored Peled to send fighters to the Golan, saying, among other things, “Benny, the Third Kingdom is at risk,” and this phrase became identified with Dayan and the war. In the public mind, Dayan became firmly associated with having lost faith in Israel’s future.[[182]](#footnote-185)

But in October 10’s 7 p.m. conversation, Elazar was pessimistic about Israel achieving any significant results beyond what it had already achieved, i.e., a stable defense line near the canal in the vicinity of the Artillery Corps and the expulsion of the Syrians from the Golan Heights. On the phone, he told Bar-Lev, “Were they offering us a ceasefire today – that would be it. I mean, a better outcome than this – I don’t see in the near future.”[[183]](#footnote-186) To Dayan, he said, “If there is no ceasefire, the most important thing is to make sure the situation doesn’t get any worse… To hold the same line and exhaust them. I don’t think I can make [the situation] any better.”[[184]](#footnote-187)

Dayan rejected Elazar’s assessment, convinced Israel could improve its position by capturing Port Said and exhausting the Egyptian army, despite Egypt’s victory at the Bar-Lev line, which Israel had previously praised.[[185]](#footnote-188) During the day, Elazar presented various scenarios, reaching an unequivocal conclusion: “The war must be stopped.”[[186]](#footnote-189) He felt the right thing to do was to threaten Damascus and perhaps even conquer it, thereby forcing Egypt too to lay down its arms. His deputy, Israel Tal, disagreed, fearing it would only drag Jordan and into the fight; Egypt, he said, doesn’t care about Syria to begin with. In this, he and Dayan were in agreement.[[187]](#footnote-190)

On October 11, Elazar, lacking creative strategies to alter the course of the campaign, considered a major assault on Syria as the only option for restoring Israel’s deterrence and the IDF’s image. Early that day, IDF forces and the IAF attacked Syria, advancing 10-km deep before facing strong resistance from Syrian, Iraqi, and Jordanian forces. They managed to fire 20 shells at Damascus on October 13, creating the impression – at least temporarily – that they were within artillery range. Meanwhile, the IDF forces at the Suez Canal regrouped.[[188]](#footnote-191) Reports of a ceasefire agreement started coming in, and the possibility of crossing the canal was considered.

On October 12, Elazar predicted that IDF successes would reach peak by the 14th, after which Israel’s position could only worsen. Elazar’s decision was influenced by Peled’s warning about the air force approaching its red line in terms of functional planes.[[189]](#footnote-192) This, however, was a ploy by Peled to persuade Elazar to order the crossing of the canal. Instead, it made Elazar more determined to end the war.[[190]](#footnote-193)

1. In an interview with Kenneth Stein, in: Kenneth Stein, *Mediniyut amitsa* (Hebrew) [*Courageous Policy*], Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 2003, p. 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yizhar Be’er, “Moshe Dayan’s last monologue: Antithesis to Israel’s first family” (Hebrew), blog: Sacred Cows—Israeli Myths, *Haaretz*, July 30, 2019, <https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/israelimyths/BLOG-1.7581303> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Government Meeting, October 6, 1973, 10 p.m., Tel Aviv, in: Golan, 2013, p. 336. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Herzl Shafir, *Milhemet yom hakippurim: Mabat shoneh* (Hebrew) [*The Yom Kippur Look: A Different Look*], Modan and Maarakhot, Ben Shemen, 2020, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Shafir, 2020, pp. 5, 53–55. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This summary of the debate and plans are based on minutes of discussions from 1968 on the defense plans, summaries of war games played out under varied scenarios on the Egyptian front, notes taken at presentations of the Southern Command plans, and other discussions during the Blue and White state of alert in April–May 1973. For summaries and partial citations from these deliberations, see: Carmit Guy, *Bar-Lev: A Biography*, pp. 174–80, 191–92]; Hanoch Bartov, *Dado: 48 shana ve’od 20 yom* (Hebrew) [*Dado: 48 Years and 20 Days*], expanded and footnoted editions, Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. 188–191, 210–215, 229–231, 256–257, 263–264, 273–276, 279, 282; Uri Dan, *Besodo shel Ariel Sharon* (Hebrew) [*In Ariel Sharon’s Confidence*], Yedioth Ahronoth—Hemed Books, Tel Aviv, 2007, pp. 67–68; Ariel Sharon with David Chanoff**,** *Warrior: An Autobiography of Ariel Sharon*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1989, pp. 218–221, 229–231, 237–238, 265, 269–271. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bartov, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Amnon Reshef, *Lo nehdal! Hativa 14 bemilhemet yom hakippurim: Sippuram shel kravot hashiryon ha’akh’zari’im beyoter bahistroiya* (Hebrew) [*We Will Not Stop! Brigade 14 in the Yom Kippur War: The Story of the Cruelest Armored Battles in History*], expanded edition, Dvir, Or Yehuda, 2013, pp. 51-55; Immanuel Sekel, *Hasadir yivlom? Kakh huh’metsa hahakh’ra’a besinai bemilhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*Will the Regular Army Stop Them? How a Decision in Sinai in the Yom Kippur War Was Missed*], Maariv Library, Tel Aviv, 20122, pp. 41–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Erez and Kfir, 1981, p. 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Japanese fleet’s attack on the Pearl Harbor’s U.S. Naval Base (December 7, 1941) and Operation Barbarossa (Nazi Germany’s invasion of the USSR, June 1941), and the 9/11 terror attacks on the United States are striking examples of surprises that, in hindsight, look as if they could have been prevented. See: Uri Bar-Yosef, *Mitkefet peta: Manhigout umodi’in bemivhan elyon* (Hebrew) [Sudden Attack: The Ultimate Test of Intelligence and Leadership], Kinneret Zmora Bitan, Shoham, 2019. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. For an example of this approach, see Bar-Yosef’s book, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Tsvi Lanir, *Hahafta’a habsisit: Modi’in bemashber* (Hebrew) [*The Fundamental Surprise: Intelligence in Crisis*], United Kibbutz, Tel Aviv, and the Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1983. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Yigal Kipnis, *1973: Haderekh lamilhama* (Hebrew) [*The Way to War*], Dvir, Or Yehuda, 2012. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Michael Bronstein (ed.), *Nitsahon bisvirout nemukha: Amitot al milhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*October 1973's Unlikely Victory: Inconvenient Truths from the October 1973 Yom Kippur War*, Effi Meltzer & Sridot Publishing, Ramat Gan and Re’ut, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Aviram Barkai, *Ma’aseh shelo haya: Konspiratsiyat milhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*A Story That Never Happened: The Yom Kippur War Conspiracy Theory*], Kinneret, Zmora Bitan, Dvir, 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Government meeting, December 3, 1972, in: Braun, 1993, p. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Boymfeld, 2017, p. 905. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Uri Bar-Josef, *Hatsofeh shenirdam* (Hebrew) [*The Watchman Fell Asleep*], Zmora Bitan, Lod, 2001, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Bar-Yosef, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 2001, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The narrower plan (up to 10 kilometers) is presented in the memoirs of Egypt’s then-Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Saad El Din Mohamed el-Husseiny el-Shazly, *Hatsiyat hate’ala: Zikhronot haramatkal hamitsri bemilhemet yom hakippurim* (in Hebrew translation) [*Crossing the Canal: The Memoirs of the Egyptian Chief of Staff during the Yom Kippur War*], Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 1987, pp. 19–28, 176. The expanded plan (to the passes) is presented in the memoirs of the Egyptian army’s Operations Division Director Maj. Gen. Mohamed Abdel Ghani el-Gamasy, *Zikhronot el-Gamasy: Milhemet oktober 1973* (In Hebrew translation) [*The Memoirs of el-Gamasy: The October 1973 War*], Hatsav Publishers, 1994, pp. 120, 213–236. Different parts of Anwar Sadat’s memoirs alternately support el-Shazaly’s and el-Gamasy’s approaches: Anwar Sadat, *Sippur hayay* (in Hebrew translation) [*The Story of My Life*], Idanim, Jerusalem, 1978, pp. 184, 191, 193, 195, 218. For another example of contradictory versions, see: Hassan el-Badry, Ta el-Majdoub, and El Din Zahadi, *Milhemet Ramadan: Hasivuv hayisraeli-aravi harevi’i – oktober 1973* (in Hebrew translation) [*The Ramadan War: The Fourth Israeli-Arab Round of Fighting – October 1973*], HATSAV Translation and Publishing, 1974, pp. 21, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Bar-Yosef, *H'amalach: Ashraf Marwan, hamossad vhaftat yom hakippurim* (Hebrew), [The Angel: Asharaf Marwan, the Mossad and the Yum Kippur War], 2011, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bar Yosef, 2001, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Israel Tal and Yair Tal, *Prakim lehilhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*Chapters from the Yom Kippur War*], Miskal—Publishers Founded by Yedioth Ahronoth and Hemed Bood, Rishon Lezion, 2019, p. 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bar-Yosef, 2001, p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Bar-Yos2011, pp. 202, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bar-Yosef, 2001, pp. 176–177. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Shimon Golan, *Milhama beyom hakippurim: Kabalat hahahlatot bapikoud haelyon bemilhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*War on the Day of Atonement: The Decision Making of the Israeli High Command in the Yom Kippur War*], Modan and Maarakhot, Ben Shemen, 2013, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Kipnis, 2012, p. 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Golan, 2013, pp. 67–68. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Bar-Yosef, 2011, 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Golan, 2013, pp. 156–157. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. A similar reactive pattern is still in operation between sides in the Middle East: between Israel and Hamas, and between Israel and Hezbollah/Iran. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Operations Division document, September 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. General Staff discussion, September 24, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Dayan’s statements at General Staff discussion, September 24, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 165. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Telephone conversation with Shimon Golan, December 28, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. AMAN Research document, September 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. From summary of meeting between Meir and Hussein by the Prime Minister’s Office Director General Mordechai Gazit, in: Arieh Shalev, *Kishalon vehatslaha behatra’a: Ha’arakhat hamodi’in likrat milhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*Success and Failure in Alert: The Israeli Intelligence Assessments before the Yom Kippur War*], Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 2006, pp. 108–112. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Bar-Yosef, 2001, pp. 243–246. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid, p. 248; Golan, 2013, pp. 173–174. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Bar-Yosef, 2001, p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Golan, 2013, p. 180 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Ibid, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Bar-Yosef, 2011, p. 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. General Staff discussion, October 1, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. MI document, October 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Ibid, p. 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Bar-Yosef, 2011, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Golan, 2013, pp. 202–203. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Braun, 1993, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. From military-political consultation, Tel Aviv, October 3, 1973, IDF Archive, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 210–211. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Golan, 2013, p. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Weekly meeting, October 5, 1973, Defense Minister’s Bureau, in: Golan, 2013, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Golan, 2013, p. 229. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. See essay on the subject: Rami Rom, Amir Gilat & Rose Mary Sheldon, “The Yom Kippur War, Dr. Kissinger, and the Smoking Gun,”*International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence***,** Vol. 31:2 (2018), pp. 357–373 - DOI: 10.1080/08850607.2018.1417526 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Bar-Yosef, 2001, p. 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Kipnis, 2012, p. 221. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ofer Aderet, “Secret document reveals how MI Director misled government about ‘special means’ in 1973” (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, May 8, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. From the government ministers’ meeting Meir called, Tel Aviv, October 5, 1973, 11:30 a.m., in: Golan, 2013, p. 231. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. The first cracks are visible in the MI Research Document, October 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Golan, 2013, p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Bar-Yosef, 2001, p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. *Duah va’adat agranat, helki nosaf* (Hebrew) [*Agranat Commission Report, Additions*], Vol. 1, 1974, in: Tal, 2019, pp. 174–175. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Bar-Yosef, 2011, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Tal, 2019, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Ibid, p. 177; Golan, 2013, p. 250. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Dayan, 1976. P. 575. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Bar-Yosef, 2011, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Golan, 2013, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. For more about the U.S.’s flawed assessment, see: Ehud Eran, “American Intelligence before the Yom Kippur War: A Failure of Gathering and Assessment” (Hebrew), *Mabat malam: Ktav et le’inyanei modi’in vebitahom mibeit hamercaz lemoreshet hamodi’in* (Hebrew) [*IICC Insight: Journal of Intelligence and Security from the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center*], Vol. 67 (November 2013), pp. 42–47. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. The details of this meeting as described herein are based on the diary of the Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, Arieh Shalev, October 6, 1973, and the impressions of the Defense Minister’s adjutant, Shlomo Gazit, in: Golan, 2013, p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. From minutes of conversation between Dayana and Elazar at their October 6, meeting, 6 a.m. See: Golan, 2013, pp. 254–261. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. *Duah va’adat agranat, din vehshbon helki nosaf: Hanmakot vehashlamot* (Hebrew) [*Agranat Commission Report, Partial/Additional Report: Reasoning and Completions*],Vol. 1, July 1, 1974, pp. 36–45, in: The Yom Kippur War Center, Agranat Commission Reports, <https://kippur-center.org/document-archive/agrant-files/> [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Golan, 2013, p. 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, October 6, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. From Gonen’s testimony to the Agranat Commission; Maj. Gen. Gonen in an interview with the IDF History Department, in: Golan, 2013, p. 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Erez and Kfir, 1981, p. 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Tal, 2019, p. 181. Israel Tal wrote that Dayan clearly differentiated between a preemptive and a parallel strike. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, October 6, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 275. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See Shimon Golan’s essay on the topic: Shimon Golan, “In the Shadow of Surprise: The High Command in the Yom Kippur War” (Hebrew), *Maarakhot* 403 (December 2005), pp. 88–97; and: Golan, 2013, p. 270, footnote 281. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Dayan, 1976, p. 576. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Golan, 2013, p. 271, footnote 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Golan, 2013, p. 271. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. From telegram sent to Foreign Minister Abba Eban in New York and Israeli Embassy Minister Mordechai Shalev in Washington, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 276-277. [I don’t get Shalev’s title: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v25/d166>] [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. For more on the topic, see Elazar’s testimony to the History Department, in: Golan, 2013, p. 281, footnote 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Summary of information about the state of preparedness of the Arab nations in MI Research and MI Air Force documents, October 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Cabinet meeting, October 6, 1973 (noon), State Archive, in: Golan, 2013, p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. IAF Commander, Benny Peled, addressing a general command staff conference, February 12, 1974, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 291–292. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Chief of Staff David Elazar addressing a general command staff conference, February 14, 1974, in: Golan, 2013, p. 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. For more on the confusion and turmoil among the squadrons in the early hours of the war, see book by Yiftah Spektor, an IAF pilot: Yiftah Spektor, *Ram ubarour* (Hebrew) [*Loud and Clear*], Miskal, Yedioth Books, Tel Aviv, 2008, pp. 238–244. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. The first defense order was issued in 1968 and was subsequently updated several times. This chapter is based on an analysis of the version of the order in place when the Yom Kippur War broke out: General Staff/Operations Division/Operations, Rock Master Plan for the Southern Command, March 1971. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. The master plan of the Rock Order 73, Operational Order No. 1, June 1973; Rock Order 73, Northern Command, June 20, 1973; Chalk Order 73, Northern Command, June 8, 1973; Sea Sand Order 73, Northern Command, June 11, 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Uri Bar-Josef, *Hatsofeh shenirdam* (Hebrew) [*The Watchman Fell Asleep*], Zmora Bitan, Lod, 2001, pp. 360–367; *Toldot milhemet yom hakippurim* (Hebrew) [*The History of the Yom Kippur War*], IDF—History Department, 2013, pp. 100–113; Reshef, 2013, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Reshef, 2013, pp. 97–153; Saad El Din Mohamed el-Husseiny el-Shazly, *Hatziyat hate’ala* (Hebrew) [*Crossing the Canal*], Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See statements by Lt. Gen. Elazar at two meetings of the General Staff forum as he assumed the position of Chief of the General Staff on January 3, 1972, and January 24, 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Amir Reuveni (commander of the 68th Battalion during the war), “The 68th Battalion in the Yom Kippur War: The Decision to Evacuate the Strongpoints” (Hebrew), News1/Mahlaka Rishona, August 15, 2014, <https://www.news1.co.il/Archive/002-D-95197-00.html>; Benny Taran (deputy commander of the 198th Battalion), interview with Ido Hecht (undated); Reshef, 2013, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Golan, 2013, p. 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. For more on the chaotic state of the IAF in the first hours of the war, see: Gordon, 2008, pp. 281–291. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. The author wishes to thank Dr. Eado Hecht for his explanations of this point. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Golan, 2013, p. 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Conversation between Defense Minister and Maj. Gen. Gonen, October 6, 1973, 7 p.m., Dayan documents file, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 326–328. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Diary of defense minister’s adjutant; Chief of Staff’s diary; notes by History Department director, in Golan, 2013, p. 329. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 344–345. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 345. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Cabinet meetings, Tel Aviv, October 6, 10 p.m., in: Golan, 2013, p. 335. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 352–354. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Dairy of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Conversation between Defense Minister and IAF commander before the defense minister travelled to the Golan Heights; recordings from the booth of the control center chief’s, in: Golan: 2013, p. 352. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Notes of Lt. Col. Lavie, in: Golan, 2013, p. 359. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Braun, 1993, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Golan, 2013, p. 360. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Zeev Schiff, “On the second day, Dayan considered abandoning the Golan” (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, October 10, 2006. Schiff quotes the diary of the Northern Command’s commander. Shimon Golan, a researcher in the History Department, he said that, based on the sources at his disposal, he knows of no such statement or decision on Dayan’s part. Phone conversation, July 28, 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. See: Guy, 1998, p. 240; Bar-Yosef, 2001, p. 6. In a different essay, Bar-Yosef claims that Dayan gave the order to scrap Tagar, even though no notes or testimonies prove he referred to Tagar; he only wanted the assistance of a few planes: Uri Bar-Josef and Rose McDermott, “Personal Functioning Under Stress: Accountability and Social Support of Israeli leaders in the Yom Kippur War, ‘*Journal of Conflict Resolution* Vol. 52 No.1 (2008), pp. 144–170. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Recordings from the booth of the control center chief’s, in: Golan: 2013, p. 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. To clarify: Still in the context of defense. There was no talk of an attack to cross the Suez Canal, only to weaken and undermine the Egyptian force that had crossed. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 368. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 388. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Ibid, p. 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Braun, 1993, p. 96. To understand the considerations in these discussions, it is necessary to know the area:

     The artillery line was based on the road built parallel to the canal about 10 km. inland behind a chain of low hills offering good observations positions near the canal, and a good command position.

     * The lateral road, constructed parallel to the canal about 30 km. inland, had several rear camps along its length. Its major advantage was that Egypt’s anti-aircraft missiles could not attack this line without crossing the canal and redeploying on its east bank, which would take considerable time.

     The line of the Straits, about 40 km. east of the canal, passes through the mountain chains in the heart of Sinai and through the deep sands of the northern part of the peninsula. Passage through these natural barriers had been channeled to just a few narrow passes where a small force could stop a much superior force. The drawback of the lateral road and the line of the passes was the distance these would put between the men and the canal, which would require considerable time to regain. The concern was that the IDF would not have time to accomplish this because the superpowers would prevent it by imposing a ceasefire. It is noteworthy that in the discussions about a defense in Sinai in the years before the war, this had been the reason for rejecting Tal and Sharon’s proposal to, a priori, plan the fallback to the 30-km. line rather than try to stop the Egyptians in battles near the Suez Cana. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Slater, 1991, pp. 358–369 [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan: 2013, p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan: 2013, p. 390. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Diary of Southern Command’s war office, in Golan, 2013, p. 394. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Golan, 2013, p. 395, footnote 389. It should be noted that Golan listened to the recordings of the radio communications and could therefore sense the change in the atmosphere. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
134. Golan, 2013, p. 393. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
135. Recordings in Chief of Staff’s office; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; notes of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 407. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
136. Golan, 2013, pp. 417–418; footnote 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
137. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 411; see also: Shashar, 1992. P. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
138. Braun, 1993, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
139. Dayan, *Avnei derekh: T’yuta bilti metsunzeret* (Hebrew) (*Story of My Life: Uncensored Draft*), p. 61, cited in: Golan, 2013, p. 411, footnote 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
140. Golan, 2013, p. 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
141. Recordings in Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 412. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
142. Notes of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 415. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
143. Notes of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 416. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
144. Golan, 2013, p. 417. Golan describes the circumstances of Elazar’s invitation to the meeting at Galili’s invitation. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
145. The description of the consultation in the Chief of Staff’s presence is based on: Eli Mizrahi’s notes; diary of the Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; notes of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 417. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
146. Eli Mizrahi’s notes, in: Golan, 2013, p. 418. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
147. Eli Mizrahi’s notes, in: Golan, 2013, p. 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
148. Notes of Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 419. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
149. Ibid., p. 423. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
150. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, p. 442. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
151. Golan, 2013, p. 447. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
152. Notes by Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 455. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
153. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 446. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
154. Recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 475. These ports control the northern entrance to the Suez Canal. Dayan wanted to prevent the Egyptians conquering both sides of the canal and then calling for a ceasefire and believed that if Israel seized the ports, it could block the opening to the Mediterranean. However, the axis for reaching the ports is very narrow, requiring a frontal assault. Still, movement along the axis was safe because one side consisted of marshes, and the other side was controlled by the Israeli Navy. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
155. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, p. 476. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
156. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
157. Recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 489. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
158. Conversation between Maj. Gen. Zeevi and the Chief of Staff, recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 490. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
159. Diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 501. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
160. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, p. 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
161. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, p. 503. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
162. History Instruction Department, press conference on October 8, 1973, with the Chief of Staff, in Golan, 2012, p. 507. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
163. Recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 520. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
164. Diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 532. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
165. Based on interview with Dr. Eado Hecht, IDF Command and Staff College, August 2020, Tel Aviv. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
166. Dayan in recording from the Chief of Staff’s office; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; notes of History Department director, in: Golan, 2013, p. 539. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
167. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, p. 540. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
168. General Staff discussion, May 14, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
169. Conference of Central Command officers, May 15, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
170. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; notes by History Department Director, in: Golan, 2013, p. 541. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
171. Ibid, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 542–548. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
172. Political-military consultation, October 9, 1973, 7:30 a.m., in: sections cited in the Agranat Commission report; diary of Defense Minister’s adjutant; diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 552. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
173. Dayan’s statements at the political-military consultation, October 9, 1973, 7:30 a.m., in the Agranat Commission report, in: Golan, 2013, p. 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
174. Dayan’s statements at cabinet meeting, October 9, 1973, 10:30 a.m., prime minister’s bureau in Tel Aviv, in: Golan, 2013, p. 566. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
175. Recordings from the cell of the control post head at the IAF, in: Golan, 2013, p. 578. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
176. Defense Minister’s meeting with newspaper editors, October 9, 1973, in: Golan, 2013, p. 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
177. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. 598. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
178. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, pp. 595–602. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
179. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, in: Golan, 2013, p. p. 603. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
180. Dayan during visit to the Southern Command’s command room, from diary of defense minister’s adjutant; diary of Southern Command commander’s bureau chief, in: Golan, 2013, p. 648. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
181. Meeting with the prime minister, October 10, 1973, 9:30 a.m., diary of defense minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 639. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
182. For more on this meeting with the editors’ committee, see: Braun, 1993, pp. 136–137, 140–141; Lau-Lavie, p. 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
183. Recordings from the Chief of Staff’s office, October 10, 1973, 8 p.m., in: Tal, 2019, p. 432. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
184. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
185. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
186. Recordings from Chief of Staff’s office, October 10, 1973, 8:40 p.m., in: Tal, 2019, p. 435. [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
187. Tal, 2019, pp. 438–439. [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
188. Golan, 2013, pp. 724–726. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
189. Discussion with the Defense Minister’s participation about the canal crossing, October 12, 1973, 12 noon, diary of Chief of Staff’s bureau chief; notes by Defense Minister’s adjutant, in: Golan, 2013, p. 778. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
190. Tal, 2019, p. 864. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)